

# Bach the Transcriber: His Organ Concertos after Vivaldi

- Vincent C. K. Cheung

One lesson offered by historical studies of musical styles is that the greatest composers almost never abandon their musical heritage entirely even in their most progressive compositions. They tend to build their works upon existing styles and genres, and then transform them into new styles in ways unprecedented in their times. Josquin des Prez, the “Beethoven of the Renaissance,” has been regarded by many as the integrator of the different styles of the Mass prevalent in the continent in the early sixteenth century; Monteverdi, the father of modern opera, embellished the more old-fashioned Florentine monodic style with what he had learned from the Italian madrigalists in his operas; J. S. Bach, one of the greatest composers of all time, also absorbed into his music the styles of many composers of different nationalities. An Italian master whose compositions had significant impact on Bach was Antonio Vivaldi. In 1713-1714, Bach transcribed at least nine concertos of Vivaldi, three for solo organ (BWV 593-4, 596), and six for solo harpsichord (BWV 972-3, 975-6, 978, 980). In this article, we shall analyze Bach’s transcription process in his three organ concertos after Vivaldi, and discuss briefly some possible influence of these transcriptions on Bach’s later compositions. But before our analysis, it is instructive to examine Bach’s original purpose in writing these organ concertos.

## Transcribing for Prince Johann

In 1708, Bach moved from Mühlhausen to Weimar where he held the position of *Hoforganist* at the court of Duke Wilhelm Ernst. The Ernst family was indeed very musical. An enthusiastic and pious Lutheran, Duke Wilhelm regarded music as one of the most important means of glorifying the Lord.<sup>1</sup> The young Prince Johann Ernst, a nephew of Wilhelm, was also a talented organist and composer under the tutelage of a good friend and relative of Bach, Johann Gottfried Walther, who was put in charge of the Prince’s musical education upon

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Geiringer, *The Bach Family* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1954), 143.

his arrival in Weimar in 1707.<sup>2</sup> There was also an orchestra in the court of Wilhelm devoted to the Italian concerto, a genre which was sweeping the European continent at that time. Almost certainly, the concertos of Vivaldi were part of their repertoire.<sup>3</sup> It was in this musical court of Weimar that Bach transcribed two concertos by the young Prince Johann (BWV 592, 595) as well as three concertos by Vivaldi for solo organ (BWV 593, in A minor; 594, in C; and 596, in D minor). The A-minor and the D-minor Organ Concertos are based on two concertos from *L'estro armonico*: No. 8 (RV 522, for 2 violins and strings, in A minor) and No. 11 (RV 565, for 2 violins, cello, and strings, in D minor), respectively; the C-major Concerto, on the other hand, is a transcription of Op. 7 No. 11 (RV 208, for violin and strings, in D major).<sup>4</sup>

It is not exactly known why Bach transcribed these concertos in Weimar although several explanations have been put forward by historians. Perhaps because it is too well known that Bach learned the musical styles of other composers through copying and transcribing their works, many musicologists have assumed that these concertos after Vivaldi were nothing but Bach's exercises. One of them is J. N. Forkel, Bach's first biographer:

...that order, continuity and proportion must be brought to bear on ideas, and that to such an end some kind of guide was necessary. The then newly published violin concertos of Vivaldi served him for such a guide. He heard them so often praised as excellent compositions that he hit on the happy idea of arranging them complete for his keyboard.<sup>5</sup>

Note that in the above quotation, Forkel not only has no evidence supporting his conjecture that Bach used Vivaldi's concertos as a "guide" to "order, continuity and proportion," but also wrongly concludes that Bach arranged Vivaldi's concertos "complete for his keyboard." Another Bach scholar who supports

<sup>2</sup> Malcolm Boyd, *Bach* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1983), 35.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Hurley, "The Vivaldi/Bach Transcriptions," *Soundboard* 24 (1997): 32.

<sup>4</sup> At least two versions of this concerto exist. The version upon which BWV 594 is based is now found in the autograph MS Turin, Collection Renzo Giordano V 21 (full score) and in the MS Schwerin 5565 (parts). The middle movement of this version differs significantly from that of the published version, and in view of this difference, Ryom catalogued the Turin version as RV 208, and the published version, RV 208a. Not knowing the difference between RV 208 and RV 208a, Geiringer wrongly concludes that in the C-major Concerto Bach "replaced the middle movement by a kind of German toccata" (247).

