

Australian Brandenburg Orchestra

THREE FACES OF VIVALDI

Paul Dyer artistic director
Ingrid Matthews (USA) guest director, period violin

Program

Heinichen *Serenata di Moritzburg* S 204, and Concerto in F Major, *Dresden*, S 234
Weichlein *Canon über das Post-Hörn* for four violins
JS Bach Brandenburg Concerto No 4 in G Major, BWV 1049

Interval

Vivaldi Concerto for four violins in B Minor, RV 580, Op 3 No 10
Vivaldi Sinfonia for strings in B Minor, *al Santo Sepolcro*, RV 169
Geminiani Concerto grosso No 12 in D minor, *La Folia*
Vivaldi Concerto *con Molti Stromenti* in F Major, RV 574

SYDNEY City Recital Hall Angel Place

Friday 11, Saturday 12, Wednesday 16, Friday 18, Saturday 19 September 2009 at 7 pm
Saturday 19 September 2009 at 2 pm

ADELAIDE Adelaide Town Hall

Sunday 20 September 2009 at 5 pm

PERTH Perth Concert Hall

Tuesday 22 September 2009 at 8 pm

MELBOURNE Melbourne Recital Centre

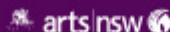
Thursday 24 and Friday 25 September 2009 at 7.30 pm

BRISBANE Queensland Performing Arts Centre

Sunday 27 September 2009 at 5 pm



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To modern audiences, a concerto normally means a work for a solo instrument accompanied by the orchestra. This kind of solo concerto was developed by musicians in northern Italy in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries and took Europe by storm in the hands of Antonio Vivaldi, whose vivid concertos for a variety of instruments were widely disseminated across Europe beginning in the 1710s.

A concerto for many instruments flaunts both the number and the diversity of its soloists, often throwing together unorthodox combinations of string, wind and sometimes brass instruments into a very unhomogenous solo group. Concertos of this kind were ideal vehicles for showing off the depth and talent of a fine orchestra, allowing soloists drawn from all across the orchestra to demonstrate their talents in an atmosphere of friendly rivalry. Tonight's concert features no fewer than three of these types of concertos, one by Vivaldi himself and two by composers who were strongly influenced by Vivaldi: Johann Sebastian Bach and Johann David Heinichen.

The violin was Vivaldi's first love, and in his *Concerto for four violins* we hear the virtuosic display that shocked and fascinated eighteenth-century audiences multiplied four-fold. A less familiar but more sombre side of Vivaldi is revealed in his *Sinfonia al Santo Sepolcro*.



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Johann David Heinichen

(1683–1729)

Serenata di Moritzburg, S 204

Allegro

Adagio

Allegro

Concerto in F major, Dresden, S 234

Vivace

Adagio

Un poco allegro

Allegro

Heinichen was one of the most significant German composers of the early eighteenth century, and his treatise on basso continuo and the principles of harmony is one of the great sources on baroque musical theory and practice. After completing his university studies in Leipzig, where he had some early successes composing opera, Heinichen began practising law. Music was clearly his first love, however, and in 1710 he set off for Italy for six years where he worked as a musician (part of the time as music teacher of Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen, later JS Bach's employer), soaking up the latest musical trends and meeting the great Italian composers of the day, including Vivaldi. Although he was offered a permanent post by Prince Leopold, Heinichen accepted instead what was probably the best job for a composer in Europe – music director at the wealthy and prestigious court of Augustus III, Elector of Saxony, in Dresden.

Known as “Florence on the Elbe”, Dresden was one of the supreme cultural centres in Europe, renowned for its art and music and the virtuoso players and singers employed by the court. The Dresden court orchestra was without rival for the first half of the eighteenth century, and all the major composers of the time wanted their music played there. Even JS Bach wistfully indicated his willingness to compose whatever and “whenever Your Royal Highness most graciously commands”. To exploit the capabilities of this virtuoso ensemble Heinichen drew on all his knowledge of French, Italian and German styles and varying forms to produce music in an astonishing range of instrumental textures and sonorities.

The orchestra at Dresden was truly international, with players from France, Italy and the Netherlands, and Heinichen was a strong exponent of the “mixed style” that synthesised Italian, French and German musical styles.

The Serenata di Moritzburg (Moritzburg Serenade) was composed in October 1719. The instrumental serenade was a musical form used in Austria, Germany and Northern Italy throughout the eighteenth century. It was a short work intended as a greeting to a noble person, and was performed outdoors at night – at 9 pm to be precise. The Elector's hunting lodge was at Moritzburg, a few kilometres outside Dresden, and the *Serenata* was probably intended as background music played while the Elector relaxed after a hard day's hunting. The prominence of the natural horn or *corno da caccia*, an instrument that had recently become established in orchestras throughout Germany, gives the *Serenata* and the concerto that immediately follows it in tonight's performance a strong hunting flavour.

