



**Teaching
Music
through
Performance in
*Orchestra***

VOLUME 4

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Teacher Resource Guide

L'estro Armonico

Antonio Vivaldi

(1678–1741)

transcribed by Johann Sebastian Bach
(1685–1750)

arranged by Bob Lipton
(b. 1954)

Publisher:	FJH Music
Date of Publication:	2014
Duration:	3:25
Version:	String Orchestra

Unit 1: Composer/Arranger

Antonio Lucio Vivaldi, the most prominent and influential Italian composer of the late Baroque era, was born in Venice, Italy, on March 4, 1678. Vivaldi studied violin with his father, Giovanni Battista (1655–1736), who served as a barber before he became a professional violinist for St. Marco Basilica in Venice. Vivaldi likely received his first composition lessons from Giovanni Legrenzi (1626–1690), an early Baroque composer of opera and instrumental music, who also served as maestro de capella at St. Marco Basilica. Between 1693 and 1703, Vivaldi was trained for the priesthood, but his lifelong illness, probably bronchial asthma, forced him to forever cease the celebration of Mass shortly after his ordination. He continued to practice priesthood and became known as the “Red Priest” of Venice, likely because of his red hair, which was a family characteristic.

In 1703, Vivaldi obtained his first official post as a violin teacher and composer at the Pio Ospedale della Pietà (Devote Hospital of Mercy), an on-and-off appointment that he maintained for the next thirty years in various roles: as violin teacher, director of instrumental music, and paid composer. Often termed an “orphanage,” Ospedale della Pietà was actually a home for

the illegitimate female offspring of noblemen. Vivaldi resigned from his position at the Ospedale in 1740 and moved to Vienna, hoping for the position of court composer in the imperial court under the patronage of Emperor Charles VI, a great admirer of Vivaldi. His plan never came to fruition, as shortly after Vivaldi arrived in Vienna, Charles VI died and Vivaldi himself became gravely ill. Vivaldi died in poverty on July 28, 1741, at age sixty-two and received a modest burial in Vienna.

Although Vivaldi's concertos had a broad influence both on his contemporaries and on composers of future generations—he composed more than 500 concertos, 230 of which are for violin—his creative output also included compositions in nearly every Baroque genre. Vivaldi's music was widely circulated and emulated by his contemporaries, including the great German Baroque composer Johann Sebastian Bach (1685–1750), who transcribed five of Vivaldi's twelve concertos for string instruments, known as *L'estro armónico*—three for harpsichord (Nos. 3, 9, and 12) and two for organ (Nos. 8 and 11).

The arranger for this piece, Bob Lipton, earned a Bachelor of Arts in music education from San Francisco State University. He retired from teaching middle school orchestra and band in 2015. As a tuba player, he has performed with various professional symphonies and the San Francisco 49ers Band. He has published over sixty original compositions and arrangements for string orchestra and concert band.

Unit 2: Composition

This arrangement is based on Vivaldi's enormously influential Op. 3 collection of twelve concertos for string instruments, entitled *L'estro armonico*, named after Concerto No. 11 in D minor. The twelve concertos are organized into four groups of three concertos. Each group starts with a concerto for four solo violins, followed by a concerto for two solo violins, and a concerto for one solo violin. Concerto No. 11 in D minor is scored for two solo violins, strings, and basso continuo. Bach transcribed this piece into his Concerto for Solo Organ in D minor, BWV 596. It is the vigorous third movement of the D minor concerto, "Allegro," that inspired Lipton's arrangement. In this movement, Vivaldi conjoins the violin duet with a rapid exchange of phrases in the cello part before giving the bass line to the violas for a shimmering episode of animated homophony. Lipton used both versions of the piece for this arrangement—Vivaldi's original score for strings and Bach's transcription for solo organ. From Vivaldi's original, Lipton borrowed the call-and-response duet passages and the remarkably lyrical duet, which is played in thirds by the first and second violins. From Bach's transcription, Lipton used a shortened version of Vivaldi's extended sixteenth-note passages and dispersed them among first and second violins, violas, and cellos, giving each section a soloist role.

Unit 3: Historical Perspective

The 1711 publication of Vivaldi's Op. 3, *L'estro armónico*, was a pivotal event in the composer's career. It was his first publication of the genre for which he became most associated—the concerto. The piece was dedicated to Grand Prince Ferdinando of Tuscany. Vivaldi chose to publish this piece with the firm of Étienne Roger in Amsterdam, rather than at home in Venice, possibly to ensure a superior print and wider distribution. The piece became one of the most distributed collections of instrumental music in the eighteenth century.

Vivaldi was the first composer to normalize a three-movement concerto structure (fast–slow–fast), which is regarded as a precursor to the development of the pre-Classical symphony. Although ritornello (“the little thing that returns” or “refrain”) existed since the fourteenth century, Vivaldi was the first to employ the ritornello form in fast movements of his concertos. To his contemporaries, Vivaldi was more important as a virtuoso violinist than as a composer, and his virtuosity was reflected in his music. He freely used special effects (such as pizzicato and muting) while also paying great attention to articulations and bowing nuances. He occasionally used *crescendo* and *diminuendo* dynamics, which was unusual for his time and acted as a precursor to the wider array of dynamics used in the Classical and Romantic eras. Vivaldi was also fond of syncopated rhythms, a common device of Dalmatia and other Slavonic countries neighboring Venice. Like many Baroque composers, Vivaldi extensively used the compositional device known as sequence, in which a single melodic figure is repeated in various related keys.

Vivaldi is best known for his work *The Four Seasons*, a group of four solo violin concertos published in 1725 as part of his Op. 8. This work employed innovative string instrument techniques to depict moods of the four calendar seasons, and it is considered a precursor to nineteenth-century programmatic music.

