

SIX
CONCERTOS

IN SEVEN PARTS

FOR

Four Violins, one Alto Viola, a Violoncello

and a THOROUGH BASS for the

Harpſichord

With general Rules for Playing Iſtrumental

Compoſitions in Parts, but more eſpecially

Calculated for the Uſe of this Work.

Dedicated to

M^{RS} ORD

BY

Charles Awiſon

Organist in Newcastle upon Tine.

OPERA TERZA.

LONDON

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MDCCLI.



Madam,

*Permit me to intreat your
favourable Acceptance of these **Concertos**;
as it will naturally prepare the Publick to receive
them with Candour; and pardon me , Madam, if
at the same time I take the Freedom to recommend
your Elegant Performance; as the best Illustration of
the following Rules so far as they relate to the Force,
Beauties, and Delicacy of true Musical Expression.*

I am, Madam, with great Esteem

Your most Devoted

Humble Servant

Charles Avison.

P R E F A C E

The Introduction of a new Character into this Work, namely, that of the *Mostra*, ✓ or Index, may, perhaps, be judged by some unnecessary, by others, a presumptuous Attempt; it was therefore thought proper in this Place to say something in its Defence and Explanation.

IN all Compositions For instruments in *Parts*, and which are published in separate Books and seldom perused in *Score*, most Performers are frequently at a loss to know the Composer's Design: hence proceed many discordant *Ricercate**, where only the full unmixed Harmony should be heard; another Consequence has been, that for want of some such Character as the *Mostra* above mentioned, the very best Contrivances in a good Composition have often passed undistinguished and neglected. To remedy this Defect, it seems necessary to point out, in each Part, every *leading* and *responsive Fugue*: For which purpose the *Mostra* is placed over the first *Note* of every *accidental Subject*, as well as *principal*; the former being rather more necessary to be thus distinguished, as every Person, capable of performing in Concert, must know the principal Subject wherever it occurs, and therefore will of course give *That* its proper Expression. But the accidental Subjects are, on account of their Variety, much more difficult to be ascertained: Sometimes indeed they are a Part or *Accompaniment* of the *principal*, and then may styled a second, or third Subject, as they are generally repeated, or at least so retouched in the Progress of the Fugue, as render them easily known. But yet there often times other Subjects entirely different from the Principal, as in the Fugues of this Work, and which, being seldom or never repeated, are therefore still more necessary to be marked as above; for having always some peculiar Relation to the other Parts, it is absolutely necessary that they should be justly expressed: And this can only be done by a simple, plain, yet energetick Execution; for whenever a Subject is proposed, it can never, with Propriety, admit of any variation; expression alone being sufficient to give us everything that can be desired from Harmony.

THUS, by a due Observance of the *Mostra*, the Performer will be greatly assisted in comprehending all the Harmony and Contrivances of the Composer, and obtain an Advantage and Pleasure, almost equal to that of playing from the Score.

BY what is said, it appears that this *Mostra* will be of similar use in Music to that of *Capitals*, *Italics*, and other orthographical Illustrations in Writing; and therefore, perhaps, may make the Chance which the Musical Author has for Success, more nearly to that of a Literary one; for it is certain that the former at present lyes under so many additional Disadvantages that whatever serves to lessen or remove any of them will be thought an invention of no trivial Utility. For instance, how often does the Fate of a Concerto depend on the temerarious Execution of a Sett of Performers, who have never previously considered the Work, examined the Connection of its Parts, or studied the Intention of the Whole? Was a Dramatic Author in such a Situation, as that the Success of his Play depended on a single Recital, and that too by Persons thus unprepared, I fancy he wou'd scarce choose to run the Risque, tho' he had been even Mr. Garrick for one of his Rehearses. Yet what the Poet never did, nor ever will venture, the Harmonist is of Necessity compell'd to; and that also frequently, when he has not yet acquired a Character to prejudice the Audience in his Favour, or is in any Situation to prevent their first Censure from Determinate and Final.