<sup>5</sup> J. N. Forkel, *Unber Johann Sebastian Bach Leben, Kunst und Kunstwerke* (Leipzig, 1802), as quoted in Peter F. Williams, *The Organ Music of J. S. Bach - Vol. 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1980), 284.

Forkel's conjecture is H. Grace, who mentions that Bach made the arrangements simply because "he found his own invention stimulated by the process [of transcription]."<sup>6</sup> Like Forkel and Grace, K. Geiringer also believes that Bach's concertos after Vivaldi were part of his "studies" of the Italian style.<sup>7</sup>

The suggestion of Forkel, Grace, and Geiringer is not unreasonable given that Bach was an enthusiastic learner all through his life. Nevertheless, if self-education were Bach's sole purpose of transcribing the concertos, it is difficult to see why he also chose to arrange Prince Johann's concertos along with those of Vivaldi. Furthermore, as P. Williams points out, by the time Bach wrote these arrangements, he had already composed some potential ritornello movements such as Cantata 196/iv (c. 1708), and thus, according to Forkel's view, Bach must have already learned from Vivaldi's concertos how to achieve "order, continuity and proportion" in compositions before he made the transcriptions.<sup>8</sup> Clearly, Forkel's suggestion is not persuasive. An alternative explanation of why Bach transcribed the concertos has been proposed by Schering:

...we shall have to seek the purpose of these arrangements in practical music-making and be able to accept that within a short time the new concerto of the Italians became such a favourite that players wanted to be able to play the particularly popular concertos with their own two hands on clavichord or organ. Bach's arrangements would then be considered to be what they really are: keyboard extractions, 'for the soul's refreshment of music-lovers.'<sup>9</sup>

Schering's suggestion, like Forkel's, is not quite satisfactory, for the transcriptions were not published or publicized during Bach's life, nor were Prince Johann's compositions "particularly popular" among "music-lovers" of that time. A more convincing explanation is that of H. Schulze. In numerous archival records in Weimar, Schulze found that in 1713, Prince Johann had a journey to Düsseldorf visiting the court opera there. In particular, on August 17th 1713, Prince Johann's party stopped by Amsterdam, the city where Vivaldi's *L'estro armonico* (Op. 3) was first published in 1711. According to the Weimar court account, the Prince spent a rather large sum of money on binding sheets of music after his trip, suggesting that he must have bought published music and/or

<sup>6</sup> Harvey Grace, *The Organ Works of Bach* (London: Novello, 1922), 247.

<sup>7</sup> Geiringer, 246.

<sup>8</sup> Williams, 284.

<sup>9</sup> Schering, as quoted in Hans-Joachim Schulze, "J. S. Bach's Concerto-Arrangements for Organ - Studies or Commissioned Works?" *Organ Yearbook* 3 (1972): 6.

manuscripts in Amsterdam.<sup>10</sup> Very possibly, the then newly published *L'estro armonico* and manuscripts of Vivaldi's later published Op. 7 were among the Prince's purchases in Amsterdam. Furthermore, Walther, the Prince's music teacher, tells us in his autobiography that from June 1713 to March 1714, he gave the Prince "tuition in composition."<sup>11</sup> It is thus conceivable that shortly after his visit to Amsterdam, the Prince, using Vivaldi's concertos as models, composed under the guidance of Walther the concertos that Bach transcribed. Possibly trying to "transfer to his own court the impressions [that he] gained in Amsterdam, not only in the matter of ensemble pieces but also the keyboard arrangements that surprised visitors from abroad,"<sup>12</sup> the Prince may have commissioned Bach and Walther to arrange Vivaldi's concertos and his own works for organ and harpsichord. This interpretation is further supported by the fact that Bach and Walther did not seem to have arranged the same concertos.<sup>13</sup>

More interesting than Bach's reason for transcribing Vivaldi is Bach's approaches to adapting Vivaldi's concertos for the keyboard. We shall discover how Bach demonstrates himself to be a creative transcriber by comparing Vivaldi's originals with Bach's transcriptions closely.

### **Bach's Approaches to Transcriptions**

The most noticeable characteristics of Bach's organ concertos after Vivaldi is probably the arranger's faithful adherence to the original compositions: Bach does not change the basic structure of any of the movements at all. Perhaps because the transcriptions were intended to be demonstrations of the Italian concerto form, Bach was reluctant to introduce any structural alteration to his transcriptions. More surprising is that many passages idiomatic to the violin in the original, such as fast repeated notes and large leaps, are directly transferred by Bach to the transcribed version without any modification, resulting in figurations that keyboard players might feel uncomfortable playing (e.g., BWV 593/iii/mm. 75-81, Ex. 1). These unidiomatic passages in his organ concertos did not bother Bach at all perhaps because the transcriptions were made "before he had reached his prime as an organ composer,"<sup>14</sup> as H. Grace suggests. Nevertheless, it is at the same time obvious that Bach has no intention of mechanically transferring every single note of his models to his works. Bach's organ transcriptions are

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<sup>10</sup> Schulze, 8.

