

# Avison

ENSEMBLE

*reviews*

## ARCANGELO CORELLI CONCERTI GROSSI OPUS 6



THE AVISON ENSEMBLE  
PAVLO BEZNOSIUK, DIRECTOR & VIOLIN  
2 CDs on Linn Records, CKD 411

- **Classic FM Drive featured album, 8th - 12th October 2012**
- **Nominated for *MusicWeb International's* Recordings of the Year 2012**

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*... delightfully amiable, effervescent performances*  
*... music of immense suavity and elegance*  
*... a celebration of his colourful music*

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### CLASSIC FM

09 October 2012

A bright album of Baroque music from period instrumentalists, The Avison Ensemble. Drive Featured Album, 8 October 2012

Released to mark the 300th anniversary of Corelli's death, this album from The Avison Ensemble is certainly a celebration of his colourful music. Characterful and cheery, with bright violins accompanied by a solid continuo, the recording on period instruments brings a sweetness in tone and a dance-like levity to these Baroque classics.

The 'Christmas' Concerto may well be the most famous example of Corelli's concerto grosso writing - in the Pastoral movement, he even used folk-like tunes, and sounds evoking bagpipes to conjure images of the Biblical shepherds attending the manger at the birth of Jesus.

But this album offers so much more than the 'Christmas' concerto. There's an astounding variety in the 12 concertos, from dainty minuets to poignant largos. The ensemble capture the magical interplay between the orchestral parts, and

highlight some of the best qualities of Baroque instrumental writing - with a few memorable tunes to boot!

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## **GRAMOPHONE MAGAZINE**

**Iain Fenlon**

01 January 2013

The Avison Ensemble play the most famous Op 6 set of all. Corelli's reputation as one of the presiding geniuses of the early Baroque is extraordinary for being based on such a small output of work, all of it written for instruments, consisting of just six opus numbers, each of which contains 12 works. Few works of the period can match Corelli's Op 6 Concerti grossi in popularity, something of which the composer was clearly aware: beginning in his twenties, Corelli obsessively worked and reworked them throughout his lifetime, refusing to allow them to be published. It was only one year after his death that they were finally brought out in Amsterdam; subsequently they went through more than 10 editions in some 20 years, not to mention innumerable adaptations and rearrangements in the course of the 18th century. Often styled as the foundation stone of the concerto grosso medium, the pieces of Op 6 are structured around the opposition of solo concertino and larger ripieno groups of instruments, an arrangement that was already established in Rome by the time Corelli arrived there.

The hallmark of Corelli's style in these pieces is seemingly endless invention and variety of expressive means, and this is the main challenge in performance. In terms of recordings there is stiff competition here, with the now quite old if iconic recording of Trevor Pinnock and the English Concert well ahead of the field, but these new performances are certainly part of the competition, supple and elegant, perfectly in harmony with the suave if at times austere character of the music and, above all, architecturally shaped with subtlety and finesse. Improvised ornamentation has been added with discretion and care, and the sense of ensemble is faultless and, in the faster movements, breathtakingly impressive.

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## **BBC MUSIC MAGAZINE**

**Kate Bolton**

01 April 2013



This is the first in a projected series of Corelli recordings by the Avison Ensemble marking the 300th anniversary of the composer's death, and what better way to begin than with the iconic Op. 6 Concerti Grossi. Celebrated and emulated across Europe (not least by Handel, who pays homage in his own OP. 6 collection, the centrepiece of the set is the so-called Christmas Concerto - a musical tableau evoking the Nativity, complete with piping shepherds.

Under the assured and affable direction of violinist Pavlo Beznosiuk, the Avison Ensemble eschews the flashy bravura of some of its competitors in favour of a subtle graciousness that seems to capture the essence of Corelli's polished style. They point up the fleet dance rhythms with lightweight bowing and clean articulation, while more expansive playing and measured tempos in the slow movements convey the 'majestic, solemn and sublime' qualities that Corelli's contemporaries so admired. Though there's occasionally a slight edginess to the violin sound, it doesn't seriously detract from otherwise ingratiating performances.

