MUSIC IN THE BAROQUE

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with the Virgilian heroine's suicide. However, Metastasio and Zeno sought to rid opera of the juxtaposition of comedy and tragedy that had been so essential to Venetian opera. Their poetry was formal, elegant, and concise. Metastasio was particularly gifted at crafting poetic texts well suited to the da capo aria form, in which the poetry for the **A** and **B** sections expressed well-defined, complementary affects, using expressive and metaphoric language that lent itself to musical expansion and the kind of florid singing favored by the *prime donne* and *primi uomini* (first, or leading, women and men).

Metastasio and Zeno also advocated changes in opera's musico-dramatic organization. Throughout much of the seventeenth century, arias could occur at any point in a given scene. However, in the settings of librettos by Metastasio and Zeno, da capo arias were much longer (particularly with the highly ornamented repeat of the **A** section); they were also almost always placed at the end of the scene, to be sung just before the character exited the stage. Thus, the recitative dialogue culminated in a moment of lyricism, which was felt to be more true to life than if a character burst into song in the middle of the scene. (We will have more to say about the so-called "exit arias" in Chapter 14.)

In *opera seria*, the Carnivalesque conventions of Venetian opera—the play with same-sex desire, the effeminate heroes and warrior women—gave way to more standardized representations of virtuous women and heroic men. As John Rice shows in *Music in the Eighteenth Century,* Metastasio's dignified librettos would dominate much of Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, particularly in absolutist regimes where unambiguous representations of virtuous monarchs were politically expedient. Reform, however, did not happen all at once, as a number of librettists and composers continued to embrace the pleasurable excesses of the seventeenth century, thus maintaining at least a hint of the Carnival sensibilities disdained by the Arcadians.

CORELLI AND THE CULT OF INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

In a culture where poetry was highly valued and vocal music was regarded by many as the most significant form of music, there arose a figure who gained international fame exclusively in the realm of instrumental music: Arcangelo Corelli. Corelli's genius, lauded by contemporaries and acknowledged by critics today, manifested itself in several arenas. To begin with, as described in Roman documents, he reigned for over three decades as the leader of virtually every Roman performance involving large instrumental ensembles, serving all the major Roman patrons. Along with Lully, he is one of the most important figures in the development of the modern orchestra.

By the time Corelli arrived in Rome in 1675, the nature of instrumental ensembles was undergoing a transformation. Rather than being arranged into multiple choruses with full complements of voices and instruments, as was typical in polychoral works by Monteverdi and Schütz, voices and instruments were separated and the instruments were arranged by section (violins, violas, cellos, and so on).

The full ensemble, which might contain as many as 80 to 100 players, came to be known as the *concerto grosso* (large concert) or *ripieno* (full, marked "tutti" in the score), while a smaller group (labeled "soli"), which might consist of only two violins, was known as the *concertino* (little concert).

Typically, Corelli's *concertino* group at this time consisted of two players, himself and his colleague Matteo Fornari, who were often set apart from the orchestra in a position of prominence. This arrangement gave Corelli an opportunity not only to explore the contrast between the *ripieno and concertino* (as Giuseppe Torelli does in the works discussed in Chapter 10), but also to supervise the performance and the ensemble blend. He seems to have succeeded. Crescimbeni marveled that Corelli had introduced to Rome "*sinfonie* of so large a number of instruments and of such diversity that it was almost impossible to believe that he could get them to play together without fear of discord, especially since wind instruments were combined with string, and the total very often exceeding one hundred." Corelli achieved this by uncommon musical discipline; he acquired a reputation as a strict task master and is also credited (along with Lully) with being one of the first to insist on uniform bowings for all the members of a string section. Crescimbeni also reminds us that Corelli's published works—which contain no parts for wind instruments—must have indeed differed from what was actually heard in performance.