The concerto is extravagantly scored for a pair of hunting horns, three oboes, two flutes and solo violin. Horns and violin dominate the first movement, while flutes and oboes together in the third movement depict birdsong.



Romanus Weichlein

(1652–1706)

***Canon über das Post-Hörn!* (Canon on the post-horn) for four violins**

Weichlein was a Benedictine monk, a composer and violinist. Born in the Austrian town of Linz, he studied at the University of Salzburg where he was strongly influenced by the Bohemian composer Heinrich Ignatz von Biber. Weichlein was music director at two Benedictine monasteries, but in 1705 he was transferred to a war-torn district near the Hungarian border to be a parish priest. Forced by the church to remain there despite severe famine, Weichlein died of typhus a year later. Other than a set of sonatas, very little music by him has survived.

This canon was composed in 1686 for the thirty-fifth birthday of the abbot at the Benedictine monastery in Lambach, where Weichlein took his vows. A canon is a piece of music in which two or more parts begin at different times and imitate each other. Here there are four parts, each played by a solo violin and supported by basso continuo. The title refers to a post-horn, an instrument used to announce the arrival or departure of a mail coach or rider. Weichlein does not set out to represent the sound of the horn itself, but rather the bustle of the mail-coach arriving and leaving. While the work is technically very demanding for the players, the effect of the continuous overlapping of parts at a fast tempo is exuberant and catchy, the sound reminiscent of an American “hoe down”.

Johann Sebastian Bach

(1685–1750)

Brandenburg Concerto No 4 in G, BWV 1049

Allegro
Andante
Presto

In March 1721 Bach sent “Six Concertos for Several Instruments” to the Margrave of Brandenburg, uncle of King Friedrich-Wilhelm I of Prussia. In Bach’s lengthy dedication in courtly French and using the conventional obsequious style, he reminded the

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Margrave that he had performed for him in Berlin two years earlier and had been asked to send him some of his compositions. This dedication provides the only definitive information about the background to the compositions now known as the “Brandenburg Concertos”. While the origins of the six concertos remain unclear, one thing we can be confident of is that they were not all newly composed at the time of their dedication to the Margrave of Brandenburg. In fact, it is now believed that Bach composed the six concertos over a period of about eight years, from around 1713 to 1721, when he held positions at the courts of Weimar and Cöthen.

Although Bach’s talent was acknowledged by the Weimar court – his salary exceeded that of the higher ranked *Kapellmeister* (music director) – politics at the court meant that he was overlooked for the position of *Kapellmeister* when it became available, and he began to look for another post elsewhere. Like most German composers of his time, Bach’s options for earning a living were limited: he could work as a court or chamber musician for a member of the nobility, or as a church or civic musician for a municipal authority. Throughout his career he continually sought out better paid positions that gave him maximum artistic control, so when he was offered the role of *Kapellmeister* by Prince Leopold of Anhalt–Cöthen towards the end of 1717, he enthusiastically accepted. Taking up the position was not as straightforward as simply resigning from his current job at Weimar, however. As a servant of the Dukes of Weimar, Bach required their permission to leave his current post and he was imprisoned for almost a month for being impertinent enough to ask for his own dismissal.

Although Cöthen was a small, nondescript mid-German town, Prince Leopold was a good musician and a music connoisseur who appreciated Bach’s value to his musical establishment and acknowledged this in his salary, which was twice that paid to the previous *Kapellmeister*. Bach would have been pleasantly surprised by the high quality of the Cöthen ensemble, which was due primarily to the presence of a number of virtuoso musicians who had found themselves out of a job when Friedrich-

Wilhelm I of Prussia, no music lover, dissolved the Berlin court *capelle* in 1713. Bach composed some of his most famous instrumental music while at Cöthen, and his five years there, from 1717 to 1722, were among the most productive and artistically satisfying of his career.

The two years from 1719 to 1721 were very difficult ones for Bach personally, however, which may explain why it took him so long to send new compositions to the Margrave of Brandenburg as he had promised. During this time his brother and his fifth child died, a son named after Prince Leopold. High rates of infant mortality were a part of everyday life in the eighteenth century, and only ten of Bach’s twenty children survived past childhood. The greatest tragedy of Bach’s life, however, occurred in 1720 when his wife Maria Barbara died while Bach was accompanying the Prince on a visit to the spa town of Carlsbad. The shocking event is described in Bach’s obituary by his son Carl Phillip Emmanuel Bach, only six years old at the time of his mother’s death:

After thirteen years of blissful married life with his first wife, the misfortune overtook him, in the year 1720, upon his return to Cöthen from a journey with his Prince to Carlsbad, of finding her dead and buried, although he had left her hale and hearty on his departure. The news that she had been ill and died reached him only when he entered his own house.