Linn's spacious recording suggests resonant Roman churches and enhances the dramatic textural contrasts between concertino and ripieno groups. And with 5.1 surround sound, you can wallow in true Baroque splendour.

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## **THE SUNDAY TIMES**

**Stephen Pettitt**

14 October 2012

Arcangelo Corelli's 12 Concerti Grossi, Op 6, were published in 1714, a year after the composer's death. They form a cornerstone of later baroque repertoire, renowned for their polished finish, elegant turn of phrase and refined formal balance as much as for their contrasting of texture and dynamic, and their idiomatic string writing. Above all, they are seductively easy on the ear. The Avison Ensemble offer suave, personable performances, allowing this exquisitely engaging music to do its own work.

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## **THE INDEPENDENT**

**Anna Picard**

17 September 2012

Arcangelo Corelli's Concerti Grossi were published posthumously. The composer dubbed "arcomelo" (melodious bow) had achieved considerable success in Italy, but only after his death in 1713 would his music be internationally revered.

What emerges in Pavlo Beznosiuk's supple performance with the Avison is music of immense suavity and elegance - from the enchanting Largo of the 6th, to the tender pastoral of the Christmas Concerto.

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## **BBC RADIO 3 CD REVIEW**

**Andrew McGregor**

27 October 2012

Delightfully amiable, effervescent performances of all twelve concertos recorded with an enjoyable level of warmth and detail. I've enjoyed these a lot ... An early opener for the Corelli anniversary in 2013. And the Avison Ensemble's promising us

a further three Corelli recordings for the 300th anniversary next year; if they're as enjoyable as the Opus 6 concertos I'll certainly be listening.

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## **EARLY MUSIC REVIEW**

**Violet Greene**

01 February 2013

Corelli and Handel's op. 6 are often thought of as comparable sets, but here the performing style is very different from the Handel op. 6 reviewed on p.28. Combattimenti Consort's Handel displays vigour verging on the over-excited (tipping at times into slightly less than perfect intonation), while the Avison Ensemble's playing is never less than silky perfection, impeccably blended sound, and never a hair out of tune. Their interpretation is also faultless and the concertino team of Pavlo Beznosiuk, Caroline Balding, Richard Tunnicliffe, Andrew Skidmore, Paula Chateauneuf and Roger Hamilton are all highly skilled and informed.

[The recordings] are a 'set' in every way and 12 works in the same form by one composer do tend to exhibit which to enjoy the beautiful shaping of phrases in which the ensemble excels. This is still a beautiful disc and the excellent sleeve notes add to its allure.

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## **INTERNATIONAL RECORD REVIEW**

**Marc Rochester**

14 February 2013

Although Corelli worked on them over many years, continually tweaking and amending them right up to the moment when he sent them off to the Amsterdam-based publisher Etienne Roger, he never lived to see the publication of his 12 Concerti grossi, which eventually appeared in 1714, a year after his death, and on which his posthumous reputation largely rests. He seems to have been frustrated with what he regarded as Roger's procrastination in delaying their publication, but as soon as they appeared they rapidly became hugely popular, going through more than 10 editions in 20 years and becoming firmly established in the repertoire of groups across Europe. Nowhere was their popularity stronger than in England, where, as Simon Fleming suggests in his booklet note, the manner in which orchestras were formed for specific concerts, with little or no time available for rehearsal, made them ideal: 'The concert organisers, or other billed performers, would take on the more challenging concertino roles, leaving the orchestral players the simpler ripieno parts.' As with anything which becomes so universally popular, Corelli's Op. 6 Concertos garnered their fair share of imitators, one of the most famous being Handel, who not only wrote his own set of 12 Concerti grossi in direct competition to Corelli's but also published them with the same opus number. The Avison Ensemble recorded the Handel set in 2010 (reviewed in September 2010), so it is certainly high time it tackled its progenitors.

