

15. Corelli

Trio Sonata in D, Op. 3 No. 2: Movement IV (for Unit 3: Developing Musical Understanding)

Background information and performance circumstances

Arcangelo Corelli (1653–1713) was one of the most important and influential composers of the Baroque period. This is all the more remarkable for the fact that his output was not large, with just four sets of twelve trio sonatas, twelve solo sonatas and twelve concerti grossi – all for string instruments – plus a handful of other works. His sonatas and concertos were highly regarded for their form and style by later Baroque composers such as Handel and Bach. Corelli's music still sometimes features in present-day studies of Baroque counterpoint and harmony, and much of it is within the reach of good student string players.

At the time of writing the Op.3 No.2 Trio Sonata (1689), Corelli was employed by Cardinal Pamphili as music master, living in the Cardinal's palace and organising and directing the regular academies (Sunday concerts) there. The Op.3 sonatas are *sonate da chiesa* (or church sonatas – although in the 1689 edition Corelli just called them *sonate*): they were designed to be played either at church services or in sacred concerts. In most cases, as in Op. 3 no. 2, there are four movements in the order slow, fast, slow, fast. Pieces with dance titles (Allemanda, Corrente, etc.), as used in *sonate da camera* (chamber sonatas) are avoided as unsuitable for church, but nevertheless some movements are dance-like.

Op.3 consists of twelve church sonatas (six in major keys and six in minor keys). The four movements of No.2 in D major are labelled Grave, Allegro, Adagio, Allegro. All are in D major apart from the Adagio in B minor.

Performing forces and their handling

The Op. 3 sonatas are usually known today as 'trio sonatas'. Corelli himself described the sonatas as 'a trè' ('...in three parts'). There *are* basically three parts, as you can see from the anthology score, but *four* players are expected:

- Violin 1
- Violin 2
- Violone
- Organ

The first violin part (probably designed to be played by Corelli himself) and the second violin part (possibly played by Matteo Fornari, one of Corelli's pupils) are broadly equal partners in that they share a similar tessitura (range of pitch): Violin I covers two octaves and a semitone, and violin II a 14th. Furthermore, the two violins frequently imitate each other at the unison and are constantly crossing parts and exchanging ideas. Although the first violin always states the material first in this (and other) movements, the second violin finishes the whole sonata on top.

The violin parts are not difficult to play, only twice (in bars 11–13 and again in bar 34) requiring either player to venture beyond first position, and not using the bottom G string except for the penultimate note in the first violin part. It is possible that performers would embellish the repeated sections with some ornamentation (although this is not so on the CD).

The violone is a low-pitched bowed string instrument similar to the bass viol, often with five or six strings. However, the term is used loosely and may simply refer to any bass string instrument such as the violoncello. The pitch range is almost the same as that required by the two violinists – two octaves, and it fits comfortably within the range of the modern cello.

The continuo part is provided by the organ which would probably have been a single manual pipe organ without pedals. The player would have been expected to improvise the inner harmonies by providing suitable chords above the bass line according to the figured bass. Corelli's original figuring was somewhat sparser than that provided by this edition.

(Purely for interest, note the passages where the organ is given a simplified version of the bass part (bars 7 and 22). These were not in Corelli's first (1689) edition, however. In that first edition the violone part for Op. 3 no. 2 is labelled 'Violone, ò Arcileuto' ('Violone, or Archlute', the latter being a large type of lute.)

Texture

The texture is three-part imitative counterpoint. Each of the three 'voices' has its own independent melodic line (but bear in mind that the organ also improvises inner harmonic filling).

The opening sounds like the start of a *fugue* with

- Violin I stating the *subject*
- Violin II providing the *answer* (on the dominant), and
- Violone joining in at bar 6 with a further entry of the subject.

As the rest of the movement is not a fugue, however, this first part is best described as being fugal in style.

Corelli explores plenty of variety within this generally contrapuntal movement:

- Monophony (bars 1–2)
- 2 parts in parallel 3rds (bar 3)
- Inverted pedal (violins, bars 15–17)
- Polarised texture (violins close together, but widely separated from the violone, as in bars 16–19)
- Parallel 10ths (bars 8–9, Violin II and Violone)

The violone part drops out of the imitation after bar 23 and provides a more distinct bass line for the rest of the movement.

