



Bach Corti Buccarella
il pomo d'oro
Harpsichord Concertos III

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Concerto for 2 Harpsichords in C Minor, BWV 1062 *

1	I. {Allegro}	3. 23
2	II. Andante	5. 38
3	III. Allegro assai	4. 12

Concerto for 2 Harpsichords in C Major, BWV 1061 *

4	I. {Allegro}	6. 39
5	II. Adagio ovvero Largo	4. 30
6	III. Fuga	4. 59

Concerto for Harpsichord, Oboe and Strings in D Minor, BWV 1059 (reconstructed by Francesco Corti) +

7	I. Allegro	5. 40
8	II. Siciliana	3. 42
9	III. Presto	3. 24

Concerto for 2 Harpsichords in C Minor, BWV 1060 *

10	I. Allegro	5. 02
11	II. Adagio	5. 21
12	III. Allegro	3. 18

Total playing time: 55. 56

Francesco Corti, harpsichord solo in BWV 1059 and harpsichord 1 in BWV 1060-1062

* **Andrea Buccarella**, harpsichord 2

+ **Emmanuel Laporte**, oboe

il pomo d'oro

Violin 1: Evgeny Sviridov

Violin 2: Anna Dmitrieva

Viola: Stefano Marcocchi

Cello: Catherine Jones

Violone: Paolo Zuccheri

Cover image:
Festung Königstein (1756-1758)
by Bernardo Bellotto (1721-1780)





Francesco Corti
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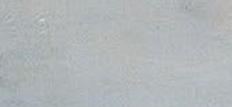
Johann Sebastian Bach's solo harpsichord concertos have come down to us in a beautifully noted autograph score now preserved at the Berlin Staatsbibliothek. The last page of this famous manuscript is quite perplexing. After only nine bars of a "Concerto a cembalo solo, una [sic!] Oboe, due Violini Viola e Cont." (BWV 1059) the writing suddenly stops. This has led musicians and scholars to elaborate various hypotheses to explain why Bach interrupted his work. Why would Bach stop or abandon the composition precisely at the end of the first tutti, when the harpsichord solo was supposed to start. Did he realise he would not have enough space on the page (supposing that the oboe would separate from the first violin)? Did he change his mind about adding a ninth concerto into the series? Was he simply forced to stop for some other reason?

The instrumentation of these enigmatic nine bars is also interesting. Next to BWV 1057, BWV 1059 is the only concerto in the

collection involving a wind instrument. One wonders what role had Bach envisioned for the oboe: was it supposed to simply double the first violin (as the surviving bars suggest) or had Bach planned to give the instrument a solo part?

Luckily, the origins of this fragmentary writing can be easily tracked down. Undoubtedly, cantata BWV 35 is the source of BWV 1059. The cantata begins with a large orchestral movement, called *Concerto*, with a solo organ part. Looking at the whole cantata, it is possible to conjecturally reconstruct a second and a third movement using the aria *Geist und Seele wird verwirret* and the *Sinfonia*. Evidence tells us that Bach did not normally look very far away when reworking his own pieces. It was for him most logical and economic to draw all the new movements from a single pre-existent composition.

Thus, a reconstruction of this "never written" piece seems possible, although a problem



product owes much to his invaluable input and knowledge. I wish to thank him for prompting me to embark on this adventure and for supplying all the materials, sources and expertise in order to make this possible.

Francesco Corti

Beginning perhaps in Weimar but taking deeper root during his tenures in Köthen (1717-1723) and Leipzig (1723-1750), Johann Sebastian Bach absorbed the rising influence of the Italian concerto style and infused it with what mattered most to him: polyphony, motivic elaboration, and technical brilliance. He also took multiple opportunities to rescore existing works, by himself and by others, in order to perform them at the keyboard. Most of his roughly 15 keyboard concertos derive from older material that Bach recycled in the 1730s to create pieces for his Collegium Musicum programs. We know that Bach owned multiple harpsichords at the time and had numerous pupils, including several of his sons, within his immediate circle who were fully capable of performing these works.

Adapting themes originally conceived for violin, oboe, or other treble instruments to the keyboard posed few challenges, with those melodic ideas transferring to the keyboard's right hand. Where Bach's inventiveness shines is in newly-added

material, usually accorded to the left hand, and in the solo episodes. On the other hand, variety of texture suffers in the process of transcription for keyboards. Despite all his mastery, even Bach cannot always compensate for the change when a melody, conceived in cantabile style for the violin, must take up residence among the ebonies and ivories. English music critic Donald Francis Tovey, writing in the early 20th century, offers a biting - but probably true - assessment: "If we ask why Bach arranged these works for less effective instruments," writes Tovey in reference to BWV 1060, "the answer is indicated by the survival of the arrangements: he could get them more often played (and probably better played) on the harpsichord."

Having surveyed the solo concertos in two previous recordings, Francesco Corti and il pomo d'oro turn their attention here to the double harpsichord concertos. In the process we will encounter two that derive from older works by Bach himself (BWV

1060 and 1062), and one original concerto (BWV 1061) that makes us wish Bach had found time and occasion to create more. Finally, this recording captures the restoration made by Mr Corti of Bach's unfinished solo concerto, BWV 1059, a piece he ostensibly abandoned after sketching just a few measures. Corti, having lived with this music so deeply, writes about his approach to the 1059 reconstruction in his personal statement text.