THE Author of these Concertos, thoroughly aware of this, thought that the above Expedient, by making his Work more intelligible, might probably secure to it a better

Fate than it wou'd otherwise meet with; and he does not doubt. but if all his Performers will please pay due Regard to the Invention of this Figure, it will be of singular Use in the Execution of this, and other Works of the same Nature; and may promote a manly, and judicious Execution of the *Concerto*, as much as the Marks invented by the excellent Mr. *Geminiani* are of Service for acquiring a gentile, and easy Manner in the *Solo*. To this greatest Master of Instrumental Music (whose inimitable Works ought to have been much more to out Pattern, especially as his Residence has been so long in this Kingdom) the Publick are indebted for several excellent Rules for playing that kind of Composition in Taste: It were to be wished he had extended these also to the *Concerto*; but as he has not, the World will, perhaps, not think the following Directions entirely below their Notice.

BUT to lay down a complete System of rules, is not my Intention; as that wou'd be an Undertaking far beyond my Power to execute, particularly such Rules as require many fine Examples to illustrate all the Graces, both of Harmony and Expression; for these must be drawn from a long and deep Experience in the various Stiles of Music; and which, were they ever so justly explained, are still best acquired by the Ear, from a skillful Performance. I shall therefore only attempt to give some few Hints, which may be of Service in the performing of such *Concertos*, as have pretty nearly an equal Share of Air and Expression in all their Parts.

THE first material Circumstance which ought to be considered in the Performance of this kind of Composition, is the Number and Quality of those Instruments that may give the best Effect.

AND 1st I wou'd propose, exclusive of the four Principal Parts, which must be always complete, that the *Chorus* of other Instruments should not exceed the Number following, viz, six *Primo*, and four *secondo Ripienos*; four *Ripieno Basses*, and two *Double Basses*, and a *Harpichord*. A lesser number of Instruments, near the same Proportion, will also have a proper Effect, and may answer the Composer's Intention; but more wou'd probably destroy the just Contrast which should always be kept up between the *Chorus* and *Solo*: For in this Case the Effect of two or three single Instruments wou'd be lost and overpowered by the Secession of too grand a *Chorus*; and to double the *Primo* and *Secondo Concertino*, or *Violoncello* in the *Solo*, wou'd be an Impropriety in the Conduct of our Musical Economy, too obvious to require anything should be said on that Head. It may be objected, perhaps, that the Number of *Basses*, in the above Calculation, wou'd be found too powerful for the *Violins*; but as the latter Instruments are in their Tone so clear, sprightly, and piercing, and as they rather gain more Force by this Addition, they will always be heard: However, if it were possible, there should be wanting a *Double Bass*; especially in a Performance of full *Concertos*, as they cannot be heard to any Advantage without that NOBLE FOUNDATION of their Harmony. As to *Wind Instruments*, these are all so different in their *Tone* and *Register* from those of the *Stringed Kind*, besides the Irremediable Dissagreement of their rising in their Pitch, whilst others are probably falling; that they should neither continued too long in Use, nor employed but in such Pieces, as are expressly adapted to them; so that in the general Work of *Concertos* for *Violins*, etc. they are almost always Improper; unless we we admit of the *Bassoon*, which, if performed by an expert Hand, in a soft and ready Tone, and only in those Passages that are natural to it, may then be of singular Use, and add Fullness to the Harmony.

DID every Performer consider the *Fort* of his Instrument, and where its best Expression lay, *there* to exert it most; I should but have little Pretence for my present attempt in the ensuing Directions.

2ndly IN the four principal Parts, there ought to be four Performers of almost equal Mastery: As well in regard to *Time*, as Execution; for however easy it may seem to acquire the former, yet nothing shews a Master than a steady Performance throughout the whole Movement, and therefore chiefly necessary in the *leading* Parts. But this Rule is generally neglected by placing one of the worst Hands to the *Tenor*; which, though a Part of little Execution, yet requires so much Meaning and Expression, that the Performer should not only give a fine Tone, (the peculiar Quality of that Instrument) but by swelling and singing of the Notes, and Entering the Spirit of the Composer, know, without destroying the *Air*, where to fill the *Harmony*; and, by boldly pointing the Subject, keep it up with the greatest Energy.