Notice also how Corelli draws the movement (and the whole sonata) to a close by dropping all three parts down an octave for the final three bars. An echo effect is intended – notice the dynamic *p* replacing the *f* at bar 32. The octave drop (with reduced brightness of sound) also helps create this echo effect.

Structure and Tonality

This movement is in binary form: A (repeated) B (repeated), as defined by the repeat marks and the tonality:

- The A section (bars 1–19) starts in D major and modulates to the dominant key (A major)
- The B section (bars 20–43) begins on the dominant with the same melodic material (inverted) and modulates through various related keys before returning to the tonic at the end. (Bars 41–43 could be regarded as a codetta.)

Phrase structure and keys:

Bars 1–2 Subject in D major (tonic).

Bars 3–4 Answer in A major (dominant).

- Bars 5–11 *Inversion* of subject in upper parts (parallel 3rds), with third (uninverted) entry of subject in bar 6. These bars start in the tonic and modulate to the dominant
- Bars 11–19 Imitative entries in A major (related to, or derived from, the original 'subject')
- Bars 20–21 Imitative entries in violins (inversion of subject) – in the dominant (A major)
- Bars 22–28 Imitative entries in all three parts (still inversion of original subject) – in the tonic. Music moves to the relative minor (B minor).
- Bars 28–32 A four-bar contrasting passage in E minor (subdominant of the relative minor) – imitation between violins
- Bars 32–41 Imitative entries passing through A, D and G majors before returning to the tonic. The semiquavers recall part of the original subject
- Bars 41–43 A short codetta phrase (the 'echo') emphasising the tonic key.

Harmony

The harmony is *functional* and *diatonic* – that is, the accidentals in the score are related to changes of key. The harmony is also largely consonant, mostly with root-position chords and first-inversion chords (shown by a 6 in the figuring).

Dissonance occurs through carefully-prepared and resolved suspensions (a 7–6 in bar 9, for example, and a 4–3 at bar 40²), and double suspensions (9–8 and 7–6 simultaneously at bars 29² and 30²). Suspensions also occur in the organ part alone (see the figuring for bar 23). (The suspended A in bar 18 is part of a $I\bar{I}^7b-V$ progression in A major).

Perfect cadences define the phrase structure (bars 10–11, 18–19) and changes of key (B minor in bars 27–28, E minor in bars 31–32). The strongly functional harmony is also evident in the pedal points heralding the ends of sections (bars 15–18 and 39–40).

Melody

This movement can be termed *monothematic* in that almost all the melodic invention stems from the opening three-note motif (D–F sharp–D) based on a rising and falling 3rd. Corelli develops this apparently simple motif in the following ways:

- As a rising sequence including added passing notes (bar 1²)
- With a further sequence of this embellished version (bar 2¹)
- By inversion (bar 5)

- In a falling one-bar sequence with the embellishments removed (violin II and violone, bars 8–10)
- Juxtaposition of the opening motif and its inversion in rising sequence (bars 11–13)
- Extended falling sequence in violone (bars 15–17)
- Addition of an anacrusis to the (embellished) motif for the entries starting in bar 32.

As a consequence of the more or less continuous employment and development of the opening three-note motif, melodic lines are based almost exclusively on the interval of a 3rd and on stepwise movement. Occasionally, however, larger leaps, notably octave leaps as in violin I at bars 7 and 34, help to provide additional character and vitality.

Rhythm and metre

This movement is in the style of a *gigue*, which is a lively dance in compound time and binary form more usually found in chamber sonatas than in church sonatas. There are two main beats per bar and the strongly rhythmical character of the music is enhanced by the phrasing in dotted crotchet beats in the opening subject (bars 1–2) and the cadence points in bars 2 and 4.

Corelli sometimes plays around with this regularity of metre to add interest and buoyancy:

- The violone entry in bar 6 starts half way through the bar (subsequent imitative entries are at one bar's distance – bars 11–13, 20–24 etc)
- *Syncopation* in violin I (bars 26–27)
- *Hemiolas* in bars 27 and 31. The harmony changes on the first, third and fifth quavers of the bar to give a feeling of simple triple (3/4) time rather than the compound duple of the time signature.