

# BACH CONCERTO IN D MINOR

## BWV 1052

Bach composed the concerto BWV1052 most likely in 1738, while *Kapellmeister* at St. Thomas' in Leipzig. At the same time, he was employing the resources of a group of musicians in weekly concerts called the Collegium Musicum, an organization founded 30 years earlier by Telemann, and probably the concertos he composed during this time were performed with this group. Later, the Collegium Musicum was to become the forerunner of the Gewandhaus Orchestra, the orchestra famously led by Mendelssohn in a revival of forgotten works of Bach (incidentally, this concerto was a favorite of Mendelssohn's).

The first movement is a large structure in typical Baroque fashion, combined with Bach's individual genius. In the Baroque concerto, the *ritornello* was the opening music that returned periodically to denote the structure's geography. In this case, the opening *ritornello* appears four times, twice in the tonic, d minor, once in *a* minor, and once in *g* minor, as if showing us a single structural element from four different angles, which is the essence of Baroque concerto form. Bach's contribution is the polyphonic variations he is able to compose over the *ritornello*: when it appears in *a* minor the soloist leads, and the orchestra follows two beats later in canon; in *g* minor, the roles are reversed. Not only do we see the same familiar structure from different angles, we notice the exquisite details which lend an atmosphere of continual variety and development.

The second movement's music was reworked in a cantata (BWV146). Over the eerie passacaglia bass, Bach composed a beautiful four-part chorale to the words, "We must pass through great sadness before we may enter God's kingdom." In the concerto, the bass is intoned softly in *unisono* before the sorrowful entrance of the soloist, who weaves a complex, ornamented arabesque similar to other slow Bach movements such as the second movement of the Italian Concerto.

Perhaps the third movement is the celebration of the sadness passing; although still in the minor key, major and minor did not yet have the happy/sad dichotomy we've gotten used to from later, Classical music. The buoyant rhythm, and dance-like *rondeau* structure lend an uplifting lilt to the end of this magnificent concerto.

Nathan Carterette  
[www.nathancarterette.com](http://www.nathancarterette.com)