After the death of his wife it appears that Cöthen lost its appeal for Bach, and his employer’s marriage to an un-musical princess, as well as a possible debt crisis for the overstretched court may also have contributed to the impetus to leave. Perhaps the Brandenburg Concertos with their enormous variety of form and instrumentation were intended to impress the Margrave with Bach’s range as a composer and hence as a potential future employee. Bach hinted as much in his dedication:



I beg Your Royal Highness very humbly to have the goodness to continue Your Highness's gracious favour toward me, and to be assured that nothing is so close to my heart as the wish that I may be employed on occasions more worthy of Your Royal Highness and of Your Highness's service.

History does not record what the Margrave thought of Bach's gift, and it is not known if the concertos were performed anywhere in Bach's lifetime. It is probable that they were played at Cöthen, as the Prince's orchestra certainly included musicians capable of playing this very demanding music. The autograph score remained in the possession of the Prussian royal family, but the concertos were largely neglected and unknown, and were not mentioned either in Bach's obituary or his first biography published in 1802. They were published only in 1850 when a German musicologist stumbled upon them in a library in Berlin, but it was not until one hundred years later, with the early music revival of the 1950s, that they began to be widely heard.

When he was at Weimar, Bach began studying the new style of Italian concerto for one or two soloists made popular by Antonio Vivaldi. A variant featured a number of contrasting solo instruments (the *Heinichen* and last Vivaldi concertos in this concert are examples of this type), and in the Brandenburg concertos Bach used the widest range of solo instruments imaginable – fourteen in total – in completely innovative and unprecedented combinations. In Concerto No 4, as in most of his concertos, Bach broadly followed Vivaldi's model of three movements, fast–slow–fast, the fast movements structured around a refrain (*ritornello*) that is stated with variations by the full orchestra, alternating with different thematic material for the soloists. Bach's approach to *ritornello* form, however, his layering of orchestral texture and his virtuosic writing show far greater originality than Vivaldi. Here the soloists are violin and two recorders, which always work together as a pair. There is much imitation between all solo parts with the violin dominating with dazzling display in the first and third movements.

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Antonio Vivaldi

(1678–1741)

Concerto for four violins in B minor, RV 580, Op 3 No 10, from *L'estro armonico*

Allegro

Largo – Larghetto – Largo

Allegro

Vivaldi died penniless and unknown in 1741, yet only thirty years earlier he had been the most famous instrumental composer in Europe after the publication in 1711 of his Opus 3, a collection of twelve concertos that he called *L'estro armonico*. Described by the Vivaldi scholar Michael Talbot as “perhaps the most influential collection of instrumental works to appear during the whole of the eighteenth century”, this seminal work provided a model for concerto composition that was followed and built on by other composers from France to Germany to Italy for years to come.

Vivaldi's nearly eight hundred works might have remained in obscurity had it not been for a revival of interest in JS Bach during the nineteenth century, when scholars found that Bach had developed his compositional style by studying and transcribing a number of Vivaldi's violin concertos, including this one, which he rewrote for four harpsichords (BWV 1065). This piqued an interest in Vivaldi for his own sake and his published works began to be studied, although it was not until 1926 that the bulk of Vivaldi's works were rediscovered.

L'estro armonico literally means “harmonic oestrus” or “heat”, but a better translation is probably “frenzied or passionate harmony”. It was not only these concertos' originality in terms of musical form, but also the sheer energy and vigour of Vivaldi's style expressed in forceful rhythms and endless variety, that made them so fascinating.

Like the other *L'estro armonico* concertos, Concerto No 10 is full of driving rhythms and powerful harmonic progressions, and Vivaldi uses the colour of the minor tonality to create a mood that is dramatic and intense. The fast first and

third movements are built on repeated refrains (*ritornellos*), slightly varied each time to maintain interest and give a sense of momentum. Often the theme is tossed between the four solo violins, but the first violin has the bulk of the solo material, particularly in the third movement. The writing for violin is dazzling, with very fast passages venturing into the extremes of the instrument's range. Vivaldi was a virtuoso violinist, and Johann Uffenbach, a traveller from Germany and a keen amateur musician, was astounded at his technical feats:

Vivaldi played a solo accompaniment – splendid – to which he appended a cadenza which really terrified me, for such playing has never been nor can ever be; he came with his fingers within a mere grass-stalk's breadth of the bridge, so that the bow had no room – and this on all four strings with imitations and at incredible speed.