Corelli was also praised for his virtuoso solo playing and his expertise as a violin teacher, attracting students from all over Europe. An anonymous English eyewitness to one of his performances commented that he "never met with any man that suffer'd his passions to hurry him away so much whilst he was playing on the violin as the famous Arcangelo Corelli, whose Eyes will sometimes turn as red as Fire; his countenance will be distorted, his eyeballs as in an agony, and he gives in so much to what he is doing that he doth not look like the same man."

The other image of Corelli and his music is one that in many respects resonates with the aims of the Arcadian Academy—a composer who attained classical perfection, simplicity, and order in his works. This image, however, is based not on descriptions of his performances but on his publications, which through their wide dissemination and championing by influential players throughout Europe were held up as models for Baroque instrumental genres. Corelli's Opus 1 (1681) and Opus 3 (1689) collections contain *sonate da chiesa* (church sonatas), often arranged in four movements in the pattern slow-fast-slow-fast. The *sonate da camera* (chamber sonatas) in his Opus 2 (1685) and Opus 4 (1694), on the other hand, are essentially suites of dances in binary form.

All of Corelli's sonatas owe a debt to Torelli and his predecessors in the Bolognese Accademia Filarmonica (to which Corelli might have belonged). Corelli's violin sonatas (Opus 5, 1700) started a trend for lyrical and idiomatic violin compositions that could be played by amateurs, but when ornamented were sufficiently challenging for professionals, as is apparent in his Sonata in A Major, Op. 5, No. 9 (see Anthology 17).

Corelli also made an impact with the Op. 6 Concerti Grossi (1716, published posthumously), which likewise are indebted to Torelli's experiments with the concerto. With this single set of concertos, Corelli demonstrates numerous ways

in which the *concertino* and *ripieno* can relate to one another, utilizing elements of both the chamber and church styles. The countless concerti grossi composed and published in England in the early eighteenth century reflected Corelli's considerable influence.

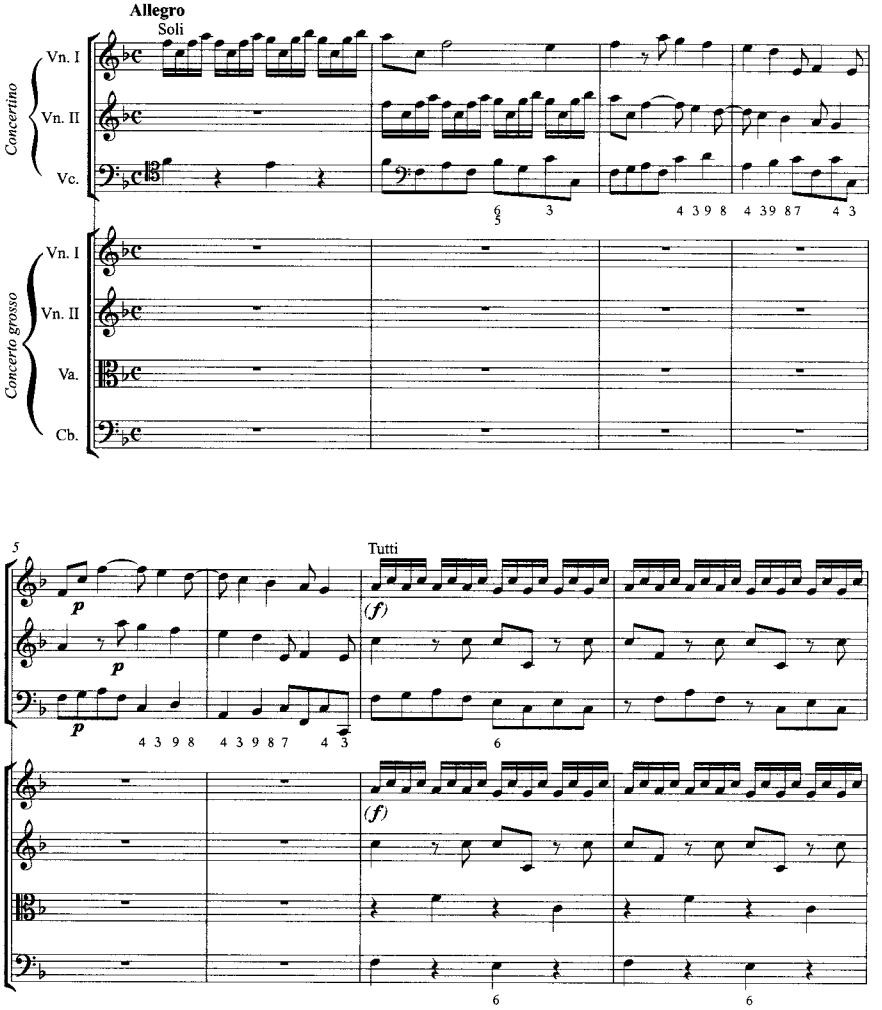
These facts, as important as they are, fail to explain the universal appeal of Corelli's music, which critics have long recognized, but often have difficulty describing. This is in part because the aspects of his style that sounded novel in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries became so much a part of later Baroque practice that in the hands of other composers they sound almost like clichés. Unlike the music of early instrumental composers such as Dario Castello or Corelli's contemporary Heinrich Biber (see Chapters 4 and 13), Corelli's works almost always gravitate toward closely related keys, the dominant and relative minor. This would become common practice in the eighteenth century, but Corelli's harmonic motion toward these goals is distinguished by its drive and energy. He frequently uses sequences and pairs of contrasting motives, controlling the pace in a manner that makes the arrival in the new key (or return to the tonic) seem inevitable and satisfying. He takes advantage of the so-called walking or running bass, often in eighth or quarter notes. This regular pattern allowed the composer to dwell on a given harmony without losing a sense of forward motion, setting the contrapuntal activities of the other voices into relief. There is also a smoothness to Corelli's voice-leading: the bass typically moves by step, using first-inversion chords, or by fourths and fifths. Some of the most emotion-laden passages in his works are the series of suspensions that appear not only in slow movements—which sound much richer than they look on paper—but in fast movements as well.