<sup>11</sup> Schulze, 7.

<sup>12</sup> Schulze, 8-9.

<sup>13</sup> Boyd, 74.

<sup>14</sup> Grace, 250.

characterized by at least eleven types of alteration; in most cases, Bach seems to have particular musical or practical reasons for introducing the change.

**1. Changes in note range.** Bach's organ in Weimar reached only to  $c'''$  (two octaves above middle C),<sup>15</sup> and thus, every passage in the original which goes above  $c'''$  requires downward transposition in order for it to be playable on the organ (e.g., BWV 596/iii/mm. 65-67, Ex. 2). Very possibly, the restricted range of the Weimar organ was Bach's reason of transposing Vivaldi's Op. 7 No. 11 down a tone (from D major to C major) in BWV 594: as a result of the change of the concerto's tonality, many passages can be played without needing to transpose them down an octave (e.g., mm. 7-10 of the first movement, whose highest note is  $c'''$  in the transcription). Sometimes, there are two different parts in the original which lie in the same note range, and thus, transposing one of them down an octave is necessary so that the audience can distinguish between them more easily (e.g., BWV 594/i/mm. 26-29, 65-66, Ex. 3a-b). Bach also uses transposition to clarify exchanges of parts (e.g., BWV 593/ii/mm. 31-33, Ex. 4), and to vary repeated passages (e.g., BWV 596/iii/mm. 51-52, Ex. 5). In BWV 594/iii/mm. 126-129, the original solo violin part is lowered so that a line not present in the original can be accommodated in the transcription (Ex. 6).

**Ex. 1** A. Vivaldi Op. 3 No. 8 / iii

Concertino

Ripieno

**Ex. 2** A. Vivaldi Op. 3 No. 11 / iii

Concertino

Ripieno

J. S. Bach BWV 593 / iii

Oberwerk

Rückpositiv

J. S. Bach BWV 596 / iii

<sup>15</sup> Howard Shanet, "Why did J. S. Bach Transpose his Arrangements?" *The Musical Quarterly* 36 (1950): 181.

**Ex. 3a** A. Vivaldi  
Op. 7 No. 11 / i

26

Violin solo

Ripieno

J. S. Bach  
BWV 594 / i

26

**Ex. 3b** A. Vivaldi  
Op. 7 No. 11 / i

65

Violin solo

Ripieno

J. S. Bach  
BWV 594 / i

65

**Ex. 4** A. Vivaldi  
Op. 3 No. 8 / ii

31

J. S. Bach  
BWV 593 / ii

31

**Ex. 5** A. Vivaldi  
Op. 3 No. 11 / iii

51

Concertino

Ripieno

J. S. Bach  
BWV 596 / iii

51

Obw.

Ruckp.

**Ex. 6**  
125

A. Vivaldi  
Op. 7 No. 11 / iii

Violin solo

Ripieno

J. S. Bach  
BWV 594 / iii

125

**2. Changes in note values.** An example for this type of alteration can be found in BWV 594/i/mm. 65-66 (Ex. 3b), where the crotchets in the ripieno of the original are replaced by quavers in the arrangement so that the effect of *détaché* can be reproduced on the organ.

**3. Changes in rhythm.** As in BWV 594/ii/mm. 8-9 (Ex. 7).

**Ex. 7**  
8

A. Vivaldi  
Op. 7 No. 11 / ii

Violin solo

Ripieno

J. S. Bach  
BWV 594 / ii

8

**4. Changes in harmony.** As in BWV 593/i/m. 46 (Ex. 8).

**Ex. 8**  
46

A. Vivaldi  
Op. 3 No. 8 / i

Concertino

Ripieno

J. S. Bach  
BWV 593 / i

46

**5. Changes in notes.** Analyzing one of Bach's transcriptions for lute (BWV 1006a), N. Goluses realizes that alteration of an individual note in that transcription functions to clarify the harmonic design of the original passage.<sup>16</sup> We can indeed find a similar example in Bach's Organ Concerto in C (BWV 594/i/mm. 51-53, Ex. 9). Bach also changes those high notes in the original not playable on the organ (e.g., BWV 596/ii/m. 4, Ex. 10), and occasionally, he uses this strategy to vary repeated notes (e.g. BWV 593/iii/mm. 118-124, Ex. 11).

