

A comparison of the musical styles of vivaldi and corelli essay sample

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Change, discovery, and innovation characterize the Baroque period. Classic composers, such as Bach and Handel burst onto the musical arena with great compositions. During a time with so many talented artists, some of the earlier masters were neglected. Two of these talented musicians were Antonio Vivaldi and Arcangelo Corelli. Both Italian artists were distinguished violinists as well as accomplished composers. “ Corelli was the greatest violinist-composer of the Baroque and arguably its second most influential Italian composer after Monteverdi.” Corelli’s works consist entirely of string music apart from one sonata for trumpet, two violins, and continuo. The popularity of Corelli grew through the publications of forty-eight trio sonatas, twelve solo sonatas, and twelve concerti grossi. All of these works were published in six collections containing twelve works apiece.

The first four being sets of trio sonatas. Although only a small output of Vivaldi’s works were published during his lifetime, these were considered some of his most important and influential instrumental works. Vivaldi’s music contains over fifty operas, forty cantatas, over fifty sacred vocal works, sonatas, concertos, ninety solo and trio sonatas, and roughly five hundred concertos (two hundred of which are for solo violins). Vivaldi was best known for his trio sonatas and concerto works. While both composers were continuously developing their styles and reaching new heights of achievement, neither strayed too far from a basic format. The fact that both composers were so refined makes juxtaposing the two an impossible task. When comparing two of Corelli’s trio sonatas from Opus Three to two of Vivaldi’s violin concertos from La Stravaganza Opus Four, neither composer

can be distinguished over the other. Both works masterfully exemplify the characteristics of the composers' styles.

A brief background of each composer is necessary into gain insight into their writing styles. “ Arcangelo Corelli was born in Fusignano, a small town midway between Bologna and Ravenna, on 17 February 1653.” The first music lessons that Corelli took was from a priest in the town of Faenza. After continuing his studies at Lugo, Corelli traveled to Bologna in 1666. In 1675, Corelli spent four years in Rome where he undertook subordinate positions among orchestral violinists. He soon became one of the foremost violinists in Rome. “ On 9 July 1687, Cardinal Pamphili engaged Corelli as his music master at a monthly salary of ten Florentine piastres.” Corelli received the honor of being admitted to the Arcadian Academy (along with distinguished musicians such as Pasquini and Scarlatti) on April 26, 1706, He was named Arcangelo Corelli. In 1708, Corelli retired from public view; he used his time composing. On January 8, 1708, Corelli died and was buried in S Maria della Rotonda.

Antonio Vivaldi was born on March 4, 1678. Although very little is known about his childhood and musical education, it has been assumed that he took violin lessons from his father. “ Vivaldi's virtuoso playing of the violin as well as many stylistic echoes of Corelli, particularly in the early sonatas, have given rise to conjectures that he was actually a pupil of that master in Rome.” No evidence of this was found, however, it would explain his three year absences between his deaconship and his priesthood. Vivaldi spent time as a private violin instructor after his time being considered the virtuoso

violinist of Italy. Vivaldi died in Vienna in 1741. “ Antoni Vivaldi, the incomparable violinist, known as the red-haired priest, highly esteemed for his concertos and other compositions, earned at one time more than 50, 000 ducats, but because of his immoderate prodigality died a pauper in Vienna.”

In order to prove that both musical examples are perfect indications of each composer's style one must examine each composer's works individually.

Corelli has many distinctive qualities that differentiate him from other composers and scream Corelli. The pieces being analyzed are Corelli's first and second sonatas in Opus Three. The first is in F major and the later in D major. One example is that Corelli avoids extremes in the violin register. The example below depicts this conservative use of the register.

Ex. 1: Sonata II Allegro Opus 3, Corelli, measure 34 of score

This D in third position is highest note that appears in both sonatas. Although the note does require a shift from the musician, when setting it in reference to the entire range of the violin, the D is not a far stretch. The D is only used once throughout both sonatas. Corelli does, however, use the C in third position quite frequently. However, one cannot satisfactorily argue that this note is an extreme in register considering a stretch of the fourth finger would enable the musician to stay in first position and the note. The third position is rarely exceeded as was shown in the above example. Similarly, to the extremes in register, Corelli also avoids the use of the G-string on the violin; as shown below.

Ex. 2: Sonata II Grave Opus 3, Corelli, measure 18-19 of score

This is the only time in both of the sonata examples that Corelli dares to go to the G-string. The G-string is exhibited once in eight movements. The lowest note other than this lone C is the open D-string. Moving along, another aspect of Corelli's writing is the use of conjunct upward and downward progressions of first inversion chords. The following example shows an opening movement of one of the trio sonatas that is full of first inversion chords.

