

Edition Eulenburg
No. 257

J. S. BACH

BRANDENBURG CONCERTO No. 2

F major/F-Dur/Fa majeur
BWV 1047



Eulenburg

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

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Edited by/Herausgegeben von
Karin Stöckl
in collaboration with/in Zusammenarbeit mit
Johannes Adam, Eberhard Enß, Frauke Schmitz



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Ernst Eulenburg Ltd
48 Great Marlborough Street
London W1F 7BB

PREFACE

From August 1717 to April 1723 Johann Sebastian Bach was Kapellmeister and Master of the Royal Chamber Music at the Court of Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen. Bach expressed his feelings about this post retrospectively in a letter to his longstanding friend Georg Erdmann, written in 1730.¹ One may gather from this letter that for Bach the well-paid post of Kapellmeister obviously carried with it a certain prestige and for that reason he felt it to be a demotion to have to trouble himself with a choirmaster's job. On the other hand Bach's comments make it clear that the working conditions in Cöthen became increasingly difficult with the approaching marriage of Leopold to Friederica Henrietta von Bernburg, which took place at the end of 1721. Bach had in fact, in November 1720, already tried to make a change by applying – though without success – for the vacant post of choirmaster at the Jakobikirche in Hamburg.

In this context the fact that Bach sent selected concertos to Berlin, in a dedicatory manuscript, beautifully prepared as a fair copy in his own hand, for Christian Ludwig, Margrave of Brandenburg, youngest son of the Electoral Prince, has particular significance. According to the requirements of his secular post, Bach composed almost exclusively keyboard works, chamber music and instrumental concertos during his time at Cöthen. So when he dedicates some of his works to an equally secular master it is natural to suppose that he would choose them from this repertory.²

Furthermore, in the text of the inscription (in French) to the Margrave dated 24 March 1721, he makes reference to concrete grounds for the dedication of these *Six Concerts avec*

plusiers instruments, named nowadays, after their dedicatee, the 'Brandenburg Concertos':

A couple of years ago I had the good fortune to be heard by your majesty [...]. Your majesty honoured me with the request that I send you a few of my compositions.

The circumstances of this performance have been much puzzled over. A coincidental meeting between Bach and the Margrave in Meiningen, of which Christian Ludwig's brother-in-law was Duke, or in Carlsbad during a trip made by Leopold early in 1718 would be possibilities; it is more likely however that Bach met the Margrave in Berlin at the beginning of 1719. Prince Leopold had ordered a harpsichord and instructed Bach to collect the instrument from Berlin – as can be verified from an item for travel expenses in the accounts for 1 March 1719.³

The Margrave may well have expressed the desire to hear more of Bach's compositions at the time of this performance. The fact, however, that Bach did not comply with the Margrave's wishes until the sudden dedication of these six concertos two years later makes it much more likely that a secret request was the real reason behind the sending of the scores.⁴

This theory is supported by further observations. As already mentioned, for the enclosures which accompanied his dedicatory manuscript Bach drew on the repertoire of instrumental concertos which he had in all probability composed in and for Cöthen – taking into account, of course, the circumstances in Berlin, with which he must have been familiar both from

¹ *Bach-Dokumente*, Bach-Archiv, Leipzig, edited by Werner Neumann and Hans-Joachim Schulze, Vol. I (Kassel [-Leipzig], 1963), No. 23

² It seems plausible, owing to this contractual relationship, to put the date of composition somewhere between 1717 and 1721.

³ *Bach-Dokumente*, Vol. II (Kassel-Leipzig, 1969), No. 95. Whether Bach was already in Berlin at the time the harpsichord was ordered or only went there to collect it is of secondary importance. The unusual French of the opening of the dedication 'une couple d'années' obviously encouraged the view that the reason for the dedication is to be found at least two years earlier.

⁴ cf. H.-J. Schulze, 'Johann Sebastian Bachs Konzerte – Fragen der Überlieferung und Chronologie', in: *Bach-Studien 6. Beiträge zum Konzertschaffen Johann Sebastian Bachs* (Leipzig, 1981), 15

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his journey there and from the lively exchange of musicians which took place between Cöthen and Berlin. He probably hoped to perform the concertos himself in Berlin.⁵

In its six works the score mirrors the whole range of types of concertante ensemble music current at the time: the third and sixth concertos display the characteristics of social music-making most clearly, the second and fourth more the concerto grosso type, and Concertos 1 and 5 in their final autograph form document the development towards the solo concerto. Furthermore, a comparison with the copies, still in existence, of the early versions of Concertos 1, 2 and 3 made by the Bach scholar Christian Friedrich Penzel shortly after Bach's death in Leipzig, and of Concerto No. 5 made by Johann Christoph Altnickol, shows that the diversity of the concerto type was extended in many respects in the writing out of the dedicatory score. Bach enriched the instrumentation by the use of unusual instruments such as the violino piccolo in No. 1 and flauto d'écò in No. 4; he divided the cello part in No. 3 and expanded the cadenzas of the solo instruments in Concerto No. 5. In addition, the treatment of the sequence of movements shows Bach's desire to display his skills to the full – by choosing a two-movement composition for the third piece and by extending the first concerto in the drawing up of the manuscript to a quasi four-movement piece.

Although Bach provides a representative cross-section of his concertos in the dedicatory score, it would be mistaken to think of them in terms of a cycle. We have here merely a collection of pre-existing concertos composed as individual works.

After the death of Margrave Christian Ludwig the dedicatory manuscript came into the possession of the Bach scholar Johann Philipp

Kirnberger. He in turn handed the score on to his pupil Princess Amalie of Prussia and it was bequeathed with her library to the Joachimsthalschen Gymnasium. From there the score was finally passed on to the Berlin Staatsbibliothek. It was not published until 1850 when, on the centenary of Bach's death, the Brandenburg Concertos were printed for the first time by C.F.Peters in Leipzig.