BWV 1060

Bach's Concerto for Two Harpsichords and Strings in C Minor, BWV 1060, likely stems from a lost double concerto for violins or oboe and violin, though no firm evidence is available to decide the matter. The opening Allegro comes on passionately. It is based on a tiny motif (beats 1 and 2) that Bach rhythmically ornaments (beats 3 and 4); following a rising variant, the entire theme is sequentially repeated a whole tone lower. On first blush these subtleties matter little: the theme is wonderfully poised and offers



contrast of rhythms. However, Bach will explore the spaces between these motivic parts later in the movement, inserting harpsichord episodes within the theme that integrate the keyboards fully into the fabric. By the latter portions of the movement, Bach's polyphonic skill comes to the fore as both harpsichords - with active right- and left-hand material - revel in rising and falling passages that take their cue from the ever-present ritornello theme.

The Adagio's affective contrast against the previous movement and the ensuing finale is surely intentional. The main idea, featuring a sustained lyrical melody over arpeggiated accompaniment, supports the theory that it would have featured violin or oboe in a previous incarnation. Instead, Bach here sets the two harpsichords into a fugal arrangement that is further developed by counterpoint between each player's treble and bass parts. Indeed, the richness of harmonic and melodic content

captured in the two keyboards confines the strings to a secondary, coloristic role, highlighted by their use of pizzicato.

In contrast to the opening Allegro, the finale features extensive doubling between the two keyboards. This may have been a matter of practicalities (lack of time) or an intentional choice to strengthen the feeling of unity in the ritornellos. Bach's clear form reminds us constantly of Vivaldi, though it is true that his rhythmic nuance and active bass lines evolve beyond the Italianate idiom he inherited. In this finale we again hear echoes of a probable violin/oboe source, both of which would be ideally suited to the skipwise main theme.

BWV 1061

Bach's Concerto in C Major, BWV 1061, is one of the very few concertos that is not an arrangement of material either used in or intended for some other composition. It thus can lay claim to be one of Bach's earliest original keyboard concertos



Andrea Buccarella
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For the finale one might have guessed where Bach's penchant would lead him: a massive fugue and fantasia, with lengthy solo episodes and all manner of figuration and polyphony. The theme can be described as "athletic" or "instrumental" (rather than "vocal") by virtue of its fast tempo, skipwise motion, and rhythmic variety. The relation between the strings and keyboards is a curious one. For those favoring Vivaldi's shorter periods and more frequent interchange of solo and ritornello, Bach's lengthy harpsichord duets will seem exorbitant. But for those - apparently including the composer himself - for whom the time had come to completely free the harpsichord from its background role as a continuo instrument, these vigorous episodes argue that stance in compelling fashion. The keyboard would never again relinquish its position in the spotlight.

BWV 1062

There is no doubt regarding the source for Bach's Concerto for Two Harpsichords

and Strings in C Minor, BWV 1062. It is a transcription of his Concerto for Two Violins in D Minor, BWV 1043, composed in Köthen with violinist Joseph Spiess in mind. At the time Bach's employer, Prince Leopold, maintained a strong chamber orchestra populated by musicians (including Spiess) who left Berlin when that city's musical scene took a downward turn. The period in Köthen offers a small window during which Bach could indulge his interests in Italian concerto composition; nearly all of his original concertos, including the six Brandenburgs, was likely written between 1717 and 1722. Unfortunately, when the Prince married, his new bride's distaste for music put a halt to secular music at court. Within a few months Bach was auditioning for a post in Leipzig, where he would live from 1723 until his death.

We see from the start how Bach uses Vivaldi as a starting point. Where Vivaldi might have opened with a canon (imitation at the unison), Bach raises the ante by starting

with a fugue (imitation at a fifth). At the first solo episode we hear a new idea marked by leaps of a tenth and some wonderful two-part counterpoint. Bach structures his themes so that orchestra and soloists dovetail into one another, creating an immense forward drive all the way to the final "Picardy Third" cadence. As expected, the original violin lines are portioned out largely to the harpsichord right hand registers, but the developed left-hand material (added in the 1736 Collegium arrangement) marks a noteworthy advance on the original.

In the central Largo Bach spins out one of his most touching melodies based on a simple falling line. Underneath, however, careful listeners may pick out the same fugal relationship upon which Bach constructed the opening of the first movement. The long-held notes are wonderfully offset by the lilting meter (12/8), although the effect of the sustained tones and suspensions works better with

the original solo violins. With a full central section based upon a different theme and a coda at the end, this slow movement is more substantial than typical.

The spirit of Vivaldi comes through clearly in the brilliant final Allegro, which Bach begins as a tight canon. All the Vivaldian conventions are found here - rapid triplets, imitation between the parts, chains of dissonant suspensions and sequences - combined with Bach's impeccable sense for colour via key changes. It takes the right gesture to end such a vigorous Allegro, and Bach rises (or better yet, falls) to the occasion with a short descending motive that hones in on the final chord. It is fair to say that the whole work succeeds better in its violin guise, yet the keyboard version offers new layers of sophistication in the low register and, most importantly, ever greater resources for contrapuntal development.

Jason Stell



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Acknowledgments

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Harpsichords:

Andrea Restelli, Milano, 1998, after Christian Vater, Hannover, 1738
 (solo harpsichord in BWV 1059, harpsichord 2 in BWV 1060-1062)
 Andrea Restelli, Milano, 2021, after Christian Vater, Hannover, 1738
 (harpsichord 1 in BWV 1060-1062)

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