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~ The New Yorker

*CONCERTO PER VIOLINI*

*18th-Century Italian Virtuosi*

First Church of Christ, Scientist  
Central Park West at 68<sup>th</sup> Street, NYC  
Saturday, 13 May 2023 at 7:30 PM

# *18th-Century Italian Virtuosi*

- Concerto grosso, Opus 6, No. 7, D major, pub. 1714      Arcangelo Corelli  
Vivace      1653-1713  
Allegro  
Adagio  
Allegro  
Andante - largo  
Allegro  
Vivace
- Sinfonia/Concerto, RV 146, G major      Antonio Vivaldi  
Allegro      1678-1741  
Andante e sempre piano  
Presto
- Concerto per archi, RV 118, c minor, 1720-24      Vivaldi  
Allegro  
Largo  
Allegro
- Concerto grosso "Il pianto d'Arianna," Op. 7/6, pub. 1741      Pietro Locatelli  
Andante, Allegro, Adagio, Andante, Allegro, Largo      1695-1764  
Largo andante  
Grave  
Allegro, Largo

*interval*

- Concerto per archi, RV 128, d minor Vivaldi  
Allegro non molto  
Largo  
Allegro
- Sonata, Opus 5, No. 12, pub. 1700 Arcangelo Corelli  
La Follia - adagio
- Concerto grosso, H.143 'La Follia,' pub. 1729 Francesco Geminiani  
*[after Corelli's Violin Sonata, Opus 5, No. 12]* 1687-1762  
La Follia - adagio, 23 variations
- Concerto per archi, RV 157, g minor Vivaldi  
Allegro  
Largo  
Allegro
- Concerto per archi, RV 151, G major, "alla Rustica" Vivaldi  
Presto  
Adagio  
Allegro

# EARLY MUSIC NEW YORK

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## violin

Daniel S. Lee, concertmaster  
Isabelle Seula Lee, principal  
Ryan Cheng • Kako Miura  
Joanna Mulfinger • Rebecca Nelson  
Shelby Yamin • Jude Ziliak

## viola

Daniel McCarthy, principal • Kate Goddard

## basso continuo

Ezra Seltzer, principal • Sarah Stone – violoncelli  
Nathaniel Chase – double bass violon  
Dušan Balarin – theorbo & guitar

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## ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Say the word “concerto” and most people think of a work for a solo instrument in conjunction with (some would say in opposition to) an orchestra. But the original definition of “concerto,” as it came into general use in the baroque era, was a work for musicians playing together.

The literal meaning, in Italian, is “gathering” or “accord,” though its Latin derivation, “concertare,” connotes confrontation or battle – thus, the “opposition” scenario isn’t so far-fetched. Indeed, “concerto” was first used to describe some vocal works in the late 1500’s, and only came to be applied to Italian instrumental music late in the 17th century.

At first, the most featured solo instrument was violin – not surprising, given that so many of the great Italian composers of the era were also virtuoso violinists. **Antonio Vivaldi**’s “The Four Seasons” is perhaps the most famous example of baroque violin concerti. Other instruments eventually got the solo treatment as well: Among Vivaldi’s more than 500 concerti are works for viola d’amore, violoncello, flute, recorder, oboe, bassoon and mandolin. (It fell to non-Italian keyboard exponents such as Johann Sebastian Bach and his sons to develop the harpsichord concerto.)

Some of the greatest baroque concerti are not just for a single instrument, however. **Arcangelo Corelli** and **Pietro Locatelli** were among the greatest exponents of the concerto grosso, which juxtaposed a larger ensemble (“ripieno”) with a smaller group of solo instruments (“concertino”). Corelli, Locatelli and Georg Friederich Händel composed important cycles of concerti grossi; Bach’s Brandenburg Concerti are among the most famous examples of the form.

**Corelli** is older by a generation or more than the other composers on this program. However, his Concerti Grossi, Op. 6, prepared meticulously at the end of his life and published posthumously, stand alongside those previously published by his younger countrymen as the foundation of the modern concerto genre.

With a few exceptions, the only music of Corelli to survive exists in six collections, each with twelve works representing the pinnacle of his achievement in the genres of trio sonata (opp. 1 through 4), violin sonata (op. 5) and concerto grosso (op. 6). His entire output is for strings, though sometimes accompanied by discreet basso continuo on a fretted or keyboard instrument. However, its melodiousness displays a keen awareness

of the possibilities of the human voice (as would, a century later, the piano works of Frédéric Chopin).