Ex. 3: Sonata I Vivace Opus 3, Corelli, measure 28-29 of score

These closing measures are presented with an excess of first inversion chords. All beats of these measures happen to be first inversion chords. This is just a short example from this movement, however if one looks previously in the same movement the chords used in numbers are first inversions. Keeping within the idea of patterns and progressions, Corelli would often write, " sequential progressions that travel alternately a fifth in one direction and a fourth in the other." An example of this style is shown below.

Ex. 4 Sonata II Allegro opus 3, Corelli, measure 29 of score

In this instance, Corelli puts two sequential progressions next to each other. The B moves down a fifth to the E and then moves up a fourth to the A. In this is shown the opposite direction and the alternating fifth to a fourth. It repeats again from the A to a D and the back up to a G. Once again, the progression is from a fifth down to a fourth up. One characteristic often used in the bass instrument is a walking base line.

This is when an inessential note is interposed between two harmony notes.

This progression is usually found in a sequence of eighth notes.

Ex. 5 Sonata I Grave Opus 3, Corelli, measures 9-10 on score

The harmonic notes are shown on beats one through four. They outline the harmonic progression of the two measures. The inessential notes are put on the off beats.

One of Corelli's most well-known features appears as the Corelli Clash. “

This is a resolution onto the leading note at a cadence coincides with the anticipation of the tonic note in the companion upper part.” Dr. Jack

Ashworth from the University of Louisville states that although this style is credited to Corelli, the composer does not use it very often in his pieces.

However Corelli's music does contain many other types of clashes.

Ex. 6 Sonata II Adagio Opus 3, Corelli, measure 17-18 of score

Even though, the tonic does not appear in anticipation with the leading tone, the leading tone does suspend over the bar line where it meets tonic. This clash is reversed in nature from the traditional “ Corelli Clash,” however, it can be considered nothing other than a clash.

An example of these next two stylistic traits cannot be shown, however, they do occur in the trio sonatas. First, Corelli followed a pattern with his trio sonatas. Opus One and Three were church sonatas and Two and Four were chamber. The difference between the two sonatas is that the chamber sonatas have a feeling like a dance. “ Church sonatas lack designated dance

movements but contain dance characteristics.” It was stated that Opus three relates more to the chamber sonatas because it contains a greater amount of movements in an upbeat tempo. All of the sonatas follow four-movement pattern as well. This is true for Sonata I and II of Opus Three.

In Corelli’s works, there are always a plethora of suspensions, unison passages, and diatonic arpeggiated motives. Below are examples of each.

Ex. 7 Sonata I Grave Opus 3, Corelli, measures 5-7

As you can see in these three measures alone, Corelli uses the suspension four times. This is not a one time example. Suspensions such as these are used at least once in every measure.

Ex. 8 Sonata I Vivace Opus 3, Corelli, measures 1-4

In the opening measures of the third movement of Sonata I, the violins are in complete unison. The rhythm are identical as the violins play a third apart from each other. In this passage, even the bass has unison rhythm on the second and fourth measures.

Ex. 9 Sonata II Allegro Opus 3, Corelli, measure 29 of score

Here in the second violin part, a first inversion five chord is arpeggiated followed by a first inversion three chord.

Corelli contains a predictable mood in his pieces. This creates most of his appeal to listeners. However, even with his predictable movement, Corelli manages to throw in some harmonic surprises. Occasionally, he will even has

such bizzarria that it throws off the music's continuity. One such instance is interpreted in the measures below.

Ex. 10 Sonata II Allegro Opus 3, Corelli, measure 13 of score

This measure comes off surprising to the listener because the voices are not balanced well. Usually Corelli is very consistent on equal voice leadings, but in this instance, the voice leading fails. One aspect of Corelli's trio sonatas is that he replaced the viola with a second violin. In both example sonatas, a violin is favored over the viola.

The final aspect of Corelli's pieces are the finals are equally divided between fugal types. This is true for both Sonatas. The finale movement is in the compound meter of six eight. Also true of Corelli's style is the alternation of slow to fast movements. Only Sonata II follows this form.

As one can see Corelli's trio Sonatas I and II follow most if not all of Corelli's styles. If heard, the pieces would unmistakably be known as a Corelli style. This is not to say that Corelli out style Vivaldi by any means. In fact, one could go as far assaying the two Italian violinist/composers were equal in talent and style. Niether strayed from their comfortable format. Looking at Vivaldi's pieces will show equality between the two.

