

A. Corelli, *Concerto Grosso in G minor*, Op. 6/8 (“Christmas”)



Arcangelo Corelli (February 17, 1653 – January 8, 1713) was an Italian violinist and composer. His style has influenced all of the famous violinist-composers of 18th-century Italy who took him as their "iconic point of reference."

Although one cannot be sure, Arcangelo Corelli's famous the *Concerto grosso* in G minor, Op. 6, No. 8 (*Fatto per la notte di Natale*, as the inscription actually reads) may well have been composed a full quarter century before it first appeared in print, posthumously, in 1714; there is a record of Corelli

having, in 1690, performed a Christmas Concerto for the enjoyment of his then-new patron, Cardinal Pietro Ottoboni. The Christmas Concerto is easily Corelli's best-known piece of music, though isolated movements from his sonatas have, through other composers' adaptations, achieved vast individual fame. It is at heart an example of the *sonata da chiesa*, expanded from the usual four movements to five and incorporating into the last movement a rolling, 12/8 meter *Pastorale ad libitum*. Like the rest of the Op. 6 concerti, it is scored for a *concertante* group consisting of two violins and a cello and a larger *tutti* ensemble.

The normal slow-fast-slow-fast organization of the *sonata da chiesa* underlies everything that happens in the Christmas Concerto; but Corelli at several key points makes a concerted effort to turn that textbook organization on its head. Six measures of fiery *Vivace* preface the opening *Grave* movement, and the third movement (*Adagio*) has a central *Allegro* episode in which the first solo violin and first *tutti* violins suddenly break out with a rapid, ruffled sixteenth note oscillation (complex first movement structures that incorporate many changes of tempo are not at all unusual throughout Op. 6, indeed, the opening movement of Op. 6, No. 1 has no fewer than seven tempo indications in it!).

The second movement is in the usual binary form, and is built around Corelli's favorite kind of staggered, imitative suspensions. The fourth movement, *Vivace*, which would normally be the finale, is very short, so as to make room for the sizeable fifth movement, the body of which is an *Allegro*, but the true heart of which is that most famous of all Corelli music: the lovely, serene *Pastorale* (*Largo*).