From the first bars of the First Concerto in D, the Avison Ensemble sets its unique seal on the performance, with a delicately treading Largo quickly shifting gear effortlessly into an invigorating Allegro. Possibly the rapid alternation of the slow/fast material here is not helped by these extremes of tempo, which make for a sense of instability, but with the first appearance of the concertino group the music takes on a refreshingly vivid character, much enhanced by the outstanding Linn SACD sound. Pavlo Beznosiuk leads the concertino group very much from the front, occasionally entering into a lively partnership with Caroline Balding - there is a wonderful passage of overlapping violins in the first movement of the Fourth Concerto - and inspiring his team to some tremendous feats of virtuosity. Not to be outdone, the ripieno delivers its voice with impeccable precision, creating, especially in the quicker movements, playing of almost breathtaking clarity. This may on the face of it be relatively simple music, but to deliver it at such high speed with such flawless ensemble is a noble achievement.

It is certainly in the quicker movements that the Avison Ensemble shows its true mettle, and looking down at the list of highlights I had noted for mention, I see that they all come from the fast movements; in short, if it's fast, it's impressive. Among these is the disarmingly intimate organ solo from Roger Hamilton at the end of the slow movement of the Second Concerto. He is playing on a delightful box organ, which also peeps its pipes over the parapet in the Third, Eighth and Eleventh Concertos.

Considering it is not just the most famous of the 12 Concerti Grossi but also the one over which Fleming dwells the most extensively in his booklet notes, it would be amiss of me not to make some mention of the so-called Christmas Concerto, No 8 in G minor. Whether or not it dates back to Christmas Eve 1690, as Fleming suggests, it is only the final 'Pastoral' which has a clear Christmas connection, taking the form of a gently lilting Siciliano with hints of the rustic instruments traditionally associated with shepherds, bagpipes and pipes. The Avison Ensemble gives this movement an utterly enchanting delicacy, more, perhaps, in the manner of an elegant court dance than shepherds celebrating a birth in the fields, but infinitely sweet and charming and a fitting climax in a very impressive pair of discs.

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## **THE IRISH TIMES**

**Michael Dervan**

14 November 2012

Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713), the New Grove tells us, was the first composer to derive his fame exclusively from instrumental composition, the first to owe his reputation in large part to the activity of music publishers, and the first to produce classic instrumental works which were admired and studied long after their idiom became outmoded.

Nowdays, his music seems a little sober beside the volatility of Vivaldi. Yet the Adagio from the second of his Op 6 Concerti Grossi was used by Michael Tippett in

his 1953 Fantasia Concertante in a way that highlights the sheer harmonic adventurousness of which Corelli was capable. The nicely sprung playing of the Avison Ensemble under Pavlo Beznosiuk conveys the music's vitality in a way that manages to be both relaxed and purposefully pointed.

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## **BBC RADIO 3 CD REVIEW**

**Andrew McGregor and Simon Heighes**

10 November 2012

This [recording] does work for repeated listening; I keep coming back to this one for the warmth and the sheer joy of the playing ... I feel these are quite English performances. They are warm, I think that's entirely English, but slightly restrained, but when there is drama in the music ... the Avison Ensemble rises excellently to the challenge. ... It's this simplicity, this gentility of style. They're not over-amping things, no one's pushing, no one's directing ... and they're letting the music flow and speak ... a very good opener to the series.

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## **AUDIOPHILE AUDITION**

**John Sunier**

14 November 2012

Corelli's published works are few, but they impacted European classical music from the mid-1700s thru the early 1800s. In England his works were in high regard and many composers were influenced by them. The dozen Op. 6 Concerti Grossi may be his very best works. Published in 1714, they are some of the finest examples of the baroque concertos which have a concertino group (1st violin, 2nd violin, cello) plus a ripieno group (1st violins, 2nd violins, violas, cellos and continuo). The ripieno largely doubles or reinforces the concertino to produce a chiaroscuro effect. The first eight are considered concerti a chiesa while the last four are concerti da camera. The various short movements that the Concerti Grossi consist of were written at various times and for different occasions. Some involve older works of Corelli, but revised carefully so as to fit seamlessly into the new concerti.

