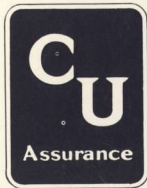


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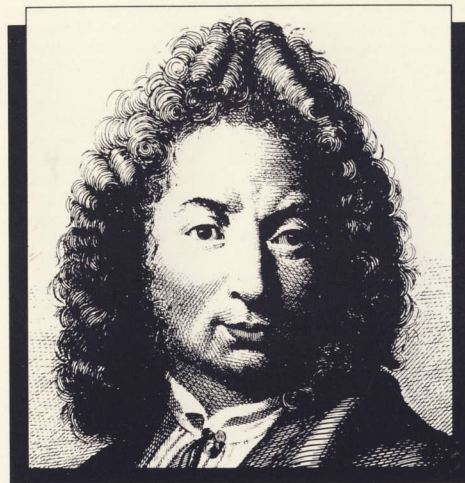


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Photo: Lewis Segal

Corelli  
The 12 Concerti Grossi Op.6  
CANTILENA director, Adrian Shepherd



Despite his importance and the enormous fame he achieved during his lifetime, remarkably little is known about Archangelo Corelli. He was born on February 17, 1653, at Fusignano into an upper class family – two of his brothers were ennobled – and he received his musical education at Bologna. Apparently Corelli was not taught the violin until his fourteenth year, yet he was soon to become acknowledged as the greatest violinist of his day. At seventeen he entered the *Accademia Philharmonica* where, it is often said, he studied under the composer Giovanni Battista Bassani. This cannot have been so, for Bassani was only thirteen at the time. The early part of Corelli's career is shrouded in mystery. We know he travelled abroad and gained for himself an enviable reputation, but details about these journeys are mostly vague and lacking corroboration. It has been said that he turned up in Paris where he aroused Lully's jealousy, but this story is almost certainly fictitious. At the age of about thirty he settled in Rome, and such was his reputation by this time that violinists flocked to him for tuition from all over Europe. Unlike many composers of the time Corelli did not have to produce a vast amount of music in order to earn his living. For this he had to thank Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni, who became his friend and patron. Apart from a visit to Naples, Corelli spent the rest of his life living comfortably in the Cardinal's Palace, where he directed a series of weekly concerts. These were recognised as the summit of Rome's musical life.

Unlike most musicians Corelli was keenly interested in paintings. Some of the best known Italian artists of the day were among his close friends, and they helped him to build up, without buying, a valuable collection. Handel, who came to know Corelli well during his sojourn in Italy and had a very high opinion of him, said he liked nothing better than saving money and looking at pictures he had not paid for. By all accounts Corelli, a most amenable character, went to considerable lengths to save. He dressed very shabbily for a man of his position, and invariably walked rather than take a carriage. He died in Rome, rich and famous, on January 8th, 1713.

Apart from one or two works, the authenticity of which has not been proved, Corelli's entire output of compositions is contained in six volumes. Each consists of twelve works under the same opus number. Five of these

volumes (Op. 1–5) consist of violin or trio sonatas. The first of these sets appeared in print in 1681 and the last (which Corelli's pupil Geminiani arranged as *concerti grossi*) in 1700. These volumes, which were widely distributed, became regarded both as classics of their day and portents for the future – in other words models on which later composers would build. Precisely when the twelve *Concerti Grossi* Op. 6 were first published is a disputed matter. Some authorities say they appeared in Rome in 1712, while other contend that the Amsterdam edition of 1714 is the earliest publication; it was followed in 1715 by an edition put out by Walsh of London. This matter would be of little importance but for the fact that Corelli died in 1713, that is after the date of the supposed Rome printing, but before the Dutch edition appeared. Consequently we cannot be sure whether or not the composer authorised publication. Certainly he had deliberately withheld the *Concerti* for many years. There is even a reference to them as early as 1689, which, of course, does not mean all of them were necessarily composed by that time. Whatever the date of the first publication, they had previously circulated widely in manuscript copies. Why then did Corelli withhold these works? It has been suggested he polished and repolished them before becoming totally satisfied, but this, like many another story surrounding the composer, is unlikely. Probably the truth lies in the fact that there were no copyright laws. Once music had been published there was nothing to prevent others producing their own editions without having to pay the composer a fee. Well before the turn of the century Corelli's international fame had been established, so he may have decided to retain the *concerti* for his own use. They were, after all, unique at the time, and were to remain so until Handel produced his own set of Twelve *Concerti Grossi* Op. 6. This number is a clear indication that Handel intended his set as a tribute to Corelli's.

