

Bach Festival of Charleston at First (Scots)
"Baroque Chamber Sonatas"
Friday, March 4, 2011, 7:30 p.m

Program Notes
by William D. Gudger

The Baroque sonata was the instrumental counterpart of the vocal aria or duet. In the words of musicologist Manfred Bukofzer, the texture of the sonata emphasizes the "polarity of the outer voices." Thus a treble range instrument (violin, flute, and/or oboe in solo or duet) is set against the "basso continuo." This ubiquitous Baroque accompaniment usually consisted of two instruments, both playing from the composer's bass line: a cello or other melodic instrument, doubled by the left hand of the harpsichordist, whose right hand provides chords not written out but improvised from "figured bass," a numerically labeled method of chord patterns.

In addition, sonatas were sometimes classified either as "da camera" (from the chamber) or "da chiesa" (in the churchly manner). *Da camera* sonatas usually consisted of movements based on dances (whether so labeled or not), while *da chiesa* sonatas emphasized the counterpoint more suitable for the church. However, this distinction was not a strict one, and there was a great deal of cross-pollination. Publication of a set of sonatas often marked a composer's establishing his reputation. Some sets were generic, especially those designed for amateurs, and could use almost any combination of recorders, violins, flutes, or oboes. On the other hand, Italian composers, who like Vivaldi were violinists, often preferred their own instrument; and German composers favored wind instruments. In fact, the newly popular transverse flute (the wooden version of the modern flute, held at angle to the mouth) was known in 18th-century Britain as the "German flute," distinguishing it from the "common" flute, or recorder.

Among the works heard in tonight's concert, Vivaldi's sonata, like his numerous concertos, follows the fast/slow/fast ordering. Most of the remaining works on the program begin with a slow movement, an ordering principle established by the most famous sets of Baroque sonatas, those of Arcangelo Corelli. J. S. Bach's Sonata BWV 1030 was in fact a sonata composed in trio texture, but used only two performers: the two treble parts are taken by a flute and the right hand of the harpsichordist (who here supplies fewer improvised chords), while the left hand of the harpsichord (without cello) is the bass. Tonight we hear a reconstruction of the earlier version of the work, which survives only as a harpsichord part; the oboe was the likely solo instrument.

It is somewhat ironic that Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach composed a flute sonata in Hamburg. During the first part of his career he was virtually chained to the harpsichord at the court at Potsdam where Frederick the Great spent countless hours playing the flute. In Hamburg, Emanuel Bach had wider opportunities to compose all sorts of music as municipal music director, a position in which he followed his godparent Telemann.