The Concerto No. 8 is subtitled "Fatto per la notte di Natale" and is popularly known as The Christmas Concerto. In its final Pastorale movement Corelli sets a pastoral scene with the biblical shepherds, imitating the drone of their pipes or bagpipes. All the Concerti are highly refined and some have extremely virtuosic parts. Thus they have withstood the ravages of time and remained popular for centuries.

There is only one other SACD set of all the Op. 6 Concerti Grossi on the Brilliant Classics label and it lacks the fidelity and performance level of this set from Linn. However, there is a single PentaTone SACD of selected Concerti Grossi from Op. 6 by Simon Murphy and the New Dutch Academy. Like this one, it uses authentic

instruments and is beautifully performed. It has somewhat richer sonics, spritelier tempi and greater signal on the surround channels, but it is good to have the complete set of the Concerti Grossi on this Linn release. The leader of the Avison Ensemble-Ukrainian/Irish violinist Pavlo Beznosiuk-is quite a virtuosi and keeps this set of the Concerti Grossi at a high level. The hi-res surround recording was just made last year in London. The note booklet is well-written and worth reading.

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## MUSIC WEB INTERNATIONAL

**Brian Wilson**

01 November 2012

Corelli's Op.6 *Concerti grossi* were effectively the model for Vivaldi and his other successors. My introduction to these concerti, some fifty years ago from a Supraphon LP of five or six of them played (as I recall) by ArsRediviva, a group who, despite their impressive Latinate title, were much less in tune with the music of this period than the Avison Ensemble, nevertheless came as much of an epiphany moment, like Keats looking into Chapman's Homer, as my earlier introduction to Bach's Brandenburg Concertos. It's no reflection on that Czech ensemble to describe their performances as heavy - at the time we were listening to meaty performances of Bach and Vivaldi from the Stuttgart Chamber Orchestra and Karl Münchinger and thinking how clever we were to be enjoying such 'rare' early music as the *Brandenburg Concertos* and *Four Seasons*. *Autre temps ...*

Since then there's been a revolution in playing the music of this period and we have had some fine performances of these *concerti grossi*, notably on period instruments.

Now along comes the latest release from the Avison Ensemble whose performances of the music of their namesake on the Divine Art label and subsequent appearances in Handel and Vivaldi on Linn have also received high praise, not least from me:

- **CKD362**: Handel Concerti Grossi, Op.6/1-12 - Download of the Month: July 2010

- **CKD365**: Vivaldi Concerti, Op.8/1-12

On opening my latest parcel of review discs, then, I had the highest expectations on seeing the set of Corelli's Op.6, housed in a gatefold triptych and, as I see, offered at an attractive price - effectively 2-for-1 or even less from some online suppliers. In brief, if you don't yet have a set of these ground-breaking works, or even if you have, perhaps, No.8, the 'Christmas' Concerto, in a collection of similar works, you won't regret buying any of the versions which I've named; the new recording from the Avisons, who have a strong claim to offer the lightest and airiest accounts that I've heard is not least among them. If you want SACD into the bargain, then you can forget about choice and plump for the new Linn set.

We have grown used to some very fast tempi for music of this period, especially from Italian ensembles. While Pavlo Beznosiuk is no slouch, he's certainly no speed merchant either; the *adagio* sections of the first movement of No.7, for example, seem to be taken more slowly than is normal nowadays yet, at 2:27 the time for this movement overall is equal to that on the Marriner recording and surprisingly faster than Pinnock who takes 2:38. For some really airy playing try the finale of this concerto at 1:11, exactly the same time as on the Pinnock recording.