Many of these features can be seen in the second movement of the Concerto Grosso Op. 6, No. 6 (Ex. 11.3). In the *concertino* section that opens the movement, a walking eighth-note bass line (m. 2) and contrapuntal interplay between the first and second violins lead to a series of suspensions in measure 3. With the entrance of the *ripieno*, or *tutti*, in measure 7, the additional violins amplify the *concertino*, while the cello maintains its independence from the basso continuo, with the viola enriching the texture. Corelli uses this larger ensemble to initiate a sequential pattern that thrusts the energy forward, moving away from the tonic only to return to it some 12 bars later.

After spending time with some of the highly expressive but admittedly idiosyncratic instrumental works of composers such as Castello or Girolamo Frescobaldi (see Chapter 4), or with the gentle melancholy of consort music by William Lawes or Henry Purcell (see Chapter 8), many students of the Baroque may well find in Corelli's music a familiar friend.

Although Corelli never left his adopted city of Rome, his music was disseminated well into the eighteenth century as far afield as Amsterdam, Paris,

Example 11.3: *Arcangelo Corelli, Concerto Grosso in F Major, Op. 6, No. 6 (1714), Allegro, mm. 1–8*



London, Philadelphia, and even China and Bolivia. The impact of his music through the medium of print can hardly be overestimated; many composers who had never set foot in Rome regarded Corelli as their teacher. Roger North, who wrote about the state of music in England in the late seventeenth century, credited the "coming over of the works of the great Corelli" with the predominance of the "Italian taste": It became "the only musick relished for a long time," for "if musick can be immortal, Corelli's consorts will be so." North tells us that Corelli's Op. 1 sonatas "cleared the ground of all other sorts of music whatsoever," and that his works were to musicians "like the bread of life."

In France, too, Corelli's influence was so strong that no less a musician than François Couperin composed a trio sonata entitled *Le Parnasse, ou L'apothéose de Corelli* (Parnassus, or The Apotheosis of Corelli) and confessed that he would revere the works of Corelli, along with those of Lully, as long as he lived. It is to France and the impact of the Italian style that we now turn.

FOR FURTHER READING

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