

Foreword

THIS CONCERTO by Johann Gottlieb Graun is generally considered a 'pre-Classical' work, but a look at why it merits that designation seems to be in order. It has been traditional to draw a dividing line between the Baroque and the pre-Classical periods at 1750 because a number of major Baroque composers died about then, but there is little to support this simplification other than that the date is easy to remember. It is true that Bach died in 1750 and Handel in 1759, and also that Graun (who died in 1772) was clearly a pre-Classical composer, but this theory fails to account for a number of resolutely Baroque composers who died twenty to thirty years later, such as Giuseppe Tartini (d. 1770), Francesco Barsanti (d. 1775), and William Boyce (d. 1779), to name only three.

In reality, the transition from the High Baroque to the pre-Classical did not happen overnight in 1750; it stretched out over almost half a century, and neither the beginning nor the end of that transition can be clearly defined because the two periods overlapped. To place a particular work in a specific period requires more than simply noting the date of death of the composer. At the very least, an analytic overview of the music itself is needed, especially since the music of the early 18th-century reveals that the elements of style and structure which today's musicologists associate with the Classical period began emerging, one by one, more than thirty-five years before that almost too-convenient, iconic date. These elements can be seen particularly clearly in the solo concerto, the development of which is especially indicative.

At the beginning of the 18th century, the solo concerto was a new-born idea with its roots in both the Italian-style *sinfonias* (a number of which contain substantial solo passages for brasses or strings) and the concerto grosso. It must be kept in mind, however, that the phrase 'concerto grosso' can be misleading, as composers of the period did not necessarily use the term the same way it is used today. Bach, for example, saw no need to use it in entitling his six Brandenburg concertos (1719-1721), even though he used the terms *concertino* and *ripieno* in describing the instrumentation for most of them. A few years earlier, on the other hand, Corelli had gone the other route and used the 'concerto grosso' designation for his Opus 6, published (posthumously) in 1714 under the title *Concerti Grossi con duoi Violini e Violoncello di Concertino obbligati e duoi altri Violini, Viola e Basso di Concerto Grosso ad arbitrio, che si potranno radoppiare*. The interesting point here is that directive, *ad arbitrio* ('at will'), for the ripieno group. This leads one to believe that these 'concerti grossi' were actually written as trio sonatas to which Corelli (whose earlier works were all in the sonata form) then added an optional ripieno. Clearly, the word 'concerto' was evolving at the same time – although not always at the same speed – as the form itself.

In any case, the earliest examples of this budding new musical variety bore a strong resemblance to the sonata, and the solo concerto blossomed and bore increasingly abundant fruit as virtuoso performers continued to stretch instrumental technique and composed works better suited to show off their talents. This trend can be seen in a number of seminal works composed shortly after the end of the first decade of the new century, in particular Vivaldi's *L'estro Armonico* (1711). Of the 12 concertos in this set, four are for solo violin and nine are structured in three-movement,

fast/slow/fast form. Vivaldi's early adoption of this form – at a time when the number of movements and their tempos were still arbitrary – presaged its use over the next 200 years.

Another indication of the evolution of the solo concerto is the increasing use of a simplified variety of the *ritornello* form. By the end of the 1720s, this technique of alternating between solo passages and *tutti* statements was being seen more and more in concertos. The recorder concertos of Sammartini (c.1729-37) and Vivaldi (RV 442, 1729-30) both show the evolution of this trend in the slow movements where the theme is introduced by the ensemble – and re-capped at the end – while the soloist stands by, silent. The two concertos are almost identical in form and structure; the primary difference is the need for a solo cadenza in the second movement of the Sammartini, which is one of the first works (with Locatelli's *L'arte del violino*, 1733) to include that element so typical of the later Classical concerto.

In spite of being among the first to use these structures and forms, neither Sammartini nor Vivaldi ever 'became' a pre-Classical composer, but Johann Gottlieb Graun did. Graun was born in 1702 and like them, his early training was pure Baroque. He studied composition and violin under Pisendel, and continued his violin studies under Tartini. But once he arrived in Berlin in 1740 with Frederick the Great's orchestra, he found himself at the very heart of the new *Empfindsamkeit* movement of the Berlin school (dominated by his former violin pupil Wilhelm Friedemann Bach), which took an even more emotional approach to composition than did the Mannheim school led by Johann Stamitz. The stylistic idiom of these two 'schools' had a great influence on the composers of the next generation, particularly Mozart and Hayden, and it can easily be heard in the works Graun composed during his years in Berlin. Among these works are the two concertos for 'flauto zerretto' (a misspelling of the Italian 'terzetto'), the first of which is presented in this edition.

The date of this concerto is not known with any certitude, but the characteristics of the music would tend to place it some fifteen years later than the Sammartini, and the differences between the two works are obvious upon a first hearing of them. Graun retained the virtuosic style of the Baroque, but he eschewed chromaticism (still present in the Sammartini) and focused on a simpler, diatonic harmony. He was not shy in writing lengthy *ritornello* passages in the two fast movements, and he used the 'drum bass' of repeated eighth notes (so much more urgent than the typical 'pedal bass' of the earlier Baroque). His precocious use of the so-called 'Mozartian' cadence (see in particular mm. 58 to 63 in the first movement) is perhaps the final touch that makes this work one of the finest examples of a pre-Classical concerto extant. It could be described, in oenological terms, as an elegant blend of the best grapes from two different vines, offering the connoisseur that rarest of musical wines, one which is simultaneously mature while still being full of the exuberance of youth. Graun was the product of two different periods in the history of music; only a composer with a foot in each of them could have succeeded in integrating the fire and brilliance of the High Baroque with the elegance and simplicity of the rapidly approaching future.

–T.H. Richards
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(Translation from the French by the author)

«Concerto Flauto Zerzetto»

F Major / Fa majeur / F-Dur

GraunWV Cv:XIII:127

I. Allegro

Alto (Solo)

Traverso

Tenor

Violoncello/
Viola da Gamba

9

A

Tr

T

VC/
VdG

18

A

Tr

T

VC/
VdG

Concerto in F Major Flauto Zerzetto (Graun)

27
A [Traverso] A

Tr
T
VC/
VdG

37
A

Tr
T
VC/
VdG

45
A

Tr
T
VC/
VdG

52
A

Tr
T
VC/
VdG