Edexcel AoS 2: Vivaldi’s Concerto in D minor, Op. 3 No. 11

by Hanh Doan

VIVALDI’S VENICE

Aside from two years in Mantua (1718-20) and his final months in Vienna, Antonio Vivaldi spent his life in Venice, from where his reputation and fame emanated. Venice had a unique atmosphere that had grown out of the interaction of many different factors: its social and general history, landscape and climate, culture and arts.

By 1700 the Republic of St Mark was no longer a leading economic or political power. It had lost its dominant position for trading with Asia due to the shift of international trade to the oceans and the colonial expansions of other European states. It also lost its political authority, losing its possessions in the eastern Mediterranean and to Austria. But having been known for its trade, Venice’s identity refocused around culture. The arts and entertainment flourished, and the Venetian carnival attracted tens of thousands of foreigners every year. As well as being a city of amusement for tourists, it was also enjoyed by the Venetian nobility.

By the 18th century, Venice had become a city of music. A wealth of vocal and instrumental music was performed in the city’s churches, opera houses and palazzi, and in the open air.

Musical heritage

St Mark’s Basilica had the richest of Venice’s musical traditions, with flourishing church music in the mid-16th century, which began the rise of Venice as a musical centre. Under Adrian Willaert, Claudio Menilo, Andrea and Giovanni Gabrieli and Claudio Monteverdi, the Basilica and Venice became a magnet for the north of Italy. After Monteverdi, the main musical focus shifted away from the Basilica, with a rise in interest in other musical activities. The maestri di capella after Monteverdi (Legrenzi, Lotti and Galuppi) were not as talented as their predecessors, but it was thought that Legrenzi could have been Vivaldi’s teacher. It was Legrenzi who reorganised and enlarged St Mark’s orchestra to 34 instrumentalists, including Vivaldi’s father, who was employed as a violinist. Thus the young Antonio had a direct link to the highest Venetian institution, which in the decades before and after 1700 employed many renowned musicians.

By the late 17th century, St Mark’s sacred music (as well as that of other leading churches) was surpassed in public favour by the music of the ospedali. These were institutions that raised orphaned and abandoned girls with government and private funds, and were so called because they were attached to hospitals. Some of them earned reputations in music, particularly the Ospedale della Pietà, where Vivaldi was appointed as violin teacher in 1703. Much of Vivaldi’s music was written for performance at the Ospedale della Pietà, which became one of the most important musical venues in Venice.

L’ESTRO ARMONICO, OP. 3

In 1711, following the publication of two sets of sonatas, Vivaldi introduced the genre for which he would become well known: the instrumental concerto. L’estro armonico (‘harmonic inspiration’ or ‘harmonic fire’) is a set of 12 string concertos, published in 1711 in Amsterdam by one of the leading non-Italian music publishers, demonstrating Vivaldi’s growing fame. When he began writing concertos, the genre was in its early stages, still developing as an autonomous, clearly structured and relatively fixed form. Although we now understand a concerto to be a work for a solo instrument and orchestra, the concertos in L’estro armonico are written for four violin parts, two violas, cello and continuo, which we now associate with the concerto grosso.
It’s possible to trace the development of Vivaldi’s concerto style in the twelve concertos of *L’estro armonico*. Vivaldi develops his solo writing, with solo instruments varying from between the concertos: some were written for two violins and cello (as in the D minor Concerto), while others were for solo or multiple violins.

For wider listening, students should consider exploring other concertos from this set, as well as some of Corelli’s well-known concerti grossi. Concerto No. 7 in this set is especially close to the Corelli concerto grosso form, and is considered to be the oldest work of *L’estro armonico*. The five movements of this concerto follow a typical structure of Corelli’s concerti grossi, whereas the Concerto in D minor’s structure is not as clear-cut, and despite Pearson’s interpretation of its structure, the D minor Concerto foreshadows the eventually established three-movement structure of the Baroque Concerto (discussed below).

**CONCERTO IN D MINOR, OP. 3 NO. 11: ANALYSIS**

In this Concerto, Vivaldi employs two violins and a cello as the solo group (the *concertino*), typical of concerti grossi by Corelli and Handel, though in *L’estro armonico*, he uses this combination in only two of the concertos.

There are different opinions about the number of movements in this set work. Pearson’s interpretation is that the work is divided into four movements, so it’s best to adopt the same approach:

- **Movement 1**: Allegro (D minor)
- **Movement 2**: Adagio e spiccato (3 bars) and the following Allegro (starts at the bottom of page 99 in the Anthology) (D minor)
- **Movement 3**: Largo e spiccato (D minor)
- **Movement 4**: Allegro (D minor)

Other interpretations include combining Pearson’s first two movements, therefore resulting in a three-movement structure of fast-slow-fast, which became conventional for the Baroque concerto. Vivaldi is clearly developing his concerto structure, as this work lies somewhere between Corelli’s concerto grosso structure and the Baroque concerto.
eventual three-movement convention. All the movements are in D minor, but Vivaldi is harmonically ambitious within this tonality.