IT is from a Difficulty of finding a Performer, equal to what is required on this Instrument, that I have been induced to throw the principal Points, and Fugues of this Part into the Violoncello, so that a Performance of these Concertos without a Tenor, will not so much Injure the Harmony, or Contrivance, as in other Pieces of this Kind, where the Tenor is frequently an essential Part.

3rdly THE same Rule will serve for all the other Instruments, except the Harpsicord: And as this is only to be used in the Chorus, the Performer will have little else to regard but the striking just Chords, keeping the Time, and being careful, that no jangling Sound, or scattering of the Notes be continued after the *Pause* or *Cadence*. During this Interval of Rest, he should also attend, with utmost exactness, the leading off again the remaining Part of the Movement, then when all the Parts are thus instantly struck, his own may be found to pervade and fill the Whole: And if there are any *Rests* succeeding the *Pause*, his Attention to the leading Instrument will direct him when these are to commence. The same Care is necessary at the return of each *double Strain*, when there are no intermediate Notes to introduce the *Repeat*. In fine, a profound Silence must be always observed, wherever the Composer has intended a general Respit, or *Pause* in his Work. I am the more particular in giving this Caution on to Performers on the Harpsicord, as they are most liable to transgress in this way; because their Instrument, lying so commodious to their Fingers, is ever tempting them to run, like Wild-fire, over the Keys, and thus perpetually interrupt the Performance. As compositions of this Nature are not calculated for the sake of any one Instrument, but to give a grand Effect by uniting many, each Performer ought therefore to consider his particular Province, and so far only to exert himself, as may be consistent with the Harmony and Expression in his Part. Nor let any Lover of Music be concerned if there is but little for him to execute, since he will thence have some leisure for the Pleasure of Hearing: For this reason, the under Parts, in good Compositions, are more eligible to the Performer who wou'd rather enjoy the Whole, than be distinguished alone.

THE Use of *Accicatura** or sweeping of the Chords, and the *dropping* or sprinkling Notes, are indeed some of the peculiar Beauties of this Instrument. But these graceful *Touches* are only reserved for a Masterly Application in the Accompaniment of a fine Voice or single Instrument; and therefore, besides the Difficulty of acquiring a competent Skill in them, they are not necessary in the Performance of full Music.

UNDER this Article, I shall beg Leave to offer an Observation on the Harpsicord Concerto; a Species of Composition but of late Invention, and which, if properly study'd, will admit of considerable Improvements. Hitherto we seem to have mistaken the Property of this Instrument, by not considering what it can, or cannot express. Hence it is, perhaps, that our Composers have run all their Concertos into little else than tedious Divisions; and the Subjects or Ground-work of these, being introduced and repeated by a Chorus of Violins, produce always a bad Effect: Whereas the Violin Parts

shou'd be but a few, and contrived rather as Accompaniments than Symphonies; by which means they may assist greatly in striking out some Kind of Expression, wherein the Harpsicord is remarkably deficient. The same Method, perhaps may be equally proper in the Concertos for the Organ; which being frequently employ'd in other Compositions, and at present so generally approv'd, it may not be admitt to consider it further. For however capable this Instrument may be found to fill or soften the rest, it will nevertheless over power and destroy them, if the Performer is not extremely cautious and tender in the Use of it. I wou'd therefore propose, that the Accompaniments in the thorough Bass shou'd never be struck in Chords with the Right Hand, as upon the Harpsicord, but in all full Parts the leading Subject shou'd be singly touch'd, and the Performer proceed thro' the rest of the Movement with the Left Hand only. For this Reason, no Person whatever shou'd attempt this Instrument in Concertos not expressly made for it, but from the *Score*; and then, if he has Judgement and Discretion sufficient, he may enforce an Expression, and assist every Part throughout the whole Chorus. Yet I cannot dissmis this Article, without once again observing, that the Difficulties of rendering the Organ of that Use in full Concert, which many expect from it, are so various and intricate, that we can never be too careful of the Performers Abilities; who, if thoroughly skilful, will so manage his Instrument, that it may always be heard, but seldom distinguished.