**Ex. 9** A. Vivaldi  
Op. 7 No. 11 / i

Violin solo  
Ripieno

J. S. Bach  
BWV 594 / i

**Ex. 10** A. Vivaldi  
Op. 3 No. 11 / ii

Concertino  
Ripieno

J. S. Bach  
BWV 596 / ii

**Ex. 11** A. Vivaldi  
Op. 3 No. 8 / iii

Concertino  
Ripieno

J. S. Bach  
BWV 593 / iii

Ruckpositiv  
Oberwerk

<sup>16</sup> Nicholas Goluses, "J. S. Bach and the Transcription Process," *Guitar Review* 77 (1989): 17.



**6. Rewriting passages.** At times, Bach rewrites a part in order to avoid a note beyond the range of his organ (e.g., BWV 593/iii/m. 103-104, Ex. 12), and the rewritten version sometimes has a much richer texture than the original, too (e.g., BWV 593/i/mm. 30-32, Ex. 13). In the first movement of the Concerto in C (BWV 594), the triplets in mm. 93-104 in the original are replaced in the arrangement by a sequence of semiquavers, which contrasts sharply with the ensuing sequence of triplets in mm. 105-110 (Ex. 14). In the third movement of the same concerto, however, the bass line in mm. 59-64 is rewritten so that the rhythmic drive towards the perfect cadence in m. 63 is intensified (Ex. 15). The most imaginative reworking in Bach's organ concertos is found in the bass line of BWV 596/iii/mm. 11-13, where a tremolo statement in the original is substituted by a new line with demisemiquavers and semiquavers (Ex. 16).

**Ex. 12**  
103

A. Vivaldi  
Op. 3 No. 8 / iii

Concertino

Ripieno

This musical score shows two staves for measures 103 and 104. The top staff is labeled 'Concertino' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Ripieno'. The Concertino part features a series of eighth-note triplets in both hands. The Ripieno part consists of a simple bass line with quarter notes and rests.

J. S. Bach  
BWV 593 / iii

103

This musical score shows two staves for measures 103 and 104. The top staff has a single eighth note followed by a quarter rest, then a quarter note, and a quarter note with a fermata. The bottom staff features a more complex texture with eighth-note triplets in the right hand and a bass line of eighth notes in the left hand.

**Ex. 13**  
30

A. Vivaldi  
Op. 3 No. 8 / i

Concertino

Ripieno

This musical score shows two staves for measures 30, 31, and 32. The top staff is labeled 'Concertino' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Ripieno'. The Concertino part has a complex texture with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. The Ripieno part has a bass line with quarter notes and eighth notes.

J. S. Bach  
BWV 593 / i

30

This musical score shows two staves for measures 30, 31, and 32. The top staff has a complex texture with many sixteenth and thirty-second notes. The bottom staff has a bass line with quarter notes and eighth notes, similar to the original but with a different rhythmic feel.

**Ex. 14**  
103

A. Vivaldi  
Op. 7 No. 11 / i

Violin solo

Ripieno

This musical score shows two staves for measures 103 and 104. The top staff is labeled 'Violin solo' and the bottom staff is labeled 'Ripieno'. The Violin solo part features a series of eighth-note triplets. The Ripieno part has a bass line with quarter notes and rests.

J. S. Bach  
BWV 594 / i

103

This musical score shows two staves for measures 103 and 104. The top staff has a series of eighth notes. The bottom staff has a bass line with quarter notes and rests.

**Ex. 15** A. Vivaldi  
Op. 7 No. 11 / iii

Violin solo

Ripieno

J. S. Bach  
BWV 594 / iii

**Ex. 16** A. Vivaldi  
Op. 3 No. 11 / iii

Concertino

Ripieno

J. S. Bach  
BWV 596 / iii

**7. Filling in chords.** As B. L. Leach points out, in the opening movements of both Concerto in A minor (BWV 593) and Concerto in C (BWV 594), Bach strengthens the harmony of the tutti sections by filling in the chords (Ex. 17) so that a greater contrast between the ritornello and solo sections in the arrangements is achieved.<sup>17</sup>

**Ex. 17** A. Vivaldi  
Op. 3 No. 8 / i

Concertino

Ripieno

J. S. Bach  
BWV 593 / i

<sup>17</sup> Brenda Lynne Leach, "Bach's Organ Transcriptions: Influence of Italian Masters," *Diapason* 85 (1994): 10.