Both composers set a solo or concertino group of two violins and cello against the larger string ensemble, and neither was constricted by an overall formal plan as regards the layout of movements. Corelli regarded his first eight and the last four *Concerti Grossi* as forming separate groups. Commentators have generally described the eight as church concertos and the four as chamber concertos. If

this is so, Corelli treated the *sonata da chiesa* (church sonata) form – in which an opening slow movement is followed by a fast fugal one, a pattern usually repeated by the remaining two movements – with the utmost freedom. In the chamber concertos an introductory prelude is followed by a sequence of movements, most of them in dance forms, as in a suite. Although marked, the difference between these two types is not as great as it would seem, since dance movements, even though they are not titled as such, appear in the so-called church concertos.

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### Concerto No. 1 in D major

*Largo – Allegro – Largo – Allegro*

*Largo –  
Allegro  
Allegro*

The first concerto in the Op. 6 set begins with a composite movement. Not only is there no relationship between any of its sections, but the first *Allegro* ends positively in the home key. Consequently what follows is virtually a new movement, although Corelli did not indicate it as such. The opening *Largo* of eleven bars serves as an introduction to the following *Allegro*, which brings the solo concertino group to the fore for the first time: the two violins play in close canon at the unison as against an elaborate cello part. This section falls into three parts, each of which has an *Adagio* conclusion. The second *Largo*, which is akin to a stately minuet, leads to another *Allegro*. The principal part here is given alternatively to the first and second violins, there being no independent passages for the soloists. It is with the linked second and third movements that this Concerto comes closest to the *da chiesa* concept, for here we have an extended slow movement in B minor leading to a fugal *Allegro* in D major. The final movement, which spotlights the solo violins but not the cello, strongly suggests a *gigue* with its passages of running triplets.

### Concerto No. 2 in F major

*Vivace – Allegro – Adagio – Vivace – Allegro – Largo  
andante  
Allegro  
Grave – Andante largo –  
Allegro*

As the tempo markings indicate the opening movement consists of six sections but, unlike the corresponding movement of the First Concerto, this one forms a single whole that cannot be subdivided into separate movements. The *Vivace* of nine bars is no more than a call to attention serving as a prelude to the *Allegro*. This gives way to a short but deeply expressive *Adagio* in the minor and without solo passages. The *Vivace* and *Allegro* then return, setting out in the key of the dominant, while the *Largo andante* that concludes the movement forms an independent and very beautiful coda. It is begun by the concertino group, but when the full ensemble takes over the top part and the bass change positions. After the fugal second movement the third, which involves no solo participation, opens with an introductory *Grave* in D minor. It leads to an expressive *Andante largo* in the same key, but ending in C major in order to prepare the way for the final *Allegro* – a binary form, dance-like movement in which both sections are marked to be repeated.

### Concerto No. 3 in C minor

*Largo –  
Allegro  
Grave – Vivace  
Allegro*

Alone among the twelve concertos this one is in a key with more than two sharps or flats. However, Corelli slightly disguised the fact by omitting the third flat from the signature and writing it in as an accidental each time it appears. This Concerto follows the *da chiesa* pattern closely until the final movement, which is an addition to it. The solemn opening *Largo* is of substantial proportions, and it leads into the fugal *Allegro*. Although the *Grave* and *Vivace* are not laid out in the score as separate movements, together they balance the first two. As so often in Corelli's slow movements there are no independent passages for the soloists in this *Grave*, which sets out in F minor (still



retaining only two flats in the key signature) and comes to rest on a C major chord in order to lead into the *Vivace*. Far from being fugal this is a binary form movement. The final dance-like *Allegro* follows the same pattern, and in both cases the sections are bounded by repeat marks.