4thly. As in all Concertos, Overtures, etc. where the *Ripieno Parts* are more immediately necessary, the Composer ought to persue some Design in filling each Chorus, and relieving them with Passages, either proper to be heard alone or so contrived as to give a good Effect to the repeated Chorus; so in performing these different Passages, a different Manner must be observed. Thus when the Solo is contrived for the sake of some peculiar Expression, it shou'd then be performed in a Manner suitable to the Genius or Character of the Piece; but always plain, or however with such *Graces* only as may heighten the *Expression* without varying the Time; and which therefore require other Qualities besides an Execution to do them Justice: For this Elegance of Taste, in the Performance of the Solo, consists of not in those agile Motions or Shiftings of the Hand which strike with Surprize the common Ear, but to a fine Ear productive of the most delightful Sensations. Let not the Performer then by an ill judged Execution misapply this Opportunity of shewing his Skill, but let him minutely observe every Alteration of Stile in these remarkable Places: for tho' it is not the Advantage of Instrumental Compositions to be heighten'd in their Expression by the Help of Words, yet there is generally, or ought to be, some Idea of Sense or Passion, besides that of mere sound, conveyed to the Hearer: On that Account, he shou'd avoid all extravagant Decorations, sinse every Attempt of this Kind must utterly destroy whatever Passion the Composer may have design'd to express. And last of all, let him consider, that a more than usual Attention is expected to his principal Part, when all the rest yield it. This Preference, of being distinguished and heard alone.

5thly. IN the Chorus, whether full in all the Parts, or leading by Fugues, the *Violini di Concertino*† shou'd be pointed with Spirit to each Ripieno; these also shou'd be instantly struck, without suffering the first Note to flip, by which Means the always lose their design'd Effect: an Omission which many Performers are guilty of, either thro' miscounting of Rests, or depending upon others; and thus render the whole Performance ragged and unmeaning.

6thly. WHEN Concertos are performed with three or four Instruments only, it may not be admis to play the solo Parts *mezzo Piano*; And to know more accurately where to find them, the first and last Note of every *Chorus* shou'd be ditinguised thus |; and to prevent all Mistakes of pointing the Forte at the wrong Place, *that* also ought to have

the same Mark. By this means the Performer will be directed to give the first Note of every *Chorus* and *Forte* its proper Emphasis, and not suffer the latter to hang upon the Ear, which is extremely disagreeable.

7thly. AS Discords in Music are like Shades in Painting, so is *Piano* like the fainter Parts or Figures in a Picture; bothe which do greatly assist in constituting and supporting the agreeable Variety expected from them. But as in the Case of Music so much depends upon the Taste and Accuracy of the Performer, it is particularly necessary, that a strict Regard be had to the *Piano* and *Forte*; for these, in the Hands of a skilful Composer, are generally so disposed, as to afford a most pleasing Relief; and, when justly executed, give great Beauty and Spirit to a Composition. Yet how often do they pass unobserved, or if at all expres'd, in so careless and negligent manner, as to produce little, if any, sensible difference to the Hearer? It is a common Practisewith those lukewarm Performers, who imagine that diminishing the number of Instruments will answer the same End as softning the whole, to quit their Part when they shou'd rather be all Attention how to mangle it with the utmost Delicacy; trans portin as it were, like the Swell-Organ, the les'ning Sounds to vast Distance, and thence returning with redoubled Strength and Fulness to the *Forte*; ans as this delightful Effect can only be found from a Performance of Many Instruments together, we ought never to omit such Opportunities of Carrying this noble Contrast to its highest Perfection.

8thly. WHEN the inner Parts are intended as Accompaniments only, great Care shou'd be had to touch them in such a manner, that they may never predominate, but be always subservient to the principal Performer, who also shou'd observe the same Method, whenever his Part becomes an Accompaniment; which generally happens in well wrought Fugues and other Pieces, where the Subject and Air are almost equally distributed. When the Attention of every Performer is thus employ'd by listening to the other Parts, without which he cannot do Justice to his own, it is then we may expect to hear from the whole together, all the possible good Effect that can be desired.