No.8, *fatto per una notte di Natale*, the beautiful 'Christmas' concerto, is the best known of the set. In the *adagio-allegro-adagio* movement of No.8 Beznosiuk adopts a faster overall tempo than Pinnock, Krcek or Marriner, though I never felt any sense of undue haste and the opening *adagio* is given due weight. Again in the *pastorale: largo* where the shepherds of the Nativity are evoked, the new recording doesn't hang around but the mood is well evoked without heavy underlining. You will, I think be disappointed with that tempo only if you're inseparably wedded to the ponderous way that these movements used to be treated, most notoriously by Herbert von Karajan. Karajan takes 5:04 for the *pastorale*, Marriner and McGegan are a shade too fast perhaps at 2:22 and 2:45 respectively; Beznosiuk happily splits the difference at 3:42, with Goodman in close agreement at 3:43 and Pinnock is a shade slower at 4:06. Compromise isn't always the right answer but I'm with Beznosiuk, Goodman and Pinnock here.

The Linn recording is good - truthful without trying to be spectacular - and the booklet of notes does justice to Corelli's music. The SACD stereo layer adds greater depth to the sound picture without adding heaviness. Linn have recently kindly supplied me with both SACD and 24/96 download versions of three of their recent recording and, though this Corelli set was not among them, and I've heard only the SACD, I have no doubt that the downloads, especially the 24-bit versions, are equally recommendable.

The best news of all is that this is apparently the harbinger of a complete series of Corelli's chamber music from the Avison Ensemble. I look forward with anticipation to what is to follow. The new set stands as a strong alternative for those looking for SACD.

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## SA-CD.NET

Larsmusik

18 January 2013



Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713) published relatively few compositions during his lifetime - in fact the Opus 6 Concerti Grossi were brought out a year after his death - but his influence over composers of the late Baroque Era was unprecedented. Many of the techniques we associate more with others, such as the chains of melodic sequences at the heart of so many Vivaldi concerti, were more likely his



inventions. He also made extensive use of suspensions, those sweetly dissonant combinations of tones formed when the harmony shifts under a sustained note.

These concerti feature a solo trio of two violins and cello, accompanied and augmented by a string orchestra (here 3/3/2/1/1) and continuo, including both keyboards - harpsichord or organ - and archlute, beautifully played by Roger Hamilton and Paula Chateauneuf respectively. Some of the concerti are scored so simply that they could in fact be played by the solo trio alone, but even the simplest pieces gain some depth and varied shading from the alteration of solo passages with ritornelli, antiphonal exchanges, and echoes from the full ensemble.

The well-established Avison Ensemble employs period instruments, and their performances of the entire cycle are quite sensitive: meltingly lyrical in the slow movements and full of life in the faster ones. They also embellish when appropriate, but it is worth noting that Corelli conceived this as ensemble music, and as such it does not offer the sorts of opportunities for solo display, including wholesale improvisation, that abound in the solo sonatas. Nevertheless the transitions between movements, the cadential trills, and the occasional repetitions that lend themselves to ornamentation are handled with considerable skill - and not just by leader Pavlo Beznosiuk but also by Mr. Hamilton at the Loosemore box organ, for example.

The recording seems near-ideal to me. It offers a resonant church acoustic, more wood than stone, that supports the low strings without ever swamping the vivid sound of the violins and violas. There is a nice "spread" to the orchestral layout, and one is always able to distinguish easily between the solo trio and the whole group. One remains conscious of the continuo players' contributions throughout, but they are never mixed too far forward in the presentation.

This music charms by its simplicity, which is only further enhanced through the seasoned musicianship of the Avison Ensemble. Strongly recommended.

