

Vivaldi: Concerto in D minor, Op3 No 11

- is a concerto grosso;
- it's one of a collection of concertos called 'L'Estro Armonico' composed in 1711;
- a concerto grosso is an instrumental piece in several movements, usually three . . . a slow movement in the middle with faster movements first and third;
- there are several soloists, plus a larger orchestral group;
- the Vivaldi concerto has three soloists (two violins and a cello) and a string ensemble with continuo;
- the term continuo refers to the bass line of the orchestra PLUS an instrument which helps to fill in the chords . . . especially useful in passages where only a few instruments are playing;
- the 'chord playing' instrument will often be a harpsichord, but an organ might be used for sacred music (performed in church) or sometimes a lute;
- the concertos of 'L'Estro Armonico' were originally published as a set of eight part books – four violins, two violas, cello and 'violone e cembalo' (the continuo part);
- *"eight part-books is the minimum that can contain the variegated scoring that Vivaldi demands, with a maximum of four violins, a cello part which occasionally diverges from the continuo, and two violas which occasionally divide. The assumption by Vivaldi, of course, was that each part would be played by a single player, and the parts were so organized that in the solo concertos this would give a tutti of three violins; in the double concertos each soloist would be doubled in the ritornelli; where four soloists are used together the indications of 'tutti' and 'solo' were, as usual, navigational aids only."* (Christopher Hogwood)
- so, in the D minor concerto, the 'tutti' sections are (with the exception of some passages in the first half of the third movement) in four parts only, with soloists and ensemble combined;
- the 'soli' passages use only the three solo instruments, with the ensemble strings silent except for the occasional inclusion of a continuo bass line (plus harpsichord) which is independent of the solo cello part;
- the two viola parts are identical throughout, in this concerto (but not throughout the whole 'L'Estro Armonico' set of 12 concertos);
- several passages in the D minor concerto use the violas as the 'bass' line . . . indeed, most of the slow, second movement is scored in that way.

First movement: Allegro – Adagio spiccato e Tutti – Allegro

- opening duet for the two solo violins;
- D minor . . . use of melodic minor;
- canon 2-in-1 at the unison (two parts using one theme, starting at the same pitch) / violin II follows a bar behind;
- the illusion of a tonic 'D' pedal in quavers;
- followed by cello solo plus independent ensemble bass and continuo;
- cycle of 5ths (one of several in this piece);
- root position chords from bar 20 to 25, then alternating root position and 1st inversion (with the figured bass number '6');
- chromatic 'Adagio' / the given chords probably supporting an improvised solo on violin;
- in these three bars . . . examples of false relation and (at 34¹) a Neapolitan 6th chord (1st inversion of the chord on the flattened supertonic);

- bars 35 to 51 a fugal exposition . . . in which the main 4 bar fugue theme is passed around all four (tutti) parts in turn;
- 35 to 39¹ - this is the fugue subject (theme) in the bass part – here is a plan of the whole exposition (subject and answer are the same theme, but in a different key – `subject` is in the tonic, `answer` in the dominant).

	bar 35	bar 38	bar 43	bar 47	51* - 54
Violin I	<i>(silent)</i>	<i>(silent)</i>	<i>(silent)</i>	answer (Am)	counter-subject 3
Violin II	<i>(silent)</i>	<i>(silent)</i>	subject (Dm)	counter-subject 1	counter-subject 2
Viola	<i>(silent)</i>	answer (Am)	counter-subject 1	counter-subject 2	counter-subject 1
Bass	subject (Dm)	counter-subject 1	counter-subject 2	counter-subject 3	subject

*fugal exposition ends at bar 51 beat 1 – the themes in bars 51 to 54 are slightly modified.

- notice the cycle of 5ths (all 7th chords) that is a feature of this subject;
- this is a particularly skillful and well worked example of Baroque fugal counterpoint (Bach himself was sufficiently impressed that he reworked it as an organ concerto);
- many composers (Vivaldi himself included) are often less strict and precise, particularly with the use of counter-subjects;
- the rest of this movement reuses and modifies the material of the exposition in various ways . . . eg the cycle of 5ths at bars 55 to 62 / the reworking of the head of the subject at bars 62 to 65 / the inversion of counter-subject 2 at bars 68 to 70 etc;
- there are no episodes containing totally new material;
- although the running semiquavers in the coda provide some contrast;
- *surely bar 83 beat 3 in violin II is intended to be C – A . . . maybe a Vivaldi misprint?*
- `Tasto solo` in the coda instructs the harpsichord player to stop supplying any additional, supporting chords at this point (until the final `Adagio` bars).

Second movement: Largo e Spiccato

- spiccato meaning detached (particularly the many sets of three quavers at the same pitch) rather than `bouncing the bow` technique used in later music;
- in the style of a Siciliano (or Sicilienne) . . . a slow Baroque dance of Italian origins (rather than Sicily) in 6/8 or 12/8 . . . with lilting rhythms, especially the dotted quaver – semiquaver – quaver pattern;
- tutti start and ending;
- otherwise featuring a solo for violin I over a simple chordal accompaniment;
- homophonic texture through the whole movement;
- contrasts between the solo and the accompaniment (legato – detached . . . disjunct – conjunct etc) / violas provide the lowest part / giving a light mid-upper register timbre / frequent transitory modulation / ranging beyond related keys / for example F minor at bars 111 to 113;
- note the use of chromatic chords eg bar 2.

Third movement: Allegro

- begins with a `loose` canon between the two violins with overlapping suspensions;
- in fact, quite a loosely structured movement, with a number of different motifs and quite a lot of passage work in sequence, often (yet again) based on a cycle of 5ths;
- there is an overall ternary shape, the opening `A` section from bar 125 to 138 is repeated (with some modifications) at bars 177 to 197;
- most of this `A` section material is also used in the dominant at bars 144 to 154, which might suggest a ritornello based structure;
- but a `B` section of only 6 bars between the first and second ritornelli and a `C` section of 23 bars between the second and third ritornelli would provide a strangely uneven balance;
- some features of note – chromatic harmony bars 128 to 130 and 136 etc / successive preparation – suspension – resolution at bars 136 to 137 / parallel 3rds bars 138 to 143 / transitory modulation bars 154 to 157 / violas on the `bass` line from bars 159 to 168 / imitation bars 171 to 173 / `echo` dynamic effect at bars 174 to 177.