Arcangelo Corelli - Concerto grosso Op. 6 No. 8 in G minor 'Christmas'

Concerto grosso Op. 6 No. 8 'fatto per la notte di Natale' *1. Vivace - Grave. Arcato sostenuto 2. Allegro 3. Adagio – Allegro – Adagio 4. Vivace 5. Allegro 6. Largo. Pastorale ad libitum*
Collegium Musicum 90 Simon Standage – director

Although one cannot be sure, Arcangelo Corelli's famous Christmas Concerto -- 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 the 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). ---Blair Johnston, Rovi

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