Like Corelli, Vivaldi had an excess of stylistic characteristic that distinguished him from any other composer in this period. Usually, one can notably tell a Vivaldi piece from that of another composer without doubt. To illustrate Vivaldi's constant style the Sixth Concerto in G minor and the Seventh

Concerto in C major from La Stravaganza Opus 4 will be analyzed. One of the first of these characteristics is the use of syncopated rhythms as shown in this example.

Ex. 11 Concerto in Sol minore Allegro La Stravaganza Opus 4, Vivaldi, measure 19-30 of score

The solo violin and first violin are in complete unison in rhythm and notes. They create this syncopated rhythm by changing the note on an offbeat instead of the beat. The violins continue this pattern throughout the piece, not only in the first movement. While using the syncopated rhythm, Vivaldi coordinated the bow with the rhythm. Another style that is unique to Vivaldi is that of “flexible treatment of variable sixth and seventh degrees of the minor scale.” This involves changing the quality of the note whether it be from flat to natural to sharp.

Ex. 12 Concerto in Sol minore Allegro La stravaganza Opus 4, Vivaldi, measures 112- 117 of score

The sixth degree (being an E) and the seventh (a F) fluctuate between the natural minor scale and the melodic minor scale. The E switches from E flat to E natural multiple times as the F switches to F natural to F sharp almost every measure. In keeping with note qualities, another aspect of Vivaldi’s writing is his use of the augmented melodic interval throughout the piece even in an ascending line.

Ex. 13 Concerto in Do maggiore Largo La Stravaganza Opus 4, Vivaldi,
measure 7 of score

The middle half of the fourth beat in measure seven shows this augmented second approach. In a descending line of thirty second notes, a D sharp to a C appears. In this particular concerto, the affect of augmented intervals is not a common occurrence. However, since Vivaldi does show some use of this in the solo line of the second violin, it is safe to assume that he does follow common practice.

Frequently used by Vivaldi was the notion of “ transporting ideas from the major and minor modes with freedom.” Vivaldi did this multiple times throughout his pieces. Listening to the pieces is quite interesting due to these sudden changes in motif. Most commonly, there was not any form of phrase modulation. The change in mode happens from movement to movement as well as in the movements themselves. The motifs changed instantly as well as abruptly as shown here.

Ex. 14 Concerto in Do maggiore Allegro La Stravaganza Opus 4, Vivaldi,
measures 117-126 of score (shows only solo and two violin parts)

Vivaldi was a master of composing which enabled him to form melodies from cadential fragments. Just when the piece sounds and seems that an ending is approaching, it takes on a new melodic phrase. In this example of a Vivaldi concerto, Vivaldi cleverly tricks the audience with a five to one cadence. However, the cadence not only ends the previous phrase but also starts a new motif.

Ex. 15 Concerto in Sol minore Allegro La Stravaganza Opus 4,
Vivaldi, measures 122-124 of score

In this case, the cadence actually brings back the opening ritornello. This theme occurs several times in the movement. This occurrence is different from the rest because of the fragmental cadence that forms it.

When speaking of chords used in a Vivaldi piece, one must mention the abundance of seventh chords in his harmony. Most of the chords in his harmony are seventh chords as shown below.

Ex. 16 Concerto in Sol minore Allegro La Stravaganza Opus 4, Vivaldi,
measures 24-26 of score

All three of these measures begin with some kind of seventh chord. Measure 24 begins with an A seven chord. The following measure begins with a D seven, and the last another D seven. This is a shorter example, however it clearly illustrates that Vivaldi did not seventh chords sparingly.

Quite frequently in a Vivaldi piece, the key modulates very abruptly. For a very clear example of this, we turn to the fourth movement of the seventh concerto in La Stravaganza.

Ex. 17 Concerto in Do maggiore Allefro La Stravaganza Opus 4, Vivaldi,
measures 137-141 of score

In Vivaldi's phrasing, some irregular characteristics may jump out. In some cases, this could mean an accidental on a prominent note in the phrase, an outlandish rhythm, or in this case switching meter patterns.

Ex. 18 Concerto in Sol minore Allegro La Stravaganza Opus 4, Vivaldi, measures 291-294 of score

As you can see the statements starts in a triplet patten and continues through the first two measures of the example. It then switched back to straight eighth notes in the third measure. In this pattern, the eighth notes remain constant throughout the shifting back and forth.

Also in the works of Vivaldi are contrapuntal motifs that are passed between the two violins. Contrapuntal means "(1) of or pertaining to counterpoint. (2) With respect to musical texture, exhibiting counterpoint, i. e., a degree of independence among roughly synonymous with polyphonic, as distinct from homophonic." An example of this is shown below.

