

**THE
ATLANTA BAROQUE ORCHESTRA**

Presents

“Concerto Grosso:
a Cameo of Contrasts”

John Hsu, Artistic Advisor
& Guest Director

Baroque Violin
Karen Clarke, Concertmaster
Valerie Prebys Arsenaault
Cora Cooper
Ruth Johnson
Ute Marks
Martha Perry

Baroque Viola
Melissa Brewer
Michelle Rush

Baroque Violoncello
Brent Wissick
Eckhart Richter

Baroque Bass
Melanie Punter

Harpsichord
Daniel Pyle

Baroque Bassoon
Keith Collins

Baroque Flute
Catherine Bull
Janice Joyce

Baroque Oboe
George Riordan
Susan Brashier
Lara Lay

Natural Horn
Richard Seraphinoff
Celeste Holler Seraphinoff

The Atlanta Baroque Orchestra was founded under the leadership of Lyle Nordstrom, along with founding-members Catherine Bull, Jeanne Johnson, Daniel Pyle, and Eckhart Richter, who felt the need for a permanent, professional, historical-instrument orchestra in the Southeast. The unique, transparent sheen of “early” instruments, coupled with their capability of a delightful variety of articulations, allows voices and instruments to blend into a unified, yet clear, sound that is very difficult to achieve with “modern” instruments. Since its founding in 1997, the ABO has been applauded for its freshness and verve, and for its delightful, convincing performances of a wide range of earlier works.

The Orchestra received initial generous support from the Atlanta Early Music Alliance and a variety of individuals, and has also depended on donations of time and money from the musicians themselves. The ABO is a not-for-profit corporation based in Atlanta, and is 501(c)3 (tax-exempt). Contributions, which are tax-deductible, are greatly appreciated and are central to the survival of a venture such as this. If you would like to support the ABO and its future programming, please send checks made out to “The Atlanta Baroque Orchestra,” 303 Augusta Avenue SE, Atlanta, GA 30315. There is also a great opportunity for friends of the arts in the community to serve on the new Atlanta Baroque Orchestra board. Please visit our website at www.atlantabaroque.org for more information on the ABO.



John Hsu is the Old Dominion Foundation Professor of Music at Cornell University, where he has been teaching since 1955. He is the founder and conductor of the Apollo Ensemble (a period instrument chamber orchestra) and a renowned virtuoso player of the viola da gamba and baryton. As both a conductor and an instrumentalist, he has been awarded grants by "The Fund for U.S. Artists at International Festivals and Exhibitions," a public/private partnership of the National Endowment for the Arts, the United States Information Agency, The Rockefeller Foundation, and the Pew Charitable Trusts. He has performed throughout North America and Europe, and made award-winning recordings. Among them are his CD of Haydn Baryton Trios (with violist David Miller and cellist Fortunato Arico), which was chosen Winner in the Music Retailers Association's Annual Award for Excellence in London, 1989; and his CD Symphonies for the Esterhazy Court by Joseph Haydn (with the Apollo Ensemble), which was nominated for the 1996 International Cannes Classical Music Award. In recognition of his edition of the complete instrumental works of Marin Marais (1656-1728), the most important composer of music for the viola da gamba, and for his performances and recordings of French baroque music for the viola da gamba, the French government conferred on him the knighthood *Chevalier de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres* in May of 2000.

He is a graduate of the New England Conservatory of Music, which awarded him the Honorary Doctor of Music degree in 1971. He is also Artistic Director Emeritus of the Aston Magna Foundation for Music and the Humanities (the pioneering musical organization in the historical performance movement in this country, founded by Albert Fuller in 1972). As conductor of the Cornell Symphony Orchestra, he has performed all nine Beethoven Symphonies, based on the new Bärenreiter edition by Jonathan Del Mar, completed in 2000.

Notes on *Concerto Grosso: A Cameo of Contrasts*

Although only one work on this program bears the title *concerto grosso*, all four works are in fact of the same genre. The primary characteristic of this genre is the contrast of instrumental sonorities between a small group of soloists, called *concertino*, and a big ensemble of strings, called *concerto grosso* (whence derived the term for the genre). This is the common thread that ties together an amazing array of compositions that encompass a wide range of musical styles and expression as well as instrumental colors of the eighteenth century.

From the inception of the *concerto grosso*, the conventional *concertino* consists of two violins and a cello, which is represented in this program by the Vivaldi Concerto. In the other three works, the composers chose different and unusual combinations of instruments for the *concertino*, thus offering the listener an unusual diversity of instrumental colors in the solo as well as tutti (orchestral) sections. The formal structure of these works is also expanded and varied. The usual three-movement mold of the concerto is extended in all four works: the Vivaldi concerto by an additional fast movement in the beginning, the Telemann and Bach concertos by the addition of a substantial and formally unique dance movement as the finale, and the Handel concerto by an introductory movement as well as a dance finale.

The twelve concertos for violins, Opus 3, by **Vivaldi** were published as a set entitled “L’estro armonico” in 1711. As the title suggests, this is a collection of music inspired by harmony. It is also music that explores the capabilities of the violin, and contains the most advanced violin writing of the time. Johann Sebastian Bach must have admired these works, for he transcribed six of them. Concerto No. 11 became his Concerto for organ in D Minor, BWV 596.