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## **CODAEX**

**Nils-Christian Angel**

23 October 2012

Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713) war zweifellos einer der „Top-Stars“ im Italien der Barockzeit, und wenn er heute auch nur für einen relativ kleinen Teil seiner Werke berühmt ist: er ist es doch immer noch, und zwar in denkbar weiten Kreisen! So schön und eingängig seine Musik ist, so gewiss ist sein historischer Rang als ein Künstler, der die europäische Musikgeschichte entscheidend geprägt hat. Corelli, der ja nicht „nur“ Komponist, sondern auch ein herausragender Violinist war, hinterließ seine Spuren in der Entwicklung der Violintechnik, die sogar die Geigenbaugeschichte messbar beeinflussten. Sein kompositorisches Vermächtnis aber wird man zuerst in Op. 6 zu suchen, den Concerti Grossi, mit denen Corelli Gattungsgeschichte geschrieben und eine - bis heute ganz zu Recht populäre -

Summe seiner Kunst formuliert hat. Schon die biographischen Umstände sprechen dafür, diesen wohlbekannten zwölf Konzerten doch immer wieder neue Aufmerksamkeit zu widmen: Während ihre Entstehung bis in die frühen 1680er zurückreicht, setzte Corelli die Kraft seiner letzten Jahre in ihre Überarbeitung, die in ihrer posthumen Veröffentlichung im Jahre 1714 ihr Ziel fand. Nun hat das Avison Ensemble unter der Leitung des Violinisten Pavlo Beznosiuk dieses Testamentent, das zu den strahlendsten seiner Art gehört, als Ausgangspunkt für eine komplette Einspielung der Kammermusik Arcangelo Corellis gewählt, die bei dem audiophilen englischen Label Linn Records erscheint. Gelungen ist ihnen, das sei gleich verraten, ein begeisternder, fulminanter Aufbruch ins Corelli-Jahr 2013, in dem sich der Tod des Maestro zum 300. Mal jährt.

Wie bereits vor zwei Jahren, als das Avison Ensemble mit den Concerti Grossi von Georg Friedrich Händel überzeugte (s. die Rezension von Sal Pichireddu), hebt sich auch diese Einspielung wohltuend von allen denkbaren Klischees ab, die man von Interpretationen auf Originalinstrumenten haben mag. In recht kleiner, aber nicht zu kleiner Besetzung entwickeln die durchweg exzellenten Musiker genau die richtige Dosis an Kraft, um eine pulsierende, strahlende Interpretation auf den Weg zu bringen, die absolut nichts an Präzision und Klarheit vermissen lässt. Zupackend und von großer Spielfreude beseelt kommt der hohe Gänsehautfaktor dieser Musik zum Tragen, aber nie zu Lasten jener Genauigkeit im Detail, mit der Beznosiuk und seine Mitstreiter den ebenso weiten wie perfekt ausbalancierten Einfallsreichtum Corellis herausarbeiten.

Das Booklet der hübsch aufgemachten Ausgabe bietet einen längeren, lesenswerten englischen Text von Simon D. Fleming über Werk und Komponist, in dem vielleicht noch ein paar Details zu den einzelnen Concerti gut aufgehoben gewesen wären. Darüber hinaus aber, und das ist mehr als eine schöne Nebensächlichkei, werden alle Instrumente namentlich vorgestellt, die auf dieser Doppel-CD erklingen, und unter denen sich erstaunlich viele barocke Arbeiten unserer Zeit finden. Als Geigenbauer kann man sich kaum eine bessere Referenz wünschen, und so sei diese Veröffentlichung auch denjenigen Musikern ans Herz gelegt, die auf der Suche nach einem hervorragenden neuen Instrument alter Bauart sind.

Aber nicht nur deshalb bin ich versucht, diese CD zu einer Muss-Anschaffung für aktive Streicher zu erklären. Ihre enorme Frische wird jedem gut tun, der sich an der Interpretation der Concerti Grossi versucht - und das sind gerade in der Weihnachtszeit, zu deren „Hits“ das Concerto Nr. 8 in g-Moll ‚fatto per la Notte die Natale‘ (zu Deutsch für die Weihnachtsnacht gemacht) gehört, ja traditionell nicht wenige. Die besondere CD, erschienen im September 2012.