Much as poets choose their best work for a volume of collected poems, Corelli took time late in life to cull his considerable catalogue and preserve only his finest work to publish for posterity. Thus, each concerto grosso in op. 6 is an amalgam, with the composer thoroughly updating disparate movements to create, in essence, a new work. The final results sound not only seamless, but timeless.

The eminent English music historian Charles Burney, writing decades after their publication, wrote that Corelli's concerti grossi "seem to have withstood all the attacks of time and fashion with more firmness than any of his other works." He added that the "harmony is so pure, so rich, and so grateful; the parts are so clearly, judiciously, and ingeniously disposed; and the effect of the whole, from a large band, so majestic, solemn, and sublime, that they preclude all criticism, and make us forget that there is any other Music of the same kind existing."

Greek mythology fascinated Baroque composers. The story of Ariadne, daughter of King Minos of Crete, provided many with dramatic potential for their melodic gifts. Having aided Theseus in his quest to kill the Minotaur, Ariadne abandoned father and kingdom to elope with him. On the island of Naxos, Theseus abandoned her. Depending on who tells the tale, she either died of grief, in childbirth, or both; or else was rescued by the god Dionysus, a/k/a Bacchus, who married and deified her.

Operas and cantatas about Ariadne used texts drawn from classical sources, especially Ovid and Catullus. The earliest known musical setting is by Claudio Monteverdi, a fragment of his 1608 opera about her, the rest of which has been lost. French composer Marin Marais premiered his opera "Ariane et Bacchus" in 1696. Other notable versions were composed by Händel and Alessandro Scarlatti, both around 1707.

**Locatelli** used her story programmatically in one of his concerti grossi, subtitled "Il pianto d'Arianna" (The weeping of Arianna). A solo violin stands in for the heroine, evoking her lamentations with an emotional impact unconstrained by the specificity of a text - a tour de force for both composer and soloist.

**Francesco Geminiani** achieved great fame as a composer and virtuoso violinist, his name often mentioned in the same breath as Händel, who like him dominated the musical life of London; and Corelli, one of the most frequently performed composers in London, with whom Geminiani reputedly studied in Rome before his English residency.

A common practice among baroque composers was the re-use of musical materials, by both themselves and others. Händel and Bach often lifted entire movements of their own works, transplanting and sometimes rearranging them for new compositions. Geminiani was particularly fond of this practice. Although he composed three immensely successful sets of concerti grossi, he also created twelve “new” Corelli concerti grossi, arranged from the older master’s solo violin sonatas. These outstanding works combine Geminiani’s expert orchestrational gifts with Corelli’s melodic inspiration.

The last of these twelve is based on one of Corelli’s most famous sonatas, a set of variations on the popular 15th-century Spanish tune “La Folia” (in Italian, “La Follia”). This theme has been used as the basis of variations by more than 150 composers in the past four centuries. In the baroque era alone there are examples by Jean-Baptiste Lully, Vivaldi, Bach, Corelli, Marais, and A. Scarlatti. Later composers who made their mark with “La Folia” include C.P.E. Bach, Luigi Cherubini, Antonio Salieri, Franz Liszt, and Sergei Rachmaninoff.

In “The Four Seasons” and many more such concerti, **Vivaldi** established a standard for the form that was built upon by future generations of composers. But Vivaldi was about more than just showmanship; he was a master craftsman who didn’t have to rely upon theatrics. (Besides, his flair for the dramatic also found expression in dozens of operas.)

Among his hundreds of concerti there are nearly four dozen for strings and continuo alone (“concerti per archi”). These works focus less upon the dramatic aspect of a soloist opposed to the orchestra than on the more literal meaning of the word “concerto” – a work for musicians playing together.

“Vivaldi’s 44 concertos without soloist for four-part strings and continuo,” writes Vivaldi scholar Michael Talbot, “...show him in his best light as a composer pure and simple, freed of the necessity to engage in display for its own sake.” For a program emphasizing not just the violin but the full violin family, Maestro Renz has chosen five of these “concerti per archi” to focus on works by a master who deserves to be better known as a composer for all seasons.

**DANIEL GUSS**

### **Special Thanks**

Leanne Mahoney – Church House Committee Chair

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This program is supported, in part, by public funds from the New York State Council on the Arts with the support of the office of the Governor and the New York State Legislature, and the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with the City Council.



Private funding has been generously provided by The ~  
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### *In memoriam*

*The Very Reverend James Parks Morton, 1930-2020,  
Dean Emeritus, Cathedral Church of Saint John the Divine, NYC  
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