Unlike the scores of Corelli’s concerti grossi, where the concertino is set above the ripieno, Vivaldi labels his violins I-IV, with violins I and II being the soloists, and III and IV being the ripieno. The violas I and II play the same thing throughout, and the solo cello is scored above the continuo line. The continuo keyboard player (a harpsichord in the case of the recommended recording) would usually realise the figured bass and play the chords. There are occasions, though, when Vivaldi indicates *tasto solo*, meaning that no chords should be playing.

### Movement 1: Allegro

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<td>Bars 1-20 in D minor (two solo violins)</td>
<td>Melody: Repeated D minor arpeggios in canon a beat apart. The repeated Ds resonate through the bars, even though not sounded on every quaver. Bar 7 introduces descending scales alternating every bar while the other violin plays an ostinato D. Harmony: The chords on which the melody is based are the tonic and dominant. Even when the melody indicates the dominant (eg bar 10, beat 3), the ostinato D is present and drives home the D minor tonality.</td>
<td>Two solo violins with no accompaniment.</td>
<td>The two violins present a simple two-part texture, with both parts of equal importance.</td>
<td>No dynamic markings are used in this movement, which often occurred in Baroque music. It is clear from the nature of the melodies that the players would be playing with energy and force.</td>
<td>The movement is fast and in simple triple time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bar 20-end (solo cello passage with continuo)</td>
<td>The cellist plays a mainly scalic melody. In bars 20 to 24, there is a descending <em>sequence</em> over a <em>cycle of 5ths</em>, typical of Vivaldi’s writing.</td>
<td>Solo cello accompanied by continuo.</td>
<td>Though it looks like a different texture, this is more of a melody and accompaniment texture, as the continuo player (harpsichord on the recommended recording) would be playing chords.</td>
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### Movement 2: Adagio e spiccato – Allegro

**ADAGIO E SPICCATO**

The opening three-bar Adagio is a surprise in several ways. The tempo suggests similarities to movements with slow introductions (something typical in Baroque music, including Bach’s Orchestral Suites and numerous French overtures). It is the harmony, however, that adds colour to a predominantly D minor work.

This is an excellent opportunity for the students to practise their figured bass skills. This section also demonstrates how the dominant 7th of each chord conventionally resolves by step, and how it appears in different ‘voices’ in order to maintain fluid part-writing. This is worth linking to Bach chorale writing in particular, where these conventions must be adhered to.
Below, the example demonstrates how the harmony is mainly functional, using a series of secondary dominants over a cycle of 5ths, being ‘spiced up’ by a descending chromatic melody, as well as the Neapolitan 6th in bar 3. Vivaldi adds another surprise into the mix, as conventionally it is either Ic or V that follows the Neapolitan 6th, but Vivaldi follows this with a C minor chord, which is unrelated to D minor, but the relative minor of the Neapolitan chord (E flat major). This is followed by V7 in D minor – again, a surprise to the ear. This colouring of functional harmony is the essence of L’estro armonico (ie ‘harmonic inspiration’).

The opening three-bar Adagio also provides a contrast in texture due to its block chords, and in its harmony as well. This is the first time we hear a tutti section. In this tutti section violins III and IV (the ripieno violins) double violins I and II respectively, as was typical of a concerto grosso.

Vivaldi specifies spiccato in this section: the string players are expected to play lightly off the string, separating the notes.
ALLEGRO

The thematic material of this movement comes from the opening fugal section.

FUGUE

A fugue is a contrapuntal composition in which two or more ‘voices’ (instruments or instrumental/vocal lines) imitate each other at the beginning, with the themes from the opening recurring throughout the work. Bach’s Well-Tempered Clavier should be a starting point for students to gain a basic understanding of the form.

The opening of a fugue (a fugal exposition – not to be confused with a sonata form exposition!) follows a specific pattern:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st voice</th>
<th>Subject in the tonic</th>
<th>Countersubject 1</th>
<th>Countersubject 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2nd voice</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Answer in the dominant (this is usually the same thematic material as the subject)</td>
<td>Countersubject 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3rd voice</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Subject in the tonic</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After the exposition, entries are then heard in related keys, and interspersed with episodes, which are passages developed from existing material. Closing material will return to the tonic, and there is sometimes a coda.

Many composers would use a fugal exposition to open a movement in a work, often employing the principles but not necessarily adhering to the strict tonal and melodic conventions. As well as this movement, students should listen to the final movement of Bach’s Brandenburg Concerto No. 2 in F, as well as the Overture from his Third Orchestral Suite, BWV 1068. After a slow introduction in the latter, the rhythm of the subject of the Allegro is very similar to that of the fugal opening in this Vivaldi concerto.