**8. Filling in rhythmic holes.** Arguing that Bach's techniques of arranging violin concertos for keyboard are very similar to how the Renaissance composers transcribed vocal polyphonic works for lute, T. Göllner observes that during Bach's time,

the keyboard player was always concerned with the continuity of sound in relation to the actions of the keys. He did not like rhythmic holes. The flow of musical sound must not be interrupted, and whenever individual chords could be connected, they were taken out of their polyphonic context and treated as separate entities which could be joined together by means of certain keyboard figurations and passages.<sup>18</sup>

Comparing the original concertos of Vivaldi with the organ transcriptions of Bach, we find that the concern of the Baroque keyboard players about the flow of musical sound is indeed reflected in Bach's arrangements. The "rhythmic holes" filled can be as trivial as those in the bass line of BWV 596/i/m. 29 (Ex. 18), or can be as conspicuous as those in BWV 593/iii/mm. 59-63 (Ex. 19). Some bravura passages in the transcriptions also function as filling materials, like the passage in BWV 594/iii/m. 24 (Ex. 20).

**Ex. 18**

A. Vivaldi  
Op. 3 No. 11 / i

28

Concertino

Ripieno

J. S. Bach  
BWV 596 / i

29

<sup>18</sup> Theodor Göllner, "J. S. Bach and the Tradition of Keyboard Transcription," *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Music*. Ed. H. C. Robbins Landon (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1970), 257.

**Ex. 19** A. Vivaldi  
Op. 3 No. 8 / iii

Concertino

Ripieno

59 *f* *p* *f*

**Ex. 20** A. Vivaldi  
Op. 7 No. 11 / iii

Violin solo

Ripieno

24

J. S. Bach  
BWV 593 / iii

59 *Oberwerk* *Ruckpositiv* *Oberwerk*

J. S. Bach  
BWV 594 / iii

24

**9. Realization of implied counterpoint.** Philip Hii, in his article “Bach’s Method of Transcription,” mentions that in the clavier transcription (BWV 964) of the A-minor Sonata for Unaccompanied Violin (BWV 1003), greater melodic complexity is achieved in the transcription by “the realization of implied counterpoint”<sup>19</sup> in the original. This type of alteration can also be found in the opening of BWV 596/i. Bach notices that each of the solo violin lines comprises two lines: an active line lying above *d*’, and an inactive line consisting only of repeated *d*’s. Thanks to Vivaldi’s canonic treatment of the two solo violin lines, the inactive line of violin I is complementary to that of violin II, and thus Bach is able to combine them into one line and place it on the pedal line in the transcription. As a result of Bach’s realization of the implied counterpoint in the two violin parts, the original duet is transformed into a trio with only minimal addition of new notes (Ex. 21).

<sup>19</sup> Philip Hii, “Bach’s Method of Transcription,” *Soundboard* 17 (1990): 28.

**Ex. 21** A. Vivaldi  
Op. 3 No. 11 / i

J. S. Bach  
BWV 596 / i

**10. Addition of new lines.** Bach's addition of a new line invariably results in an enriched texture (e.g., BWV 594/ii/mm. 20-22, Ex. 22). Sometimes, the newly added line is but an imitation of a line in the original (e.g., BWV 593/i/mm. 6-8, Ex. 23). In the finale of the C-major Concerto, there is even an added voice in a solo section which recalls a motive presented in the movement's opening tutti (Ex. 6). The newly composed line in the second section of BWV 596/i (mm. 21-32), on the other hand, functions to maintain the trio texture as presented in the movement's first section (mm. 1-20) (Ex. 21 and 24).

**Ex. 22** A. Vivaldi  
Op. 7 No. 11 / ii

J. S. Bach  
BWV 594 / ii

**Ex. 23** A. Vivaldi  
Op. 3 No. 8 / i

J. S. Bach  
BWV 593 / i

Ex. 24

A. Vivaldi  
Op. 3 No. 11 / i

Concertino

Ripieno

J. S. Bach  
BWV 596 / i

**11. Addition of ornaments.** This type of alteration is more common in slow movements (e.g., BWV 594/ii/m. 21, Ex. 22). As P. Aldrich points out, it is possible that the added ornaments in Bach's transcriptions are but written-out diminutions (i.e., improvised ornamentation).<sup>20</sup>