Ex. 19 Concerto in Sol minore Allegro La Stravaganza Opus 4, Vivaldi, measure 63-68 of score

The two violins are trading two different motifs back and forth for a short amount of time. One motif is more melodic with the other is a kind of pulse that a small scale in it and a trill for decoration. The first violin starts with the melodic line with the second keeps the beat. Not to be out done, the second violin takes over the melody from the first violin. Again, they switch before moving on to a new thought.

A form which is often used in Vivaldi's works is that of an ostinato. " An ostinato is a figure or musical sentence that repeats continuously. Its length varies in scope from a motive or phrase to a period. An ostinato provides unifying repetition. An short ostinato figure can function as an ornamented or extended pedal tone." In the ostinato, Vivaldi uses the phrases to contrast the harmonies in other parts. An example of this form is shown below.

Ex. 20 Concerto in Sol minore Allegro La Stravaganza Opus 4, Vivaldi, measures 268- 273 of score

The above passage occurs multiple times in this movement of Vivaldi's violin concerto. The first violin takes on this eighth note rhythm and melody that is in total contrast to what the other voices are doing. While the eighth note pattern continues, the violin, viola, and cello have a very legato quarter note followed by a dotted quarter that is slurred to an eighth. This exemplifies perfectly Vivaldi's ostinato form.

Many of Vivaldi's works have a distinctive quality about them that are notated in the instruction than in the notes themselves. In most of Vivaldi's pieces, he creates a three-movement piece in which the first movement is fast, the second is slow, and the third is fast. In some of these concertos, Vivaldi adds a slow introduction before the first movement. This is clear in both concerto examples. The Concerto in Sol minore follows this process by using Allegro, Largo, Allegro. The Concerto in Do maggiore follows the same pattern but does add on a Largo introduction. He also uses descriptive titles for his collections of works which in this case is entitled La Stravaganza.

When dynamics were concerned, Vivaldi pulled out all stops. Vivaldi would often have vast dynamic graduations from pianissimo to fortissimo as shown below.

Ex. 21 Concerto in Sol minore Allegro La Stravaganza Opus 4, Vivaldi, measures 75-79 of score

The solo violin rapidly changes from piano to forte and back to piano in the course of only five measures. In example 21, the composer creates an echo effect by using such drastic dynamic differences. Vivaldi also uses different dynamic markings simultaneously as shown below.

Ex. 22 Concerto in Sol minore Allegro La Stravaganza Opus 4, Vivaldi, measure 111 of score

Here the first violin has a forte dynamic under the soloist while the violist is at a piano. Vivaldi was a master at his works for this reason. He knows which lines he wanted brought out and was one of the first to use this type of marking to let the musician know exactly what he wanted.

The most important style characteristic of Vivaldi was the use of the ritornello. A ritornello is a melody or phrase that acts as a refrain usually used in an instrumental ensemble. Vivaldi used many ritornellos as the main motif in the first movements of all concertos. However, his approach to the ritornello varied from concerto to concerto. Usually, each time the ritornello returned, it would sound similar. “ The ritornello is usually presented in two ways. “ By a double statement of the ritornello in tonic at the end of the

movement, or by a single statement of the ritornello that is interrupted by one or more solo excursions. Simplified version of ritornello form is often used in slow movements” Sometimes, the solo will take up the ritornello as heard before and expands its motifs in improvisation. To show a ritornello in its entirety, one would need to show the piece in its entirety. However, an example of one of Vivaldi’s concertos is shown below.

Ex. 23 Concerto in Sol minore Allegro La Stravaganza Opus 4, Vivaldi, measures 1-8 of score

This opening begins with the violins in unison while the cello and viola back up the melody with a counter motif. This particular ritornello is always presented with the whole ensemble in unison. The ritornello always comes back in the same key each time it returns.

Vivaldi, like Corelli, was a master of his time. He had “ great spontaneity, exuberant sensuality, spacious and free virtuosity, and tonal imagination. He used one- sided predictable expression.” Vivaldi is known for his consistency with broad notes and wide intervals. Vivaldi seems not to favor diatonism over chromaticism. His fascinating creations jump alive with such energy and force that no one could doubt the quality of his work.

In summation, the two composers are wonderfully talented masters of music who really cannot be compared to each other. The pieces analyzed clearly show that neither musician strays far from his own style. While later in each of their careers, both Corelli and Vivaldi start experimenting with new styles, these two pieces can be easily identified in regards to the respective

composer. In conclusion, neither piece was a better example of the composer's style. Both pieces were excellent examples of the stylistic characteristics of Vivaldi and Corelli.

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