#### Concerto No. 4 in D major

*Adagio - Allegro*  
*Adagio - Vivace*  
*Allegro - Allegro*

The opening chordal *Adagio*, occupying a mere four bars, leads to a bustling *Allegro* in which the two solo violins steal the limelight; no independence is given to the solo cello. The second *Adagio* in B minor is again chordal and introductory, but on a much larger scale than the first. Up to the closing bars, which may be supplemented with a cadenza, quaver movement persists unbroken. The first and second ripieno violins play continuously, as do the violas from the third bar onwards, while the concertino group enjoy a large degree of independence, even though their parts merge with, rather than stand out from, the overall ensemble – a remarkable and very effective piece of scoring. This *Adagio* contrasts strongly with the following *Vivace* in which the two solo violins once again steal most of the limelight, although this time the solo cello is not denied a share. The two parts of the final movement, both marked *Allegro*, are independent of each other. The first has the character of a gigue with its successions of quaver triplets. These give way to semiquavers in the second part so that, while the tempo may remain exactly the same, the degree of movement is increased.

#### Concerto No. 5 in B flat major

*Adagio - Allegro - Adagio*  
*Adagio*  
*Allegro*  
*Largo - Allegro*

Corelli's key signature for this Concerto contains only one instead of two flats: perhaps he thought this would make the work appear easier to play, since string players in general do not like flat keys. Of far more importance is that

a descending motive recurs in varied form throughout the Concerto. Its appearances are far too numerous to be the result of coincidence. We hear it for the first time at the end of the first movement's introductory *Adagio*, where it forms the cadence. It crops up several times during the following *Allegro* and returns in its original form at the beginning of the *Adagio* coda. Although slightly varying the pitch sequence, the second movement clearly takes the same motive as its point of departure, and it is prominent in varying guises during the third where it again supplies the coda, reverting to its original form for this purpose. It may not be very apparent in the G minor *Largo* section that opens the final movement, although even here it can be detected, but its influence on the *Allegro* that follows is little disguised by the fast tempo. One almost expects the work to end with this motive. This it does.

#### Concerto No. 6 in F

*Adagio -*  
*Allegro*  
*Largo -*  
*Vivace*  
*Allegro*

The opening *Adagio* is an introduction of the chordal type with which we are already familiar, but in this instance it is on such a scale that Corelli regarded it as a movement in its own right. It ends on the dominant, so preparing the entry of the following *Allegro* by the concertino group. Although the bustling semiquaver passages have a decidedly solistic look about them, they are invariably given to all the first violins. The D minor *Largo*, which gives very little independence to the soloists, is a deeply-felt movement, largely contrapuntal but with short passages of harmonic writing. It leads into the *Vivace* during which the concertino group and the full ensemble alternate. As in the second movement much of the rapid figuration is given to a full section of violins and not to a single one as might have been expected, but in this case firsts and seconds share in the display. There is a similar relationship between soli and tutti in the final *Allegro*, but here the technical demands are less exacting.

#### Concerto No. 7 In D major

*Vivace - Allegro - Adagio*  
*Allegro*  
*Andante largo -*  
*Allegro*  
*Vivace*

As with Op. 6, No. 1 the opening movement of this Concerto is a composite one, its three sections being totally independent of each other. The largest is the second, which is begun by the two solo violins in imitation and without accompaniment. The change to *Adagio* is totally unexpected, not so much because it is sudden as because of the very surprising chord (within the context) that puts an end to the lively *Allegro*. After the short second movement, which is in binary form with both parts repeated, comes the *Andante largo* – a term that indicates an easy-going rather than a slow pace. For this the key changes to B minor. Except towards the end the concertino group is in the forefront and there is much free imitation between the two solo violins. Throughout the conception is contrapuntal. The movement ends on the dominant in preparation for the short fugal *Allegro* that follows. The final *Vivace* in 3/8 time has the character of a dance.

