

INTRODUCTION

Six Concertos after Corelli Opera 1 & 3 H. 126-131

Geminiani's first orchestral publications were two sets of adaptations of Corelli's solo sonatas Op. 5 as concerti grossi, which appeared in 1726 and 1729.¹ Although such arranging was said to be much despised by Veracini (see below) and scorned by Burney as "musical cookery, not to call it quackery", these concertos were immediately popular with the musical public; in England John Walsh produced multiple reprints and they were re-engraved in Paris specifically for the French market. Hawkins claimed that the second set, based on the six *da camera* sonatas of Corelli's collection, "having no fugues and consisting altogether of airs, afforded him but little scope for the exercise of his skill, and met with but an indifferent reception";² nevertheless these too were reissued in London, and reprinted in both Amsterdam and Paris.

Geminiani followed this success by issuing twelve original concertos (Op. 2 and Op. 3, both published in 1732) before returning to Corelli in 1735 with a set of transcriptions derived, according to the title-page, from *Sei Sonate del Opera Terza* (but in fact including one sonata from Op. 1). This selection contained a substantial number of fugal movements, so Hawkins' observations may have been taken to heart.³

Although Burney was convinced that Geminiani's fondness for arrangement, revision and adaptation betrayed a shortage of new ideas and compositional vitality, he nevertheless was highly impressed by the quality of the Opp. 2 and 3 concertos which had appeared *after* the first sets of arrangements. Hawkins, though allowing that "the powers of his [Geminiani's] fancy seem to have been limited", suggested that the composer's fondness for revisions demonstrated a "spirit of improvement" rather than paucity of imagination. The more turbulent and satirical comments of Veracini (another wandering Italian who, like Geminiani, was frequently in London) appear in some instances to be directed against specific compositions of Geminiani (the "fuga mostruosa" of Op. 7 being the most famous attack), but are often more general criticisms of the "paraphrasing" or "borrowing" of musical fragments from others (of which Handel was a prime exponent) rather than openly arranging complete works:

The paraphrasers, paraphrasing the works of others, gave the impression of composing, so that short-sighted people believed that these were creations of the author whose name was written at the head. These paraphrases were, most of the time, a badly assembled mosaic of small fragments lacking coherence, good taste and expression, and failed to develop and bring to a successful conclusion their initial promises. The main reasons for these musical misdeeds were different kinds of rheumatism that very often befall the works of those who compose without experience, or rather steal whatever they write.⁴

In Geminiani's defence, the works derived from Corelli were always clearly titled as such, and referred to as Corelli by the public; "reheating" may have been one of Geminiani's characteristics, but stealing

¹ See *Geminiani Opera Omnia* vol. 7.

² *Hawkins*, vol. v, p. 242.

³ The published sequence is Op. 3 nos. I, III, IV, IX, X and Op. 1 no. IX.

⁴ 'I Parafraſisti, parafrasando le Compoſizioni altrui, pareva che componessero, e chi era corto di viſta credevale Parti dell'Autore di cui leggevasi sopra il Nome. Tali parafrasi erano, il più delle volte, un cattivo Mosaico di pezzettini mancanti di connessione, di buongusto e d'espressione, senza seguito e senz'esito delle loro promesse. Le cause principali di tali musichevoli misfatti erano diverse specie di Reumatismi che cadono bene spesso sulle Compoſizioni di coloro che imperitamente compongono, anzi rubano tutto quel che scrivono.' ('Trionfo', ff. 364-5, quoted in Mario Fabbri, "Le acute censure di Francesco M. Veracini a "L'Arte della Fuga" di Francesco Geminiani, *Accademia Musicale Chigiana*, vol. 20 (1963), p. 188; trans. from *Careri*, p. 152.)

are given in square brackets.) In addition, **P** gives corrected figures where earlier incorrect figuring was erased but not replaced (see, for example, Concerto II/iii/14, where the first note was figured $\frac{9}{5} \frac{8}{6}$ with '5' erased in Corelli, but $\frac{9}{7} \frac{8}{6}$ in **P**). Apart from a minimum of editorial accidentals given in square brackets, no other editorial additions are made in the present edition, except in those passages where the bass part lacks a number of consecutive figures in an otherwise figured concerto (supplied from **P** but shown within square brackets). Patently incorrect figures are corrected and noted in the Critical Commentary.

Three Concertos from *Select Harmony* H. 121-123

The series of publications under the title of *Select Harmony* issued by Walsh and Hare began in 1730 with *XII Concertos in Six Parts... Collected from the Works of Antonio Vivaldi*, a selection from his Opp. 6, 7, 8 and 9, all of them already available in print. A second collection with the same title followed in 1732 “being 12 Concerto’s collected from the latest Opera of Albinoni in 7 parts”, again utilizing pre-existing publications of his Opp. 5 and 7. For the third collection Walsh adopted a serial approach, issuing single *Select Concertos* on a monthly basis in 1734; the title-page of the first concerto, by Giacomo Facco, an Italian composer resident in Madrid, promised that the series would “be continued Monthly with a well chosen Concerto from the Works of the most Eminent Italian Authors at 1^s. 6^d. each”. The next three issues (between February 28 and April 4) contained the present concertos by Geminiani, after which the monthly plan seems to have been aborted and the individual concertos were absorbed into a single volume, *Select Harmony Third Collection* — six concertos described as “Compos’d by Sig^r Geminiani, and other Eminent Italian Authors. Engraven in a fair Character and Carefully Corrected”. Other than Facco (no. 6 in the new arrangement) it is unclear which other Italian authors were involved; the first of the set is anonymous, while the fifth concerto had already managed to appear spuriously as part of the first issue of Handel’s Op. 3 collection, before reappearing anonymously in *Select Harmony*.⁷ Geminiani’s works, in an altered sequence, became nos. 2-4 and the whole was announced as “Just publish’d” at the beginning of June 1735.

