

# Johann Sebastian Bach: Concerto for 2 Violins in D Minor, BWV 1043

*Vivace*

*Largo ma non tanto*

*Allegro*

This is without doubt the most widely known, and surely the finest, of the three concertos for violin. Although the autograph score has not survived, we do have the original performing parts and can date the composition to approximately 1730<sup>1</sup>. Bach was at this time at the court of Cöthen, in the service of a Prince who was described by Bach as one who "not only loved but knew music".

The composer's duties were to provide chamber music for the evening concerns and special occasions. The violin concertos by Vivaldi had been studied very thoroughly by Bach and indeed were used as models for his own writing. The two soloists (as was usual in a baroque concerto) do not dominate the orchestra but emerge from the texture and exchange ideas with the group of strings. Although it is commonly known as the *Double Concerto* this is rather misleading as the violins never play against each other. They share the same thematic material yet are equally important as they contrast with the full string sound.

The outer movements are very lively and direct, and the contrapuntal nature shows a mature Bach at work. It was usual at this time to use the orchestra very much as mere accompaniment in the middle movement. Here, Bach was not so much interested in the contrast between the soloists and the remainder of the orchestra as using the expressive qualities of the two instruments in conversation while the orchestra gradually retreats into insignificance. The powerful melodic lines of this slow movement are particularly well-loved by players and audience alike. It has been suggested that Bach had instrumental solos played during communion, and that this *Largo* featured especially. But, although the inner peace of the movement may well have been fitting for such an occasion, the idea has been dismissed by renowned music scholars as pure conjecture. What has rarely been called into question is the amount of sheer pleasure which this concerto has and will continue to provide for many, many more years.

*Programme notes provided by Linda A. Williams, September 2010*