#### Concerto No. 8 in G minor

("Fatto per la Notte di Natale")  
*Vivace - Grave*  
*Allegro*  
*Adagio - Allegro - Adagio*  
*Vivace*  
*Allegro -*  
*Pastorale: Largo*

The Eighth or "Christmas" Concerto, which despite its key is given the signature of only one flat, is by far the best known. Written for the mass in celebration of the nativity, it has an additional movement tacked on at the end. This is headed "Pastorale ad libitum", thereby signifying that the rest of the Concerto could be performed away from the intended service. Today no-one would dream of presenting the work in this incomplete form or restricting its appearances to Christmas. The opening *Vivace*, which obviously should not be rushed, is a summons to attention

leading to the *Grave*. This was clearly intended to underline the solemnity of the occasion. By comparison the *Allegro* that follows, although contrapuntal, is decidedly joyous. The third movement in E flat major (but still with only one flat instead of three in the key signature) contains a scherzo-like middle section, after which the opening part of the movement is repeated literally apart from the addition of a coda. The *Vivace* has the character of a minuet, while almost equally straightforward is the following *Allegro*; the virtuosic element appears here for the only time in the work. This movement leads straight into the G major *Pastorale*, for which the solitary flat in the key signature is negated but no sharp put in its place. Opinions differ widely as to the right tempo for this evocative music in *siciliano* rhythm. At one extreme it has been treated almost as a dirge and at the other as a lively dance. Cantilena wisely opt for something midway.

#### Concerto No. 9 in F major

*Preludio: Largo*  
*Allemanda: Allegro*  
*Corrente: Vivace*  
*Gavotta: Allegro*  
*Adagio - Minuetto: Vivace*

#### Concerto No. 10 in C major

*Preludio: Andante largo*  
*Adagio - Corrente: Vivace*  
*Allegro*  
*Minuetto: Vivace*

#### Concerto No. 11 in B flat major

*Preludio: Andante largo*  
*Allemanda: Allegro*  
*Adagio - Andante largo*  
*Sarabanda: Largo*  
*Giga: Vivace*

## Concerto No. 12 in F major

*Preludio: Adagio*

*Allegro*

*Adagio* –

*Sarabanda: Vivace*

*Giga: Allegro*

As mentioned above the last four Concertos are in the nature of suites, each consisting of a prelude followed by a series of movements, most of them in dance form. Because of their similarity and formal simplicity little, if anything, is to be gained by discussing them individually. Unlike the French Overture or Suite, in which the first movement is by far the largest and most important, Corelli's preludes are on a small scale and consequently serve as introductions to the series of dances. The *Allegro* movements in the tenth and twelfth Concertos are no less dance-like because they lack titles. In No. 10 the *Adagio* serves to introduce the *Corrente* and also to bring temporary respite from the home key (an idea taken up by Handel), but the *Adagio* in No. 12 is on a large scale and constitutes a movement in itself. It might well have found a place in one of the earlier concertos. Indeed, with its continuous quaver movement it is somewhat similar to the slow movement of No. 4, which is also in a minor key. Still more intense, and consequently providing a greater contrast with its surroundings, is the combined *Adagio* and *Andante largo* of No. 11. Here the *Adagio* serves as an introduction to a movement that, with its chromatic inflections and telling harmonic clashes, is as expressive as any in the first eight concertos.

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Adrian Shepherd was born in Essex and studied under the great cello teacher William Pleeth for ten years.

On graduating from the Guildhall School of Music, London, he eventually joined the Scottish National Orchestra and later the BBC Orchestra, returning as principal cello to the SNO in 1966.

His various musical activities include a heavy commitment to chamber music – Orpheus Trio, New Music Group of Scotland – plus many solo recitals and performances of concertos.

He founded Cantilena in 1970 and has remained its Director through the ensemble's meteoric rise to fame. He is well known as a broadcaster and teacher of musical ideas and has held numerous appointments in the inspirational and tutorial fields.

*Cantilena* was formed in 1970 by Adrian Shepherd, principal cello of the Scottish National Orchestra, and worked for two years without giving public concerts to achieve an understanding, a style and a quality of sound that would be both individual and ideally suited to the Baroque and Renaissance music in which the group specialises.

The basic sixteen members of the ensemble are drawn from the SNO, and wherever possible they play seated in a circle with the audience all round. As well as providing splendid rapport between the players themselves, there is a unique sense for the audience of sharing in the music-making.

*Cantilena* has played in London and Vienna, at the Aldeburgh, Cheltenham and Edinburgh Festivals, and gives a regular series of concerts in Glasgow, Edinburgh and Aberdeen. In addition to appearing at music clubs throughout Britain, the ensemble has become well known for its many radio broadcasts and BBC television appearances, and in July 1980 completed its first highly successful tour of South America, giving eight concerts in ten days.

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