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William Hayes described Geminiani (in contrast to Handel) as “frequently revising, correcting, altering, and amending until his Piece be completely polished”,⁸ and there is much documentary evidence to show that versions of Geminiani’s works circulated in manuscript for many years prior to publication (see, for instance, Source C for these concertos). He himself, however, appeared rarely in public concerts and then apparently only when under financial pressure.

The Concerto Spirituale

In 1750 an exceptional *Concerto Spirituale* was planned, explained in advance by an announcement in *The Daily Advertiser* (1 March 1750):

MR. GEMINIANI, when last in Italy, with great Labour and Expence, made a Collection of the most valuable Compositions, Vocal and Instrumental, that have been produced there for fifty Years past, by the most eminent Masters; and it being the Opinion of his Friends, that through the great Variety of Stile, and Accuracy of Composition, they will be worthy the Attention of the Publick, he proposes to compile them into an Evening’s Entertainment, call’d

⁷ In volume 3 of the *Händel-Handbuch* (Thematic Catalogue), p. 68, Bernd Baselt suggests that this piece was “probably by Geminiani” but there is no evidence to support this assumption; it was pointedly republished by Walsh without attribution and includes two solo oboe parts, a scoring found nowhere else in Geminiani’s concertos. It is reprinted as an Appendix to *HHA* IV/11.

⁸ *Remarks on Mr. Avison’s Essay on Musical Expression* (London, 1753) p. 128.

Two Unison Concertos H. 124-125

Geminiani produced forty-seven concertos in total, including his expansions of his own solo sonatas and Corelli's solos and trios. All save his last two concertos are scored in many parts (usually a quartet of soloists and three-part tutti) with additional parts in some instances for wind instruments. Only the two *Unison Concertos*, published by John Johnson in 1761 less than a year before the composer's death, deviate from this pattern; not only do they resolutely restrict themselves to two parts in all save a few bars, they also have no known earlier existence as solos. They do not exhibit any of that "artificial contexture of the parts for which Geminiani is so justly admired" to quote John Mainwaring,¹⁷ with only the most straightforward patterns of imitation (Concerto II, first movement) and nothing more technically exacting from the composer than an ostinato bass (Concerto II, Andante).

There is an unavoidable comparison to be made with the most "modern" music of this period, which met criticism from the supporters of the "ancient" school for its lack of counterpoint and dependence on attractive melodic lines (and undemanding minuets). Whether Geminiani was working in a mood of satire or support for the galant idiom is hard to determine; his life-long assertion that lack of harmonic invention hampered music of all styles is well demonstrated in these sparse works, and he probably saw this compilation as an adjunct to the more opaque *Guida Armonica* of c1752.¹⁸ In this volume of encapsulated harmonic progressions he deplored the fact that though "there is not an ordinary Performer upon any Instrument, in any Part of *Europe*, who does not boast his having composed Sonatas, Concertos, Cantatas, &c. Yet there are but few modern Composers, even of a much higher Class, who can be truly said to have produced anything new with respect to Melody, Harmony, and Modulation. What can this be owing to, but imperfect and defective Rules?" The *Guida* was intended to supply such rules, but unfortunately, as Hawkins remarked, "there were very few that were able to comprehend the motives to, or the tendency of, the work". Geminiani responded with a *Supplement* "With Examples Shewing it's Use in Composition", but even these did little to demonstrate how upper parts in two- or three-part counterpoint were to be constructed. It is conceivable that he felt a set of concertos, normally the most complex of constructs, reduced to mere treble and bass, but with a carefully figured harmonic foundation would provide the best model for "modern Composers". At the same time, the carefully marked violin parts would act as a reminder that the rules of taste which he had expounded more than ten years earlier in *Rules for Playing in a True Taste* (c1748), *A Treatise of Good Taste* (1749) and its companion, *The Art of Playing on the Violin* (1751)¹⁹ were still applicable to the modern style. The *Unison Concertos* were published only in score, a format that Geminiani considered more suited to study than separate parts (the "corrected and enlarged" versions of his Opp. 2 and 3 concertos which he had engraved in Paris (see above) were also issued in score for didactic reasons).

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Geminiani's score, despite its many expressive markings, leaves the performer with certain problems. Foremost is the realisation of a viola part; this is supplied editorially in the present edition and, following the example of Geminiani's own written-out parts, is given mostly an octave above the bass-line. In *Select Harmony* Concerto II in this volume, for instance, apart from a brief spell doubling the second violins (in the Andante), the fully notated viola part is almost always an octave above the bass, even where it could have been in unison, including passages where it rises above the violin line (ii/5-7, 18-19, 47, 51, 85-92). The only exceptions are a brief unison passage (i/27-8) and a single note two octaves higher (i/12, n. 2). It is probable that Geminiani had a similar texture in mind for the *Unison Concertos*.

Where the bass-line is divided, it is assumed that the upper part is intended for cello with the viola following the bass and continuo line. Any further modifications of the viola pitch may be undertaken

¹⁷ *Memoirs of the Life of the Late George Frederic Handel* (London, 1760), p. 201.

¹⁸ See *Geminiani Opera Omnia*, vol. 14.

¹⁹ See *Geminiani Opera Omnia*, vols 12 and 13.