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The Second Brandenburg Concerto, *Concerto 2do à 1 Tromba 1 Fiauto. 1 Hautbois. 1 Violino, concertati, è 2 Violini 1 Viola è Violone in Ripieno / col Violoncello è Basso per il Cembalo*,⁶ goes one stage further than the earlier-composed Third Concerto along the path away from a form still centered on the Venetian polychoral style towards the solo concerto of the Vivaldi and Tartini type. Within the set of Brandenburg Concertos, it is the most fully-fledged representative model of the concerto grosso, in which the orchestra and an ensemble comprising several soloists are set against one another.

In contrast with the later Concertos Nos. 4 and 5, however, the solo parts are scarcely individualized. The specific characteristics of the recorder, oboe, trumpet and violin are not taken into account motivically or thematically; all four soloists work with the same material, which is merely adapted slightly to the differing capabilities of the instruments. On the basis of stylistic similarities to other works Bessler fixes the year of composition of the Second Concerto as 1719,⁷ a dating which, in the light of recent research findings, must be regarded as very early.⁸

As in many of Handel's concerti grossi, the orchestra and the soloists each present a theme of their own at the beginning of the first move-

⁵ There is as much uncertainty over the performability of the works as over the date of origin. It appears that the pieces as handed down to Penzel, and thus as they were to be found in Cöthen, were certainly performable there. There is no reliable information about the conditions in Berlin. See Heinz Becker, review of 'Johann Sebastian Bach, Sechs Brandenburgische Konzerte hrsg. von Heinrich Bessler, Neue Bach-Ausgabe, Serie VII, Bd. 2 [...]', *Kritischer Bericht*, in: *Die Musikforschung* 1960, 115ff.

⁶ This is the exact title and indication of scoring in the autograph.

⁷ cf. Heinrich Bessler, 'Zur Chronologie der Konzerte J. S. Bachs', in: *Festschrift M. Schneider* (Leipzig, 1955)

⁸ cf., for example, Hans-Joachim Schulze, 'J. S. Bachs Konzerte – Fragen der Überlieferung und Chronologie', in: *Bach-Studien 6. Beiträge zum Konzertschaffen J. S. Bachs* (Leipzig, 1981)

ment. Yet we cannot speak of genuine thematic dualism in the Second Brandenburg Concerto, since the 'solo theme' increasingly declines in significance in the course of the movement: it always appears unaltered and it is not incorporated into the compositional working, so that its effect is if anything that of an episode. The original 'tutti theme', on the other hand, is also taken up by the soloists and is continually re-worked in playful fashion; in the process the solo quartet gradually assumes control and forces the orchestra into the background. In the third movement the soloists dominate even more strongly than in the first, so that the orchestra here has a purely accompanying function; at no point is it incorporated into the musical working.⁹

The choice of instrument for trumpet and horn parts in Bach's music is frequently a matter of contention. The score and the copies of the parts of the Brandenburg Concertos that were prepared by Penzel contain the indication *Tromba o vero corno da caccia* (trumpet or else hunting horn). A factor in favour of the use of the horn, instead of the trumpet that is most commonly used today, is that F major is the key Bach preferred for horn parts, whereas he never – except in the autograph of the Brandenburg Concertos – expressly called for trumpets in F major.¹⁰ Friedrich Smend maintains, indeed, that Bach composed the *tromba* part for the trumpeter Johann Ludwig Schreiber, but at the same time he mentions the fondness of Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen for hunting and the sound of the (natural) horn, as well as the fact that horn players were often engaged from other principalities.¹¹ In any case, since trumpet and horn were often played by the same musician, even the payrolls of the court musicians employed in Cöthen cannot provide conclusive

evidence whether or not Bach had originally envisaged a horn in the Second Brandenburg Concerto and whether the scoring indication in the dedicatory copy for the Margrave of Brandenburg therefore perhaps shows only that allowance was being made for performance possibilities in Berlin.

The question of scoring is of interest primarily because the character of the Concerto is changed fundamentally and intrinsically if a horn is used in place of a trumpet in the part in question. Since the part notated in F sounds a fourth higher if played by the trumpet, the radiant trumpet sound dominates the other instruments in the two fast movements, especially the quiet recorder. The horn, on the other hand, transposes a fifth lower and thus fits much more firmly into the solo ensemble.

Editorial Notes

The sources

- A Autograph score (dedicatory copy for the Margrave of Brandenburg): Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Sign. Am.B.78. The second concerto can be found on folios 14v-26r of the volume.
- B Copy of the score in the hand of Christian Friedrich Penzel (1737-1801); the source is not A; violone, violoncello and harpsichord are entered, despite their differences, as *Continuo* on one stave per system: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Sign. Mus. ms. Bach P 1062.
- C Copy of the instrumental parts in the hand of Christian Friedrich Penzel; deviates only negligibly from B: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Sign. Mus. ms. Bach St 637.
- D Copy of the score in an unknown hand, second half of the eighteenth century; the source is A: Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin – Preußischer Kulturbesitz, Sign. Mus. ms. Bach P 256.
- E Copy of the instrumental parts in the hand of Johann August Patzig (1738-1816); the

⁹ cf. Rudolf Gerber, *Bachs Brandenburgische Konzerte. Eine Einführung in ihre formale und geistige Wesensart* (Kassel, 2/1965), 21ff

¹⁰ cf. the introduction to a broadcast of the Brandenburg Concertos by the BBC, 22 February 1971, quoted in notes accompanying the recording of the Concertos, Philips 6700 045

¹¹ Friedrich Smend, *Bach in Köthen* (Berlin, 1951), 17ff