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**BMC 33-34 - Francesco Geminiani (1687-1762): 12 Concerti Grossi Vols. 1 & 2**

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Francesco Geminiani was born at Lucca, in Tuscany, in December 1687. At an early age he showed considerable talent on the violin after being taught by his father. Later he studied the violin under Carlo Ambrogio Lonati in Milan and then in Rome under the celebrated master, Corelli. It is also considered possible that he studied composition with Alessandro Scarlatti whilst staying in Naples.

At the age of 20 he returned to his home town of Lucca where he played the violin in the Town Orchestra for three years. He then returned to Naples in 1711 to take up the position as Leader of the Opera Orchestra. By this time he had become recognized as a brilliant violin virtuoso, so much so that he gave the Orchestra great difficulty in following him, as the music historian Dr. Burney put it: *"his unexpected accelerations and relaxations of measure"*.

In 1714, he tried his fortune in England, where his brilliant violin playing immediately met with great success. London had become a major European music center, thanks in part to Handel, who had himself studied in Rome under Corelli and thus brought a measure of Italian musical style with him. Geminiani gained much support from the aristocracy and leading figures at the Royal Court, and was invited to play the violin before George I, accompanied at the harpsichord by no less than Handel himself. He soon established himself in London as the leading master of violin-playing, with his concerts, his published compositions, and with his theoretical treatises, the first and most important of which was *"The Art of Playing the Violin"* (1731) which included all the technical principles of modern violin style.

He also had aristocratic pupils, among them the Earl of Essex who in 1728 tried unsuccessfully to arrange for Geminiani to become Master and Composer of the State Music of Ireland. It was in fact the Earl of Essex who had to rescue him from prison after he ran into debt through his consuming passion for art-dealing and collecting. This may have led him to leave London for a period for Dublin in 1733, where he rapidly built up a fine reputation as a teacher, performer, concert promoter and musical theorist. In that same year, he opened a Concert Room in Dublin, using the upstairs premises for music and the rooms below for trading in pictures. However, he was soon to return to London to make it his permanent home, although he did pay another visit to Dublin a few years later.

At this period of English musical life, it was Corelli who dominated published instrumental works in Britain. His Concertos were especially appreciated by musicians and public alike. It is therefore not surprising that as a pupil of Corelli, Geminiani based his earliest published Concertos on his former teacher's Sonatas for Violin and Continuo, Op.5. He later made further concerto arrangements from Corelli's Trios Op.1 and Op.3, as well as having made arrangements from his own Violin Sonatas Op.4.

His own Concertos, Op. 2 and 3, appeared in 1732 and 1733. The Op. 3 Concerti Grossi were amongst his most popular works at the time, and we take the opportunity to give one of the finest examples of these, the Concerto No.2 in g minor, at the end of this collection of 12 Concerti on Vol. 2 (BMC 34). He also published further Concertos as Op. 7 (1746) and *The Enchanted Forest*, a staged pantomime - scored for two violins and cello with an orchestra of two trumpets, two flutes, two horns, strings and timpani - presented in Paris at the Tuileries palace in 1754.

As a renowned violin virtuoso, he published several challenging collections of his Violin Sonatas which require dramatic flair from the player; indeed such was the difficulty of his Op. 1 and 4 in particular that very few contemporary violinists dared play them in public. Among the Sonata movements are fugues and double fugues, strong in imitative counterpoint, and idiomatic passages of multiple stopping.

Geminiani provided ornaments for both slow and fast movements as well as cadenzas; he advocated the use of vibrato 'as often as possible'. The expressiveness of his playing was much admired by both Hawkins and Burney; Tartini tellingly described him as '*il furibondo*'.

Geminiani was undoubtedly fond of arranging his own works: among his transcriptions are Harpsichord versions (1741) of his Op. 1 and 4 and Concerto Grosso versions of Op. 4 (1743). His Op. 5 Cello Sonatas (published in Paris), together with a transcription for Violin (issued in London and The Hague), appeared in 1746. In about 1755 he published 'modernized' versions of the Op. 2 and 3 Concertos, and in 1757 a final arrangement of Op. 1 in trio format.

He gained further fame from the publication of a series of practical treatises which were much reprinted, translated and paraphrased. In addition to *The Art of Playing on the Violin*, Geminiani produced *Rules for Playing in a True Taste* (1748), revised a year later as *A Treatise of Good Taste in the Art of Musick*, a *Guida harmonica* with supplement (c.1754), *The Art of Accompaniment* (c.1754) - written from the soloist's point of view - and *The Art of Playing the Guitar or Cittra* [English guitar] (Edinburgh, 1760). When considered together with his music and the implication of the alterations he made when reissuing collections such as Op. 1 and 4, Geminiani's treatises represent an important source of post-Corellian performance practices.