Vivaldi used many special effects in ways that are now commonplace, but at the beginning of the eighteenth century were completely unheard of. One such effect was to specify dynamics, or the volume at which the instruments played. He was particularly fond of changing suddenly from loud to soft (known as “terrace” dynamics), and this effect can be heard throughout this concerto. For a composer to specify on the score how he wanted a piece played was also unusual, but Vivaldi did this frequently. For the extraordinary *Larghetto* section of the second movement he was clearly after a particular sound and gave precise but apparently contradictory directions on how each part is to be played. Of the eight violin parts, some are to be played *legato* (smoothly), some *sciolto* (detached), the violas are *sempre piano* (always soft), while the cellos are *sempre forte* (always loud).

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Sinfonia for strings in B minor, al Santo Sepolcro, RV 169

Adagio molto
Allegro ma poco

Vivaldi wrote two pieces with the title *al Santo Sepolcro* (at the Holy Sepulchre): a sonata and this sinfonia for four-part strings. Like many of his works, its origins and reason for composition are unclear. Although he was based in Venice, Vivaldi travelled extensively around Italy to oversee performances of his operas, and he could have written the sinfonia for one of the many churches in Italy with this name. More likely though is that he wrote it to be performed during a mass at the Pietà in Venice, the girls' orphanage where Vivaldi was music director and violin teacher on and off for most of his working life. The mood created in this work is quite different from his extrovert and flashy concertos. With its intense, chromatic melodies in a minor key and unstable harmonies it could have been intended for Holy Week (the week before Easter), as such music was often used in the baroque period to represent Christ's suffering and death.

Francesco Geminiani (1687–1762)

Concerto grosso No 12 in D minor, La Folia

The violinist Francesco Geminiani arrived in London in 1714, one of many expatriate Italian musicians who settled in England in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. A student of the great violinist Arcangelo Corelli, as a young man Geminiani was appointed head of the orchestra in Naples, where according to English music historian Charles Burney he was "so wild and unsteady a timist, that instead of regulating and conducting the band, he threw it into confusion", and he was demoted to playing the viola. Burney heard him conduct at a concert in London and thought him to be a "bad mental arithmetician, or calculator of

time", but notwithstanding this deficiency Geminiani was considered in England at least to be as great a composer as Handel or Corelli. He was also hailed as a virtuoso on the violin, but he rarely performed in public there and made his living more from teaching and composing than from performing.

Although Burney acknowledged Geminiani's significance in English musical life, he seems to have been dubious about Geminiani's character, commenting that "a propensity towards chicane and cunning, which gratifies some dispositions more by outwitting mankind, than excelling them in virtue and talents, operated a little upon Geminiani; whose musical decisions ceasing to be irrevocable in England, determined to try his hand at buying cheap and selling dear; imposing upon grosser ignorance with false names, and passing off copies for originals".

Geminiani arranged twenty-four of Corelli's works, adapting them to suit contemporary taste in the 1730s. According to Burney, clearly not Geminiani's biggest fan, this involved "multiplying notes, and loading, and deforming, I think, those melodies, that were more graceful and pleasing in their light original dress". This *concerto grosso* began life as Sonata No 12 from Corelli's Opus 5. It was a set of variations on the *folia*, a tune and rhythmic pattern used by many composers on which to base sets of variations. Corelli's use of it inspired not only Geminiani but also Vivaldi, JS Bach, Liszt, Beethoven (who used it in his Fifth Symphony), and Rachmaninov.

Geminiani's version consists of a theme and twenty-two variations, and is one long movement like Corelli's. Geminiani believed that "the violinist should *imitate* those feelings which are spontaneously expressed by the human voice, therefore he should *sing*". This is most apparent in the more lyrical slower variations, where Geminiani moved furthest away from the *folia* in terms of harmony and melody. The fast movements provide an opportunity for brilliant virtuosic display by the solo violinist.



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Antonio Vivaldi

(1678–1741)

Concerto con Molti Stromenti in F Major, RV 574

Allegro

Grave

Allegro

Of the five hundred concertos composed by Vivaldi, twenty-eight are for several solo instruments with orchestra. Vivaldi wrote two concertos of this type for the Dresden orchestra, but the rest are thought to have been composed for the Pio Ospedale della Pietà in Venice, the orphanage whose all-female orchestra was one of the finest in Italy. The Pietà girls' ability to play a wide range of instruments fired Vivaldi's limitless musical imagination in putting together works for all manner of unusual instrumental combinations.

This Concerto in F dramatically contrasts the timbres of horns, oboes and solo violin. In the eighteenth century the use of horns immediately conjured up thoughts of hunting, and we hear the sound of the horses in the dotted rhythms and repeated notes of the *ritornello* (repeated refrain) in the first movement.

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