Lastly. IN every Part throughout the full Chorus, all manner of Graces, or diminution of Passages, or Transposition of eight Notes higher, must be avoided; which some indiscrete Performers are but too apt to make use of, merely from the desire of being Distinguished, and that the Audience may hear they have so much Execution as to despise the too easy Limits of a natural Melody: But these Gentlemen ought to consider, that by such Liberties they do not only disapoint the expecting Ear of a just Performance of some favourite Part, but often introduce and occasion *Disallowances* in the Harmony. It is, perhaps, from the same ruling Passion we sometimes hear Performers, the Moment a Piece is ended, run over their Instrument, playing a thousand Tricks, as if they rejoiced their Fingers were delivered from the painful Task of performing other Productions than their own. What a dissonant Inteval do these heterogeneous Fancies, oe Excrescences of Music, afford to the experienced Ear, between the fine concerted Movements of a *Corelli* or *Geminiani*! But if these unfeeling Performers have little Delicacy in their Taste, they ought to shew some Regard for others that have.

HOW far the Concertos in question may be thought worthy of a Performance by these Directions, the Author pretends not to determine: They are now out his Power, but he did not suffer them to be so, till he had taken all possible Pains with them, and therefore he hopes that the single Merit of such Pains will at least meet with that Indulgence for its Reward.

S U B S C R I B E R S

TO THIS

W O R K

A.

SIR Jacob Astley, *Bart. of Melton - Constable in Norfolk*
Edward Astley, *Esq. in Norfolk*
Miss Allgood, *of the Riding*
Reverend Mr. Allet, *five Sets*
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Mr. Robert Beaumont, *ditto*
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Mrs. Ord, *three Sets*
Nathaniel Ogle, *of Kirkley, Esq. three Sets*
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The Musical Society at Oxford.

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Rev. Doctor Sharp, *Archdeacon of Northumberland, etc.*
Walter Scot, *of Harding, Esq.*
Rev. Doctor Smith, *Master of Trinity - College, Cambridge*
Mrs. Sheperdson, *of Hall-Garth*
Miss Shaftoe, *of Dunston*
Robert Shaftoe, *of Benwell*
Henry Stephenson, *Esq.*
Rev. Thomas Sharp, *Fellow of Trinity - College, Cambridge*
Mr. Smelt, *of Carlisle*
Mr. Edward Stewart, *Newcastle*
Mr. Mat. Stephenson, *ditto*
Mr. Robert Smart
Master Scot, *Newcastle*
Mr. Solinus
Mr. Joshua Shudi.

V.

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Miss Vane
Mr. P. A Van Hagan, *Rotterdam*

W.

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Lady Widdrington
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Ra. Widdrington, *Esq. two Sets*
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Rev. Mr. Wray
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Mr. Westfield Webb
Mr. John Williams, *jun. Newcastle*
Mr. John Widdrington, *ditto*
Master Mitford Wilkinson, *ditto*
Mr. William Wright, *at Lincoln*
Mr. John Walsh

Y.

The Musical Society in Blake-Street, York



To find the just Cords, in Divisions by Supposition, is, perhaps, one of the most critical Beauties in the Practise of Thorough Bass. But, where there is no Score, or upper Part, to point them out, the unexperienced Performer will be often perplexed: to such, therefore, it may be necessary to observe, that, in all Passages founded on this Rule of the unprepared and transient Discords, the Harmony, which is supposed to follow the Discord, is always melted into the passing Note, and therefore is called Supposition. To elucidate this Difficulty, the following Example is laid down, with the method also of figuring this kind of Division: by which, it will appear that the Cord by the Figure, must be struck to the preceding Note thus marked:

Example

The musical score consists of three staves. The top staff is a treble clef with a key signature of two sharps (F# and C#). The middle staff is a bass clef with a key signature of two sharps, labeled "Division by Supposition." and contains a sequence of notes with figured bass figures: 6, 6, 7, 4, 3. The bottom staff is a bass clef with a key signature of two sharps, labeled "Fundamental Bass" and contains a sequence of notes. The notes in the middle and bottom staves are connected by a brace on the left.