STRUCTURE AND TONALITY

The structure of this movement revolves around the alternation of tutti sections and the solo concertino. The tutti sections are known as ritornello sections, and they recur in related keys in the movement. The solo passages are known as episodes, where the concertino plays without the ripieno.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bars</th>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Tonality</th>
<th>Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 4-23 | Ritornello 1 | • D minor  
• A minor at bars 16-20. | Fugal opening (see themes below):  
• Bars 4-8: subject in tonic, in cello and continuo.  
• Bars 8-11: answer in the dominant in violas, countersubject 1 in cello and continuo.  
• Bars 12-15: subject in tonic violin II and IV, countersubject 1 in violas and countersubject 2 in cello and continuo.  
• Bars 16-23: answer in dominant in violin I and III, countersubject 1 in violins II and IV, countersubject 2 in violas, countersubject 3 in cello and continuo. |
| 23-32 | Episode 1:  
concertino and continuo | • D minor  
• A minor from bar 27. | Violin I plays some of the subject, while violin II combines the opening of countersubject 1 and the fast semiquavers of countersubject 2, which are also played a 3rd below in the solo cello.  
• The second part of countersubject 1 in the first violin is adapted to create some rhythmic interest. |
| Bars 32-48 | Ritornello 2:  
tutti (ripieno and concertino) | • A minor  
• Cadences in D minor in bars 36 and 42.  
• Section ends in G minor. | Subject can be found in A minor (arguably the answer) in the continuo section and in 3rds in violins II and IV. The violas play countersubject 1, while violins I and III play countersubject 3.  
• Fragments of the melodies recur throughout this section, and sometimes inverted (see cellos and continuo in bars 37-39), |
| Bars 38-56 | Episode 2:  
concertino and continuo | • Opens in G minor.  
• Moves to D minor in bar 50.  
• Passes through F (bar 52), C (bar 53) and B flat (bar 54).  
• Returns to D minor. | Motivic use of fugal themes. |
| Bars 56-73 | Ritornello 3:  
tutti (ripieno and concertino) | • D minor | Fugal themes are used more freely and not always in their entirety.  
• Long dominant pedal in bars 58-69. |

**SONORITY**

In this movement, Vivaldi contrasts the tutti instrumentation with the concertino instrumentation, alternating them in a conventional ritornello form. In bars 58 to 69, the continuo does not play chords, as indicated by the term *tasto solo*. This contributes to the excitement of the pedal as the music builds towards the end of the movement.

**ORGANISATION OF PITCH: MELODY**

Much of this has already been discussed in the table and the fugue section. The melodic shapes are mainly scalic, with the second half of the subject contrasting with ascending and descending leaps, which generate the cycle of 5ths.

**ORGANISATION OF PITCH: HARMONY**

Vivaldi’s fingerprint of his cycle of 5ths is evident the subject in bars 5 to 7, in which he travels round the whole cycle, with each of the chords being a dominant 7th chord (except for chord I). Chords are diatonic and either in root position or first inversion, with harmony being functional.
TEXTURE
After the contrasting chordal texture of bars 1 to 3 of the opening of the movement, the Allegro is polyphonic, due to its fugal nature. As well as this, Vivaldi creates contrast between the concertino and the tutti passages.

DYNAMICS
Dynamics are generally absent and are clearly generated by changes in texture. There are, however, some markings from bar 59 to the end, with an alternation between f and p. The terraced dynamic effect (with all instruments either loud or soft) is typical for the Baroque period.

TEMPO, RHYTHM AND METRE
With everything in simple quadruple time, the rhythmic interest comes from the layering of the different rhythms of the fugal themes. The opening rhythm of the subject has an implicit sense of driving forward, which is suddenly halted by the crotchets. The sense of drive returns, however, as the harmonic drive of the cycle of 5ths takes over. All three of the fugal themes are fast-moving with rhythmic drive, which creates an overall sense of momentum to the movement.

Movement 3: Largo e spiccato

SONORITY
It is in this movement that violin I begins to dominate over violin II, taking the solo passages while violin II accompanies along with the rest of the ripieno. After a two-and-a-half-bar tutti opening, the cello and continuo drop out and do not return until the end of the movement.

Structure and Tonality

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bars</th>
<th>Tonality</th>
<th>Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-3^2</td>
<td>D minor</td>
<td>Homophonic phrase.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3^3-17^3</td>
<td>Starts in D minor.</td>
<td>Thematic material of bars 3-5 is repeated in bars 11-13. More repetition of melodies towards the end of the section.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violin I solo accompanied by violins II, III and IV and violas.</td>
<td>Passes through G minor (bar 5).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17^7-20</td>
<td>D minor</td>
<td>Repeat of opening tutti.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

ORGANISATION OF PITCH: MELODY
The melody of the tutti opens with stepwise movement, beginning the movement with a lyrical siciliano (see below). The majority of the solo combines the stepwise movement with leaps in the slower-moving rhythms, which are also decorated by trills.

