

# J. S. Bach

## *Concerto Transcriptions*

*Joan Lippincott, organ*

Paul Fritts Organ  
Opus 20 (2000)  
Princeton Theological Seminary



**GOTHIC**

# Concerto Transcriptions

Concerto in G Major, BWV 592		
1	(Allegro)	3:22
2	Grave	2:08
3	Presto	2:00
Concerto in A Minor, BWV 593		
4	(Allegro)	4:12
5	Adagio	3:26
6	Allegro	4:08
Concerto in D Minor, BWV 596		
7	(Allegro)	1:06
8	Grave – Fuga	3:56
9	Largo e spiccato	2:39
10	(Allegro)	3:14
Concerto in C Major, BWV 594 ('Great Mogul')		
11	(Allegro)	7:39
12	Recitativo Adagio	3:03
13	Allegro	8:46
Concerto in C Major, BWV 595		
14	(Allegro)	4:03
Concerto in A Minor, BWV 1065, transcribed by Joan Lippincott		
15	(Allegro)	4:33
16	Largo	2:03
17	Allegro	4:27
18	Allabreve in D Major, BWV 589	7:03
	Total Time	71:53

### J.S. BACH: THE CONCERTO TRANSCRIPTIONS

Johann Sebastian Bach's stay in Weimar as Court Organist to Dukes Wilhelm Ernst and Ernst August has been described as the golden period of his organ writing. There is certainly truth to this, for his tenure in Weimar (1708-1717) directly followed his initial organist positions in Arnstadt (1703-1707) and Mühlhausen (1707-1708), during which he cut his teeth in organ playing and composition. In Arnstadt and Mühlhausen he produced "the first fruits of his efforts at organ composition," as the writers of his obituary later put it. In Weimar, his organ writing reached maturity, and it was there that he wrote most of the works that established his reputation as the greatest organist and organ composer of all time: the *Orgelbüchlein* ("The Little Organ Book"), the first versions of the "Great Eighteen" Chorales, the bulk of his large preludes and fugues, and the con-

certo transcriptions heard on the present recording. The success of these pieces and the brilliance of Bach's playing attracted students and brought invitations to test and inaugurate new organs in neighboring towns. Indeed, it was during this time that word began to spread throughout Germany about the organ virtuoso from Thuringia.

Bach was encouraged in these activities by his principal employer, Wilhelm Ernst, a great lover of organ music. Moreover, he had at his disposal an organ of sufficient (if not luxurious) resources located in the magnificent space of the Court Chapel. There were still other reasons that his talents flourished in Weimar, however. The first was the presence of his cousin Johann Gottfried Walther, organist of the City Church of St. Peter and St. Paul located just across town from the court complex. Walther was also an organist of considerable skill, and his settings of chorale melodies and his transcriptions of instrumental concertos clearly spurred friendly competition with Bach. Walther's

wide-ranging interests in music (he later published one of the most important German music dictionaries of the time, the *Musical Lexicon* of 1732) and his extensive library of German, French, and Italian music opened new vistas for the ever-curious Bach.

A second catalyst in Weimar was the presence of Prince Johann Ernst, the young nephew of Wilhelm Ernst. Ernst, a gifted violinist and keyboard player, studied composition with Walther and owned an extensive library of contemporary instrumental music. The Prince traveled frequently in Europe to hear new music and purchase copies for his collection, and it was on a trip to the low countries in the spring of 1713 that he brought back to the court a large quantity of printed music that seems to have included Antonio Vivaldi's latest set of violin concertos, *L'Estro armonico* ("The Harmonic Whim"), op. 3, of 1711.

Bach's encounter with Vivaldi's concertos, courtesy of Johann Ernst, was a life-changing experience. Vivaldi's compelling instrumental idiom with its incisive themes, clear harmonic direction, strongly wrought forms, and motor rhythms offered Bach an attractive alternative to

the North-German style that he had espoused in his early works, and it was not long before his organ compositions began to take on Vivaldian features. And in what appears to have been a friendly competition, Bach and Walther arranged a series of fashionable instrumental concertos by Vivaldi, Johann Ernst, and other progressive composers for organ and harpsichord, producing a body of transcriptions that testifies to an unusually exciting period of organ playing and composition in Weimar.

Johann Ernst died prematurely in 1715 at the age of nineteen, and it is possible that Bach and Walther intended their transcriptions as gifts to the Prince during his lifetime or as memorial tributes after his death. On the present recording organist Joan Lippincott performs Bach's five surviving concerto transcriptions for organ, two of works by Johann Ernst and three of works by Vivaldi. She also adds for good measure her own transcription of Bach's four-harpsichord arrangement of Vivaldi's Concerto in B Minor for Four Violins, Strings, and Continuo as well as the Allabreve in D Major, BWV 589, Bach's transcription-like homage to the Renaissance vocal motet.

