Largo e Spiccato (\( \textit{Largo e Spiccato} \) \( \downarrow \) \( 90 \rightarrow 2'30'' \))

J.S. Bach: Organ Concerto in d, bwv 596/3 (1713)
after Vivaldi: Concerto for 2 violins, op.3 n.11 (1711)
arranged by Michael Hawley (2012)
Largo in d, from the Concerto for Two Violins, RV565, by Antonio Vivaldi.

Piano arrangement by Michael Hawley (mike@media.mit.edu).

NOTES:

A lovely little Siciliano for when you need a short, quiet piece in d of about 2.5 minutes duration, arranged with a few pianistic considerations in mind. As a “for instance,” I’ve used this in lieu of the slow movement of Bach’s Italian Concerto when short on time — which makes it slightly more Italian. Vivaldi’s original concerto grosso, from L’ESTRO ARMONICO, dates from 1711. Two years later, J.S.Bach transcribed several of these twelve concerti for organ (around 1713). For the most part, his are faithful to the originals with a few deft touches added for organists. In the case of this Largo, Bach didn’t see the need to tweak a thing.

For many years, those organ transcriptions were mis-attributed to Bach’s son, Wilhelm Friedemann. Apparently Wilhelm had a habit of fobbing off some of his Dad’s work as his own. This bug was perpetuated: in 1900, French organist Alexandre Guilmant followed suit with an edition of this concerto erroneously citing W.F. Bach as the author. Not long after, Belgian pianist August Stradal (a student of Liszt and Leschetitzky) made an over-the-top arrangement of the concerto further perpetuating the error. Several of these scores are included herein, along with Vivaldi’s. In 1911, Max Schneider set the scholarly record straight, pointing out that in 1713, Wilhelm Friedemann was barely seven years old. Still, confusion persists.

In this modest arrangement, a few small expressive pointers are suggested in red. In the original for strings, the accompaniment supporting the melody line is played spiccato, a technique in which the bow bounces lightly on the strings. It’s nice to keep this idea subtly in mind, without exaggerating. This also suggests a slightly faster tempo: note that this piece is sometimes referred to as an Adagio, but it’s a Largo. Though a bit pedantic, it’s worth knowing that these days, Adagio is regarded as slower than Largo, but in Baroque music, it’s usually the other way around. The spiccato accompaniment is a reminder that the bars ought to be felt in “four” (not “twelve”).

Generally, pedal with the harmonic changes, which are every triplet, save for the four or five places indicated where a half-measure pedal is nicer.

I’ve suggested a slight pause just before the tutti returns three bars from the end. In a good sized hall, this can be an unexpectedly beautiful breath. It also puts the tutti back on the first beat, and ends with a dotted-half, which should be prolonged in a ritardando.

Here’s a lovely performance by Arcadi Volodos, live from the Musikverein in Vienna in 2009, which differs in a few small details; one by Ray Lev (voiced differently), and a performance on organ:

http://youtu.be/VH2DXM9GWtY  (Arcadi Volodos)
http://youtu.be/Jle-9v1SOKU?t=6m44s  (Ray Lev)
http://youtu.be/WBVATnP3oA?t=5m9s  (Simon Preston)

Michael Hawley
Cambridge, MA
15 May 2012
CONCERTO GROSSO

für
2 Violinen und Violoncell soli
mit Streichorchester
D moll

von

ANTONIO VIVALDI
Op. 3 No. 11

* Herausgegeben und mit Einführung versehen von

Alfred Einstein

Ernst Eulenburg, Leipzig/Wien
750
INTRODUCTION

Antonio Vivaldi’s D minor Concerto op. 3 No. 11 presented here for the first time in its original form*) is one of the best known works of classical music, partly on account of its innate value, partly through the peculiar manner in which it has been handed down to us. In its initial form however, it is certainly not celebrated. In 1844 F. K. Griepenkerl published an Organ Concerto gleaned from Forkel’s posthumous collection and considered to be the work of Friedemann Bach, for the latter, (the eldest of Bach’s sons) had written on the fly-leaf, — in shaky hand-writing — the words “di W. F. Bach” and had added “manu mei Patris descriptum”. In the Bach Jahrbuch (1911) Max Schneider has made it quite plain that the above-mentioned work was really the composition of Johann Seb. Bach and not of Friedemann, who at that date was but a child of seven.

In point of fact this Organ Concerto was a Vivaldi arrangement made by the elder Bach who was increasingly fascinated by the original. This is not the only instance of appropriation on the part of the younger Bach; want and weakness of will caused him to pass off some of his own compositions as his father’s during the former’s declining years. Nevertheless the work has become known as Friedemann Bach’s Organ Concerto in D minor and even made more famous by a brilliant transcription for Piano by Aug. Stradal—an arrangement of an arrangement, so to speak.

The part played by Bach, with the addition of but a single bar (in the Toccata Introduction) is a marvel of powerful assimilation, the classical broad outlines of the original acquiring new impulse and assuming fresh unity of form, the true Bachian personal aspect.

And yet the original must not be despised, as unfortunately so often happens. The fact that it was predestined to be arranged by Bach is in itself an honour and in the Introduction the three Solo Instruments depict the energy of Bach, the Theme and working-out section of the Fugue breathe the true Bachian spirit and the busy, playful Finale reminds one of certain original piano works of the great master himself.

Bach had no cause to retouch the Largo. It is one of those successful movements in the true old Italian cantabile style, the highest expression of classic form. There is no question here of mere “accompained” melody; Mozart himself may have written a more nervous Siciliano, more highly coloured and perhaps more delicate, but he could not claim to surpass it in beauty.

Munich. Alfred Einstein

*) W. Altmann’s statement (Arch. f. MW. IV p. 267) that B. & H. issued a score in 1913 has proved to be ill-founded.