

Brandenburg Concerto No. 4 BWV 1049

Notes for the HD Video

The world premiere of J. S. Bach's Brandenburg Concerto No. 4, performed on original instruments. Carla Moore, baroque violin solo; Hanneke van Proosdij & Andrew Levy, recorders & echo flutes. Performance and 4K UHD Video by the Early Music ensemble Voices of Music.

In March of 1721, Johann Sebastian Bach carefully inked six of his best concertos into a book for the Margrave of Brandenburg, Christian Ludwig. The original title, "Six Concerts à plusieurs instruments" is now known as the "Brandenburg" Concertos in English or "Brandenburgische Konzerte" in German.

These six concertos represent the summa of chamber music in the high baroque period: for the fourth concerto (BWV 1049), Bach chose the unique and imaginative texture of baroque violin and "echo flutes" (a type of baroque recorder) for his soloists.

In his autograph manuscript of Brandenburg 4 (BWV 1049), Bach writes the title as follows:

"Concerto 4to à Violino Principale, due Fiauti d'Echo, due Violini, una Viola è Violone in Ripieno, Violoncello è Continuo." For our video, we use the "echo flutes" for the slow movement, then break them apart for the first and third movements. The outside movements feature exceptionally virtuosic writing for the violin, with extended passagework spanning the entire range of the instrument. For his fourth concerto in the set of Brandenburgs, Bach is especially careful with the orchestration: this creates space for the recorder sound to breathe; in addition, his compositional style flows with sparkle and wit.

The fourth Brandenburg concerto is unusual in that Bach specifically calls for "echo flutes", or "fiauti d'echo". For many years musicologists have debated what an "echo flute" exactly is, and have also uncovered a great deal of historical detail, but the work is usually performed with two alto recorders.

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Our reconstruction of Bach's echo flutes for this performance and video recording is based on a number of key historical facts. First, the diarist Samuel Pepys details on several occasions his visits to the shop of Drumbleby, who sold wind instruments. Here is the excerpt from January, 1668:

"20th. Up, and all the morning at the office very busy, and at noon by coach to Westminster, to the 'Chequer, about a warrant for Tangier money. In my way both coming and going I did stop at Drumbleby's, the pipe-maker, there to advise about the making of a flageolet to go low and soft; and he

do shew me a way which to do, and also a fashion of having two pipes of the same note fastened together, so as I can play on one, and then echo it upon the other, which is mighty pretty."

Other historical accounts refer to a number of virtuoso players of the echo flute in different countries, and describe the instrument as two recorders or similar wind instruments, one of which is voiced softer than the other. Surviving echo flutes, consisting of a pair of recorders joined together, show that instrument makers of the time were keenly aware of how to voice the two instruments to create differences in sound.

The baroque echo flute solves a fundamental problem with the recorder and other wind instruments which is that as the player blows softer, the pitch goes lower. Since both echo and dynamic effects were essential to baroque music, the echo flute is a recorder that can play dynamics—and play them well in tune.

For our recording, we have chosen recorders that have a difference in color and articulation as well as in the volume of sound. We believe that Bach, who played the double-manual harpsichord as well the organ, would have been drawn to an instrument that could realize a rich palette of colors for the performance of his work, just as the harpsichord, which has two complete sets of strings, provides contrasts in color and articulation as well as in dynamics.

This concerto is part of the Voices of Music Great Works project. A Creative Commons edition of the score, based on the composer's manuscript, will be published to accompany the complete recording, and the recording will be available worldwide on Blu-Ray and CD, and for free on MP3 and high-definition, 24 bit FLAC files. First published October 22, 2013.

Voices of Music

Hanneke van Proosdij & David Tayler, directors

A note on this video: The Brandenburg Concertos are ensemble pieces, and every musician has a finely-wrought musical line. Rather than assemble clips of small solos, the goal in presenting this work was to show the entire ensemble--in this way, the viewer can follow the counter-subjects as well as the main themes in the musical composition. A specially designed hyperfocal lens was used for the center camera to render the entire soundstage in focus, edge to edge and front to back, so that at resolutions of 1080p and higher, one can view each individual musician. Graduated depth of field was used on the supporting cameras to throw the image into relief when showing sections of instruments. Surround sound techniques were used to place the listener in the middle of the ensemble, so that each part can be clearly heard, as well as seen.

Text: For this recording, a new edition of the concerto was made based on Bach's autograph manuscript, with careful attention to the original articulation marks.

Original instruments: the Brandenburg concertos have been performed on every imaginable combination of instruments. We believe that the greatest transparency is achieved when the work is performed on instruments from the time of Bach, using the techniques and styles of the time. In Bach's time, music was performed without a conductor, and each musician had a voice in the interpretation.

The musicians and their instruments

Carla Moore, solo baroque violin by Johann Georg Thir, Vienna, 1754

Hanneke van Proosdij and Andrew Levy, recorders.

Recorder by Peter van der Poel, based on instruments by Thomas Stanesby Jr, London
Kati Kyme, baroque violin by Johann Gottlob Pfretzschner, Mittenwald, 1791

Gabrielle Wunsch, baroque violin by Lorenzo Carcassi, Florence, Italy, 1765

Lisa Grodin, baroque viola by Mathias Eberl, Salzburg, Austria, 1680

William Skeen, five string baroque cello, Anonymous, Italy, c1680

Farley Pearce, violone, George Stoppani, Manchester, 1985, after Amati, 1560

Katherine Heater, double manual harpsichord by Johannes Klinkhamer, Amsterdam (1996), after Ruckers-Goujon, Neuchâtel, Switzerland, 18th c.

Recorded at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church, Belvedere, California