The Concerto in G Major, BWV 592, is a transcription of Johann Ernst's Concerto in G Major for Violin, Strings, and Continuo, a work that Bach also transcribed for solo harpsichord, BWV 592a. Ernst's concerto survives as a set of handwritten instrumental parts, and a comparison of the original music and the organ arrangement shows that Bach tightened and improved the score as he transferred



it to the organ. The music follows the traditional three-movement sequence of the Late Baroque Concerto: Fast—Slow—Fast. In the opening movement Bach assigns the solo violin episodes to the Rückpositiv, or secondary manual, and the tutti sections to the Oberwerk, or primary manual, and Pedal. At times he calls for double pedal, taking both viola and continuo parts with the feet in order to free the hands for the two violin lines. In the Grave middle movement a forte unison theme frames a melodic central section. And in the Presto finale, which like the first movement capitalizes on the alternation of a tutti ritornello theme and episodic segments, Bach adorns the music with 32<sup>nd</sup>-note scalar flourishes here and there to further animate the score.

The Concerto in A Minor, BWV 593, is a transcription of the Concerto in A Minor for Two Violins, Strings, and Continuo, RV 522, from Vivaldi's *L'Estro armonico*. Bach arranged the concerto for two manuals and pedal, assigning the tutti sections to the Oberwerk and the solo violin sections to the Rückpositiv, much in the manner of the Johann Ernst transcriptions. He also enriched the texture everywhere, adding new counterpoint

to Vivaldi's lines. The ingenuity of Bach's adaptation is present everywhere, from the inventive and carefully notated manual changes of the first and third movements to the inversion of Vivaldi's motives in the middle movement to make the original parts more playable on a keyboard. In the final Allegro Bach utilizes double pedal once again, assigning the unison line of violins 3 and 4 of Vivaldi's score to the right foot and the continuo part to the left foot. The two hands play the solo violin parts. The boldness of this passage must have greatly impressed Bach's listeners, for there was nothing quite like it in the organ repertory before this work.

No less magnificent is the **Concerto in D Minor, BWV 596**, a transcription of Vivaldi's Concerto in D Minor for Two Violins, Cello, Strings, and Continuo, RV 565, from *L'Estro armonico*, once again. Its formal design is somewhat different from that of the A-Minor Concerto: a 32-measure-long Allegro introduction leads to a 3-measure Grave bridge, which is followed by an extended and commanding fugue. This leads to a slow movement, *Large e spiccato* (slow and unslurred), and an Allegro finale. Bach once again shows remarkable invention in adapting Vivaldi's

instrumental score to the keyboard. In the Allegro introduction, for instance, he notates the opening solo violin lines an octave lower than written on separate keyboards, Oberwerk and Brustpositiv, with a 4' Principal stop on each. In this way he was able to include the critical top note d"', which was not available at 8' pitch on his Weimar organ (the manuals extended only to c''). Under the two violin lines Bach adds a pulsating solo pedal point that does not exist in Vivaldi's score. It serves to ground the harmony and increase the dramatic tension of the opening. Just as inventive is Bach's call for a change of registration on the Oberwerk and Pedal during the course of the introduction—a procedure that could be carried out smoothly only with the aid of an assistant. While the fugue that follows is performed on one manual throughout with the full organ, the concluding Allegro calls for the type of rapid manual changes found in the A-Minor Concerto and the Johann Ernst transcriptions. So impressive was the D-Minor Concerto arrangement that Bach's oldest son Wilhelm Friedemann claimed the music as his own on the original score. It was accepted as such until 1911, when a comparison with

Vivaldi's *L'Estro armonico* revealed the true source of the music.

The **Concerto in C Major, BWV 594**, after Vivaldi's Concerto in D Major for Violin, Strings, and Continuo, RV 208, known as the "Great Mogul," is less frequently performed than the A-Minor and D-Minor Concerto arrangements. This is due in large part to the single-line effects that work well only in a space with reverberant acoustics. In addition, Bach appears to have chosen as his model an early manuscript version of the concerto, RV 208a, that includes extended single-line cadenzas in movements 1 and 3 (the cadenza for movement 3, which occurs just before the short closing tutti, is 93 measures long!) and a middle movement that differs from that of Vivaldi's printed score in opus 7 of 1720. The cadenzas may represent an addition by Bach's friend and colleague Johann Georg Pisendel, concertmaster of the Dresden Court orchestra.