Unit 4: Technical Considerations

Left-hand technical considerations include: (1) D minor, A minor, D Major, and A Major finger patterns; (2) chromatic scales beginning on A and D notes; (3) shifting to and from third position; (4) alternative fingerings; (5) extensions; (6) octaves; and (7) vibrato for musical expression. Right-hand technical considerations include: (1) on-the-string legato bow strokes for sixteenth-note passages; (2) on-the-string staccato and martelé bow strokes for eighth-note passages; (3) on-the-string staccato bow strokes for groups of two equal-note values in a single, up bow direction; (4) slight separation and accent articulations for syncopated rhythms; and (5) if performing at a faster tempo, off-the-string brushed spiccato bow strokes. To successfully execute gradual *crescendos* from soft to loud, crawl bowing is required—using more bow on up bows than on down bows to gradually approach the frog.

Unit 5: Stylistic Considerations

Employing seventeenth- and eighteenth-century right-hand performance practices will provide students and audience members with a stylistically authentic interpretation of *L'estro Armonico*. Performing on a modern bow requires that sixteenth and eighth notes are played on the string in the upper part of the bow. However, to add a more dramatic quality to fast passages, run and eighth-note accompaniments are played with a brushed spiccato stroke at the balance point of the bow. Note values longer than sixteenths are customarily played with slight separations, while syncopated notes are articulated and spaced. Although Lipton added many dynamic markings that were absent in the original score, including several *fortissimōs* and *mezzo pianos*, dynamics should be performed within a tempered Baroque style. Several sections of the piece are dominated by accent markings, which require a Baroque-style interpretation. It is important to avoid undesirable accents both at the end of phrasal structures and at repeated rhythmic figures. Designating when and where to use vibrato will allow for the addition of nuanced expression.

Unit 6: Musical Elements

MELODY:

L'estro Armonico consists of three primary melodic ideas and variations: (1) a fugue theme characterized by leaps (e.g., mm. 1–3) and chromatics (e.g., mm. 4–6), (2) a ritornello theme characterized by sequential sixteenth-note rhythmic figures organized in a call-and-response manner (e.g., mm. 7–13), and (3) a solo theme characterized by virtuosic bowings and rapid left-hand passages (e.g., mm. 14–20). Each melody possesses a distinct character, requiring students to employ varied bow strokes in various parts of the bow and with assorted dynamics.

HARMONY:

L'estro Armonico is composed in a diatonic harmonic context that is set within a predominantly polyphonic texture. It begins in D minor (mm. 1–14) and sequences down to A minor (mm. 14–23). The key of A Major is established in m. 30 through a series of stylistically unusual modulations (mm. 35–42) before returning to D minor at m. 43. D minor and A Major are then juxtaposed with a call-and-response pattern that dominates the central part of the piece (mm. 43–65). The piece concludes on a D Major chord.

RHYTHM:

In addition to rhythmic patterns typical of the Baroque era (e.g., groups of four sixteenth notes and eighth notes followed by two sixteenth notes), a number of syncopated rhythms (e.g., mm. 20–22 in the double bass part) and off-beat beginnings of rhythmic patterns (e.g., mm. 30–33 in viola and cello parts) are present.

TIMBRE:

Vivaldi's original instrumentation comprises two violin soloists, string orchestra, and basso continuo; however, this arrangement features string orchestra only. Solo materials are primarily distributed among violins and violas, while cellos and double basses perform accompanying materials and simple bass lines. Lower parts performing quarter-note/quarter-rest patterns should not overpower the moving sixteenth-notes patterns distributed among the upper parts.

Unit 7: Form and Structure

L'estro Armonico is composed in a modified ritornello form. Ritornello form is characterized by an alternation of solo and tutti sections—the solo section playing virtuosic episodes and the tutti section playing the ritornello (refrain) part—however, this arrangement does not contain an exchange between solo and tutti parts. A typical ritornello consists of three parts: proposition, elaboration, and conclusion. The elaboration of this arrangement is extended by a dramatic climax.

SECTION	MEASURE	EVENT AND SCORING
Proposition	1–19	Presentation of the fugue theme in second violins followed by first violins and cellos; ritornello theme stated by first and second violins over the ground bass line played by violas, cellos, and double basses; solo theme presented by first and second violins, accompanied by descending rhythmic and melodic motives in cellos.
Elaboration	20–42	Chromatic section of the fugue theme restated in unison by first violins, violas, and cellos, which is juxtaposed over a second violin dotted-quarter-note rhythm and a syncopated double bass chromatic accompaniment; ritornello theme reappears in second violins and violas followed by restatements in various forms by violins; call-and-response rhythmic motive shared by violas and cellos; solo theme restated in homophonic form by first violins and played over a unison eighth-note accompaniment performed by second violins, violas, and cellos; this homophonic section introduces a long <i>crescendo</i> that culminates in the first <i>fortissimo</i> of the piece.

SECTION	MEASURE	EVENT AND SCORING
Climax	43–52	Dramatic stretto exchange among all instruments leading to a climax that culminates in a rapid dynamic contrast going from <i>fortissimo</i> to <i>pianissimo</i> in a span of two measures.
Conclusion	53–end	All three thematic ideas restated in varied forms; all instruments involved in call-and-response; another sharp dynamic contrast leads to a <i>fortissimo</i> and <i>rallentando</i> prior to the final D Major chord.

Unit 8: Suggested Listening

Johann Sebastian Bach:

Concerto for Solo Organ in D minor, BWV 596

Concerto for Two Violins in D minor, BWV 1043

Antonio Vivaldi:

L'estro armónico, Op. 3

The Four Seasons, Op. 8

Unit 9: Additional References and Resources

Heller, K. *Antonio Vivaldi: The Red Priest of Venice*. Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1991.

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