

15. Corelli

Trio Sonata in D, Op. 3 No. 2: Movement IV

(For Unit 6: Further Musical Understanding)

Background information and performance circumstances

Arcangelo Corelli (1653–1713) is one of the most important and influential composers of the late Baroque period. This is all the more remarkable for the fact that his output was very small, being just four sets of twelve trio sonatas, twelve solo sonatas and twelve concerti grossi, plus a handful of other works. All of his music was written for instrumental forces (almost entirely string ensemble) and the form and style of these works were highly regarded by the later generation of Baroque composers such as Handel and Bach. His music was widely recognised and circulated through publishing with as many as 35 different editions of his Op.1 Trio Sonatas being published during the eighteenth-century alone. The compositional techniques Corelli employed are frequently cited as a model for students of Baroque counterpoint and harmony today.

Corelli was born into a prosperous landowning family in Fusignano in Northern Italy, although sadly his father died before Arcangelo was born. He studied for four years at nearby Bologna at a time when Italians reigned as the best instrument makers, teachers and performers of string music in the whole of Europe. In 1675, he moved to Rome where he remained for the rest of his life earning his living as a violinist and composer. Queen Christine of Sweden was an early patron of Corelli (he dedicated his Op.1 Trio Sonatas to her) but the Op.3 Trio Sonatas were dedicated in 1689 to Duke Francesco II of Modena. At the time, Corelli was employed by Cardinal Pamphili as his music master, living in the Cardinal's palace and organising and directing the regular academies (Sunday concerts) there. Corelli was notable for being a strict disciplinarian with his orchestra, being one of the first directors to insist that violinists within a section achieve unanimity in their bowing.

These Op.1 and Op.3 Trio Sonatas are known as 'Sonata da Chiesa' (or 'Church Sonatas') and were designed to be played either in church or for sacred concerts. Typically there are four movements in the order slow – fast – slow – fast and the style is broadly contrapuntal in character. Op. 2 and Op.4 Trio Sonatas were called 'Sonata da Camera' (or 'Chamber Sonatas') and are more secular in style, usually also in four movements with an opening prelude followed by three dances (sarabanda, corrente, gavotta etc.) and are generally more homophonic in texture.

Op.3 consists of twelve such Sonata da Chiesa (six in major keys and six in minor keys). The keys use no more than two sharps or flats except for one which is in F minor. No. 2 is in D major and all four movements (grave – allegro – adagio – allegro) are in that key. There is no melodic link between the movements although they are clearly designed to be played as a whole (the third movement, for instance, finishes with an inconclusive Phrygian cadence).

Performing forces and their handling

Although called 'Trio Sonata' this work requires four performers:

- 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), with Violin I covering two octaves and a semitone and Violin II a 14th. They 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 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 heard on the anthology 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. Certainly, Corelli often performed with the Spanish cellist G.B. Lulier who was referred to as 'Giovannino del violone'. The pitch range is two octaves, and 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 is likely to have been somewhat sparser than that provided by this edition, but it is interesting to note the passages where the organ is given a simplified version of the bass part (bars 7 and 22).

Texture

The movement is typically contrapuntal. It is in a three-part texture with the violone part joining in the counterpoint for most of the movement.

The opening section is fugal in style. The first violin states the subject (monophonic texture) and the second violin provides the answer a 4th lower (called a 'real answer' as it is exactly the same). In bar 5 the two violins start an inverted version of the subject in parallel 3rds before the violone completes the entries of the original subject starting midway through bar 6. Stretto entries (where the parts come in more closely) in bars 11-13 are followed by a closing passage where the violins sustain an inverted pedal point (briefly doubled in bars 16-17) above the moving bass line.

Corelli achieves much variety within this three-part texture. Often the parts are polarised with the two violins close together above a bass much lower in pitch (e.g. bars 18-19), but they are more evenly spaced at the start of bar 27. Violin 2 and Violone sometimes work together in parallel 10ths (bars 8-9) although in the later part of the movement the imitation is largely

confined to the violins with the violone providing a more distinct bass line (bars 28-end). The texture is more obviously homophonic at cadence points (bars 26-27, 42-43). An interesting effect occurs in bars 32-34 where the two violins leapfrog over each other with successive entries of imitation a 4th higher. It is worth noting 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.

Structure and tonality

This movement is in binary form: A (repeated) B (repeated). As the movement is broadly monothematic the structure is defined by the repeat marks and the tonality.

- The A section (bars 1-19) starts in D major and modulates to the dominant (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.

This table shows 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 main theme, with third entry of subject starting in bar 6 in the tonic and modulating to the dominant.
Bars 11-19	Further entries in A major.
Bars 20-22	Entries on the dominant.
Bars 23-28	Entries on the tonic modulating to the relative minor (B minor).
Bars 28-32	A 4 bar contrasting section in E minor (subdominant of the relative minor).
Bars 32-41	Imitative entries of a modified subject passing through A, D and G majors before returning to the tonic.
Bars 41-43	A short codetta phrase emphasising the tonic key.

Harmony

This movement is entirely diatonic, that is, all the accidentals in the music are related to a change of key. The harmony is largely consonant and uses mostly root position chords and first inversion chords (shown by a 6 in the figuring).

Dissonance occurs through carefully prepared suspensions (a 7-6 on the first beats of bars 9 and 10 for example, and a 4-3 on the second beat of bar 40) and double suspensions (9-8 and 7-6 simultaneously on the second beats of bars 29 and 30). Suspensions also occur in the organ part alone (notice the figures at bar 23) and as part of a IIb7 – V progression (bar

18). Usually, all suspensions resolve downwards by step, but the first violin leaves the dissonance occurring on the first beat of bar 39 unresolved with a leap upwards.

There are frequent perfect cadences which define the phrase structure (bars 4, 10-11, 18-19) and the changes of key (B minor in bars 27-28, E minor in bars 31-32). These latter examples are masculine cadences (finishing on strong beats) whereas the earlier ones (e.g. bar 4) are feminine cadences (finishing on weak beats). The strongly functional harmony is also evident in the cycle of fifths progression (bars 32-35) and the pedal points heralding the ends of sections (bars 15-18 and 39-40).

Melody

As already stated, this movement is monothematic with all the melodic invention deriving from the opening three-note motif based on a rising 3rd. Corelli develops this apparently simple motif in the following ways:

- as a rising sequence with added passing notes (second half of bar 1)
- a further sequence of this embellished version (first half of bar 2)
- in inversion (bar 5)
- as a falling one-bar sequence with the embellishments removed (2nd violin and violone bars 8-10)
- juxtaposition of the opening motif and its inversion in rising sequence (bar 11 and subsequent entries)
- extended falling sequence in violone (bars 15-17).
- addition of an anacrusis to the motif for the entries starting in bar 32.

As a consequence of this development of the motif, almost all of the melody is based on the interval of a 3rd and stepwise movement. Occasionally, an octave leap (e.g. 1st violin in bar 7) will break the chains of characteristic descending sequences.

Rhythm and metre

This movement is written in the style of a gigue, which is a lively dance in compound time, more usually found in the Sonata da Camera. 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 plays around with this regularity of metre to add interest and buoyancy to the movement:

- violone entry in bar 6 starts half way through the bar (all subsequent entries are at one bar's distance – bars 11-12, 21-22 etc.)
- syncopation in the 1st violin part in bars 26-27
- hemiolas in bars 27 and 31 with the harmony changing on the 1st, 3rd and 5th quavers of the bar giving a feel of 3/4 time.