Despite these eccentricities, Bach's organ arrangement creates a great effect, capturing and heightening, through adroit manual changes, the exotic nature of Vivaldi's score. The opening and closing movements are animated ritornello forms. The middle movement, marked "Recitativo

Adagio," consists of a rhythmically free, florid cantilena melody against simple accompanimental chords.

The **Concerto in C Major, BWV 595**, is a transcription of the first movement of a lost instrumental concerto by Prince Johann Ernst. The concerto is also mirrored in full three-movement form in Bach's harpsichord arrangement, BWV 984. The most prominent feature of the organ transcription is Bach's generous use of manual change to highlight the dynamic contrast between tutti and solo passages. Indeed, during the course of the piece's eighty-one measures Bach asks the player to switch keyboards sixty times—more than in any of his other organ works. The result is an exhilarating, if technically challenging, organ arrangement.

Some twenty years after crafting the Weimar organ transcriptions Bach returned to Vivaldi's *L'Estro armonico* collection, arranging the Concerto in B Minor for Four Violins, Strings, and Continuo, RV 580, as the **Concerto in A Minor for Four Harpsichords and Strings, BWV 1065**. Bach most probably created this harpsichord extravaganza for himself and his three oldest sons, Wilhelm Friedemann, Carl Philipp Emanuel, and Johann

Gottfried Bernhard, who were all gifted keyboard players. The work would have been performed before an audience of coffee-drinking, tobacco-smoking patrons at Zimmermann's Coffee House in Leipzig, as part of Bach's weekly concerts with the University Collegium Musicum. On the present recording, Joan Lippincott plays her own organ transcription of Bach's collegium arrangement, aptly demonstrating the versatility of this extraordinary music.

In the opening movement tutti segments of the four harpsichords and strings alternate with solo segments pairing the harpsichords in different combinations. In the middle Adagio, short segments of music in dotted rhythm frame a middle section based on arpeggios in the harpsichords. In the spirited finale tutti passages alternate with solo episodes once again, this time within the context of a dynamic dance in 6/8 meter.

Joan Lippincott concludes her recording with the **Allabreve in D Major, BWV 589**, Bach's homage to the Renaissance vocal style of Palestrina. The allabreve meter, the conjunct white-note theme, the numerous suspensions, and the seamless forward motion all point to Renaissance rather than Baroque writing.

Also typical of early vocal music is the tightening of the imitative entries, or stretto, towards the end. There is nothing else quite like the Allabreve in Bach's oeuvre. As a vocal motet written for the organ, it is a unicum, and it is possible that Bach composed it during the last two decades of his life, when he was intensely involved with the study of Latin-texted church music from the Renaissance Era.

The Allabreve, like the concerto transcriptions, once again shows Bach as the supreme master of organ arrangements, be they of popular instrumental concertos or of a cappella church music.

George B. Stauffer

Mason Gross School of the Arts

Rutgers University



## THE JOE R. ENGLE ORGAN

Built by Paul Fritts and Company Organ Builders, Opus 20 (2000)

Miller Chapel, Princeton Theological Seminary

### GREAT

Bourdon 16'  
Principal 8'  
Rohrflöte 8'  
Quintadena 8'  
Octav 4'  
Spitzflöte 4'  
Quint 2-2/3'  
Octav 2'  
Tierce 1-3/5'  
Mixture IV-VI  
Scharff III-V  
Trompet 8'  
Trompet 4'  
Bärpfeife 8'

### SWELL

Principal 8'  
Gedackt 8'  
Violdigamba 8'  
Voix celeste 8'  
Octav 4'  
Koppelflöte 4'  
Nasat 2-2/3'  
Octav 2'  
Gemshorn 2'  
Terz 1-3/5'  
Mixture IV-VI  
Dulcian 16'  
Trompet 8'  
Hautbois 8'

### PEDAL

Principal 16'  
Subbass 16'  
Octave 8'  
Bourdon 8'  
Octave 4'  
Nachthorn 2'  
Mixture VI-VIII  
Posaune 16'  
Trompet 8'  
Trompet 4'  
Cornet 2'

Suspended key action • Mechanical stop action with pre-set system  
Variable Tremulant • Wind Stabilizer • Tierce (1 rank for Swell Mixture)  
Cimbelstern • Vogelgesang • Manual wind supply option • Kellner temperament

## THE ARTIST

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Joan Lippincott performs extensively in the United States under Karen McFarlane Artists and has toured throughout Europe and Canada. A graduate of Westminster Choir College and The Curtis Institute of Music, Dr. Lippincott was Principal University Organist at Princeton University, 1993-2000, and for many years has been Professor of Organ at Westminster Choir College.

October of 2010 marks Joan Lippincott's 30th year of recordings on Gothic Records.





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Joan Lippincott seated  
at the organ in the  
chapel at Notre Dame.

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