In addition to the eleven types of alteration discussed above, Bach's way of allocating the lines to the different manuals of the organ is also worthy of note. Generally speaking, Bach tends to use the *Oberwerk* (Great Organ) for tutti sections, and *Rückpositiv* for solo sections (Chair Organ). Sometimes, he uses two different manuals simultaneously to clarify the interactions between two voices, as in the opening measures of BWV 596/i (Ex. 21). In the finale of the A-minor Concerto (BWV 593), Bach employs two manuals to create an antiphonal effect (Ex. 19), and in mm. 75-81 of the same movement (Ex. 1), the fast alteration between the *Oberwerk* and the *Rückpositiv* also results in a very special effect which appears rarely outside his organ concertos. Nonetheless, the fugue section of BWV 596/i appears to be played without change of manual, perhaps because most German organists during Bach's time regarded fugues as one-manual works.<sup>21</sup>

Finally, it is not known what tempi Bach would choose for his organ transcriptions. It is apparent that BWV 593/i & iii, BWV 594/iii, and BWV 596/iii need to be played much more slowly than Vivaldi's original. As P. F. Williams observes, did Bach simply not know how fast an Italian orchestra would find it natural to play these concertos, or did he assume that his arrangements, owing to the way the keys of the organ work, have to be played more slowly?<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> Putnam Aldrich, "Bach's Technique of Transcription and Improvised Ornamentation," *The Musical Quarterly* 35 (1949): 29-31.

<sup>21</sup> Peter F. Williams, *Bach Organ Music* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1972), 22.

<sup>22</sup> Peter F. Williams, "Suggestions for Playing the Works of Bach - the Transcriptions," *The American Organist* 19.6 (1985): 44.

Certainly, this question will probably remain unanswered forever. But any organist, when playing these concertos, should at least try to convey the bounce and vitality of Vivaldi's music even though he or she has to play them at slower tempi.

### **Influence of the Transcriptions on Bach's Music**

Despite that Bach's three organ concertos after Vivaldi may not be written originally for the purpose of self-education, their impact on Bach is undeniable. In 1717, Bach was appointed as *Kapellmeister* at the court of Anhalt-Cöthen.. Since the prince's interest was not in religious works, but rather, in instrumental compositions, in Cöthen Bach had the opportunity to compose some very fine concertos, like the six Brandenburg Concertos, the A-minor and E-major Violin Concertos (BWV 1041-2), and the D-minor Concerto for Two Violins (BWV 1043). In these concertos, he could have adopted the model of Corelli's concerti grossi, which consists of a number of short movements contrasting in character, and does not emphasize the difference in style between the solo and tutti sections. However, Bach seemed to have a predilection for the Vivaldi model perhaps because it is more "compact and symmetrical"<sup>23</sup> than the Corelli model. In the opening movement of the A-minor and D-minor Concertos, a Vivaldi-type ritornello scheme is used. The long solo episode between the central and concluding ritornelli in both movements are punctuated by orchestral references to the opening measures, and this technique of recalling ritornello materials in solo sections is also employed in Vivaldi's Op. 3 No. 8 /i. As N. Carrell observes, many melodic materials in his Brandenburg Concertos are also very Vivaldian in character; in particular, the main theme of the first movement of No. 3 resembles very much a phrase in Vivaldi's Op. 1 No. 9 (Ex. 25).<sup>24</sup> The initial motive of the first movement of the D-minor Double Concerto may also be derived from Vivaldi's Op. 1 no. 11 (Ex. 26).



<sup>23</sup> Geiringer, 283.

<sup>24</sup> Norman Carrell, *Bach the Borrower* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1967), 248.

**Ex. 26** A. Vivaldi  
Op. 1 No. 11



Although the three organ concertos discussed in this article are not Bach's greatest works for keyboard, they do manifest Bach as a fine and creative arranger. While adhering to the originals faithfully, Bach exercises a great deal of freedom in his transcriptions. His rewrites are often imaginative, and his occasional use of bravura passages to fill in rhythmic holes as well as his creative use of various devices to vary repeated passages also add stylistic flair to his transcriptions. More importantly, these concertos testify Bach's great interest in the Italian style although they were written very probably for Prince Johann Ernst's enjoyment and instruction rather than for self-education. The influence of Vivaldi's concertos on Bach's concerto style is a fine example showing how a musician can compose a great piece not by inventing something totally new, but by assimilating another composer's style into his own.

*For Prof. Gregory Butler  
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