This concerto begins with an unusual pair of Allegro movements, the second with a very brief Adagio Introduction. The first movement is mostly a display of two violins playing brilliant figurations in canon, supported only by one harmony, the d-minor chord. As an extreme contrast, the second is a fugal movement that contains examples of invertible four-part counterpoint, the most complex of polyphonic writing, in which the soprano, alto, tenor, and bass parts are interchangeable while retaining the euphony and meaning of the music. The third movement is a siciliana, a slow dance of pastoral nature. (The term *spiccato* in the tempo markings of this movement and the introduction of the second movement does not denote the bounding bow stroke of modern string playing. In Vivaldi’s time, it merely meant the clear separation of bow strokes.) The final movement is an exemplary demonstration of the tonal contrasts inherent in a *concerto grosso* movement.

Telemann’s Concerto in D Major, TWV54:D1, one of the lesser-known works by this popular and prolific composer, is a *concerto grosso* with a *concertino* of four instruments. They are a pair of winds (two flutes) and a pair of strings (violin and cello). In the first and third movements, the solo instruments all join in the tutti sections, but play as a quartet, a trio, a duo, or solo, with or without orchestral accompaniment, in the solo sections. The second movement is in the ritornello form (the alternation of tutti and solo sections) with four solo sections, each featuring a different solo instrument: cello, violin, first flute, and second flute. The unexpected aspect of this concerto is the presence of a final gavotte movement of unusual formal structure. Although not so marked by the composer, it is in reality a quadripartite da capo movement in which a second gavotte and a chaconne for the *concertino* are inserted before ending with the return of the first gavotte.

Among **Handel**’s most popular instrumental works are the two dozen *concerti grossi*: the twelve concertos in Opus 6 for strings only, the six in Opus 3, plus six others without Opus numbers for strings and oboes, with or without other wind instruments. Of the four concertos in this program, this work adheres the least to the basic concept of the genre, in spite of its title. Here the two oboes are not featured as soloists that provide alternating and contrasting musical material and instrumental sonority to the orchestra. Instead, they mostly double the violin parts. It is only in the middle Adagio movement that they take on soloistic roles by embellishing the two melodic lines of the violins.

The first two movements of this concerto are played without interruption, with the first movement (no tempo marking given) serving as a prelude to the second movement, which is a fugue. The fourth movement is also a fugue, and the final Allegro, a gavotte. With its two fugues, this work is stylistically peculiar among *concerti grossi* in its emphasis on contrapuntal texture.

The six Brandenburg Concertos by **Johann Sebastian Bach**, dedicated to “His Royal Highness Monsigneur Christian Ludwig, Margrave of Brandenburg” in 1721 are among the composer’s most valuable contributions to the *concerto grosso* genre. It is surprising that the first concerto in this collection is not a new work but rather a revision of a pre-existing one, the Sinfonia in F Major, BWV 1046a from his Weimar years (1708-1717). Bach transformed the earlier work by adding the Allegro third movement and extending the fourth movement with the insertion of the Polonaise and another appearance of the Menuet before the second Trio. Instrumentally, he augmented the original *concertino* of six wind instruments (three oboes, two horns, and a bassoon) by adding the *violino piccolo*. With all these instruments there are within the *concertino* the tonal colors of the brass, woodwind, and string families.

The first movement begins with the string orchestra announcing the main theme, accompanied by the two horns (corni da caccia) doubling in the initial broken chord motive and the three oboes playing elaborations of the chord in sixteenth-note figures. This instrumentation gives to the tutti sections not only tonal brilliance and richness, but also a feeling of great joy and the open air. The *concertino* sections mostly feature the three groups of soloists sequentially (usually horns-oboes-violin) playing the sixteenth-note figures.

The second movement is a trio-sonata movement for oboe, violin, and bassoon with the orchestra providing an unobtrusive chordal accompaniment. It is an extraordinary piece in many ways. Structurally, it is made up of an eleven-measure phrase played three times plus a five-measure coda. The unusual eleven-measure phrase comprises a highly decorative and passionate melody of eight measures for the oboe and violin, followed by a three-measure *mini tutti* section for the bassoon and orchestra that modulates to a new tonality for the return of the theme. The oboe and violin play the theme in canon in its second and third appearances.

The *concertino* in the third movement is mainly for violin solo with the winds occasionally joining the orchestra in accompaniment. The rhythmic drive of the movement is provided by the persistent imitation of the initial *gigue* motive.

In the fourth movement, an expanded minuet movement in *rondeau* form (Menuet - Trio I – Menuet – Polonaise – Menuet - Trio II – Menuet), Bach displays the rich palette of the ensemble by the alternation of the full orchestral sound of the Menuet with the woodwind sound of the oboes and bassoon in the first Trio, then the string sound in the Polonaise, and followed by the brass sound of the horns in the second Trio.

The result is an extraordinarily colorful work of startling originality that combines the brilliance of outdoor music with the intimacy of chamber music, virtuosic instrumental writing with deeply felt lyricism, lively dance rhythms with gentle flowing figures, simple harmonies with intense chromaticism, as well as the best of both Italian and French musical styles.

Program notes by John Hsu

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**The Atlanta Baroque Orchestra would like to thank the following persons and establishments
for contributing their time, talents and energy in regard to the details of ABO concerts:**

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The ABO would also like to acknowledge the several thousand dollars worth of rehearsal time that has been graciously given to the orchestra by its members. These concerts could not be given without their enthusiasm and support.

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