ORGANISATION OF PITCH: HARMONY
As well as the typical root position and first-inversion chords, Vivaldi uses Neapolitan chords again in bar 2^s, followed by a diminished 7th chord the following beat. Again, these colours in the functional harmony are probably one of the reasons L’estro armonico is named as it is.

TEXTURE
This movement has a melody and accompaniment texture, or melody-dominated homophony, with the first violin playing the melody, while the other instruments accompany. The rhythm of the accompaniment is simple, comprising mainly repeated quavers in the middle section (bars 3^3-17^3).

DYNAMICS
Once again, dynamic markings are sparse, but it’s clear from the nature and tempo of the melody that the majority of this is to be played piano. Vivaldi indicates the accompaniment to be pp when the solo violin begins, ensuring that the melody line can sing out over the rest of the ensemble.
TEMPO, RHYTHM AND METRE
This movement is in the style of a siciliano, which was normally slow and in compound time, with lilting dotted rhythms. Sicilianos were often associated with pastoral scenes. In Handel’s Messiah, the ‘Pastoral Symphony’ depicts the shepherds of the Christmas story, as does the Sinfonia from JS Bach’s Christmas Oratorio, which is placed at the beginning of part two of the work, which begins with the annunciation to the shepherds. Both of these works feature this lilting rhythm:

Movement 4: Allegro

In this final movement, the focus returns to both violins in the concertino, who resume their roles as equals. Tutti passages are more like brief interjections, never drawing attention away from the soloists.

SONORITY
The concertino as a group returns to the fore in this movement, and writing for the instruments is idiomatic, exploiting their capabilities and timbres.

STRUCTURE AND TONALITY
This movement has four main sections:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bars</th>
<th>Instrumentation</th>
<th>Tonality</th>
<th>Features</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-14</td>
<td>Bars 1-6: • Imitative entries from solo violins, joined in bar 4 by solo cello. Bars 6-13: • Solo cello accompanied by chords.</td>
<td>D minor</td>
<td>• The descending chromatic line of the solo cello becomes a recurring theme in this movement and creates more of Vivaldi’s functional but colourful harmonies. This is repeated in semiquavers the continuo cello in bars 11-13.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bars 30-53</td>
<td>Bars 30-34: • The two solo violins have a dialogue over the chordal accompaniment. Bars 35-42: • The solo violin I is accompanied by the rest of the ensemble. Bars 43-46: • Tutti passage. Bars 46'-53 • Concertino plays, alternating with the ripieno.</td>
<td>Moves straight back to D minor.</td>
<td>New material throughout this section.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ORGANISATION OF PITCH: MELODY
As discussed in the table above, repetition of melodies and key themes occurs throughout this movement. Another key feature is the imitation or even alternation of the same phrase between two instruments or groups of instruments. For example, in bars 30 to 33, the solo violins alternate phrases as part of a sequence over a cycle of 5ths. At bars 50 and 52, a tutti passage is repeated by the concertino, then repeated again by the tutti.

One of Vivaldi’s fingerprints is a melody that is divided into main melody notes followed by repeated semiquavers. This is found in the solo violin part in bars 35 to 43, with the note on every crotchet beat being the melody.

ORGANISATION OF PITCH: HARMONY
Once again, the cycle of 5ths occurs frequently throughout the movement, for example in bars 7 to 10. Suspensions can be heard at bars 11 to 13, providing harmonic tensions not heard in the previous movements.

TEXTURE
Vivaldi’s textures are varied in this movement. Even within the concertino-only sections, Vivaldi creates contrasting textures. Sometimes the solo violins imitate each other accompanied by the solo cello (eg bars 30 to 33), and there are moments when the solo violins play in harmony accompanied by the solo cello (eg bars 14 to 19).

Melody and accompaniment textures can be found in different combinations, for example in bars 7 to 11, with the solo cello playing the melody, accompanied by the ripieno and solo violins. In bars 35 to 43, the solo violin I plays a melody while the rest of the violins and violas accompany.

There are also brief contrasts between tutti and concertino textures, as outlined in the structure table and the Organisation of pitch sections above.

DYNAMICS
Where passages are repeated with different combinations of instruments, Vivaldi specifies his dynamics to reflect the change in instrumental forces. This can be found in bars 70 to the end. As it is the final movement and its tempo is fast, we can assume that much of this music will be played at a *forte* dynamic.

TEMPO, RHYTHM AND METRE
The rhythms of this movement are reminiscent of the lively rhythms in the second movement. The relentless semiquavers in the various solo parts (especially in solo violin I) characterise this movement as focusing on more virtuosic playing than in previous movements.