2025
YORK
EARLY
MUSIC
FESTIVAL

# Academy of Ancient Music

*Concerto Heaven*

**Sir Jack Lyons Concert Hall**

**Friday 11 July** 7.00pm

# Academy of Ancient Music

**Bojan Čičić** *director & violin*

## *Concerto Heaven*

## **Johann Sebastian Bach** 1685-1750

**Ouverture no. 3 in D major, BWV1068**
(possible original version for strings)

1. *Ouverture*
2. *Air*
3. *Gavottes I & II*
4. *Bourrée*
5. *Gigue*

**Violin Concerto in A minor, BWV1041**

1. *[Allegro]*
2. *Andante*
3. *Allegro assai*

**Violin Concerto in E major, BWV1042**

1. *Allegro*
2. *Adagio*
3. *Allegro assai*

**Violin Concerto in D minor, BWV1052R**

1. *Allegro*
2. *Adagio*
3. *Allegro*

## Concertos (to come)

Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* – the 300th anniversary of whose publication we have been celebrating at this year's Festival – is today one of the world's most familiar pieces of western classical music. But in the first half of the eighteenth century it was not just the exuberant evocations of a year in the Italian countryside and the visceral uplift of a coursing string-sound that made Vivaldi such an admired and influential composer; it was also what he had already achieved in the development of the structural model that sustained these brilliant tone poems – the so-called 'ritornello-form' concerto. The crucial works in this regard were his op. 3 concerto collection, published fourteen years before the *Four Seasons* under the title *L'estro armonico* (loosely relatable in English as 'harmonic spark'), which spread Vivaldi's reputation across Europe and stamped his influence on the development of the solo concerto. 'As musical pieces of a kind which was then entirely new to me,' wrote the Berlin composer Johann Joachim Quantz several decades later, 'Vivaldi's splendid ritornelli served as good models for me in later days'.

Bach's first encounter with Vivaldi's music seems to have been in his late twenties, during the time of his employment as an organist at the court of the Dukes of Weimar. One member of the ducal family, Prince Johann Ernst, was a keen musician, and in 1713, on returning from a two-year stay in the Netherlands with copies of the latest Italian violin concertos in his pack, he persuaded Bach to arrange them for solo keyboard (without orchestra). In total Bach made 23 of these transcriptions, most of them of Vivaldi, and while he is not known to have written any original concertos of his own while at Weimar, some of his later examples may have had their first stirrings around this time.

In 1717 a new stage in Bach's career began when he took up the appointment of musical director for Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Cöthen. The Cöthen court was Calvinist, meaning that music was not required in church and that, encouraged by his otherwise music-loving employer, Bach was able to focus his activities on instrumental works. This was the time of the superb and richly varied Brandenburg Concertos, written for the Prince's small but expert orchestra, and it is possible that the two violin concertos, BWV1041 and BWV1042, come from this period too. An equally strong case, however, can be made for them having been composed in Leipzig, to which Bach moved in 1723 to take up the post of music director at the city's main churches. The earliest written material we have for either of them was copied around 1731, making it plausible that they were provided for performance at the gatherings of Leipzig's Collegium Musicum, the concert-giving society Bach directed throughout most of the 1730s.

Most of Vivaldi's 230-or-so violin concertos are in three movements, in the fast-slow-fast pattern that was to remain the norm for the solo concerto for more than two centuries. Within the movements a clear differentiation was made between the freely virtuosic melodic material for the soloist and the sturdier stuff given to the orchestra, which usually consisted of a recurring theme (known as the 'ritornello') that would appear several times through a movement in a succession of keys to form a framework on which the solos can hang. Bach's adherence to this elegantly lucid and satisfying format was almost total, but by way of refinement he often liked to blur the thematic distinctions between the ritornellos and the solos, using motivic fragments from the main orchestral themes to enrich the solos with a running commentary of ingenious accompanimental detail.

That much is evident in the first movement of the A minor Concerto, BWV1041, particularly in the persistent reminiscences of its bouncing opening figure. In the slow movement a steadfastly repetitive bass supports and punctuates a serene monologue for the solo violin, its line floated in a near-constant stream of slow triplets. Faster triplets then dominate the finale, a cheerful gigue of stealthily gathering momentum further enlivened by passages of *bariolage* for the soloist, in which the same note is repeated on alternating strings. The ebullient first movement of the E major Concerto, BWV1042, likewise utilises motifs from the main theme to accompany the soloist, but is less conventional in its formal outline, being cast in the three-part, A-B-A shape reminiscent of a Baroque aria (though stylistically the three 'hammer blows' of its opening are thoroughly Vivaldian). The slow central movement is similar to that of the A minor, if a touch more dreamy, and the concerto ends, unusually for Bach, with a rondo-like movement in which the orchestra's five statements of the ritornello are separated by short but excitedly inventive interludes for the soloist.

The true dating of these violin concertos may be a relatively simple case of either-or, but many Bach scores as we know them today had much more complicated births. Take the work known today as the Harpsichord Concerto in D minor, BWV1052. Its final version was prepared in the late 1730s, almost certainly for use at the Collegium Musicum, yet we find earlier manifestations of all three movements – for organ soloist instead of harpsichord, and with added oboes – distributed between two Leipzig church cantatas of the 1720s. Is BWV1052, then, a 'new' concerto pulled together from these separate cantata sections, or did it exist even before that as a three-movement concerto? And if the latter, when was it written, and for what solo instrument? Considering the work's frequent keyboard imitation of violinistic idioms such as *bariolage* and arpeggiated chords, the long-held view has

been that it started life as a violin concerto, one that may well have reached back as far as Bach's days in Cöthen, or perhaps (some have suggested) Weimar. More recently scholars have questioned this attribution, favouring the organ as the original soloist, but Bojan Čičić prefers to keep an open mind, admitting on the one hand that 'playing semi-quavers for almost a whole movement is somewhat foreign to the style of writing for violin', but suggesting on the other that 'Bach might been pleased with the fact that we play his music on different instruments from the ones he originally chose, a practice he expected from his students when he gave them (for example) his own Sonatas and Partitas for solo violin to arrange for keyboard, as he himself so often did.'

Whatever the facts of the matter, this is one of the most powerful of Bach's concertos, with a robust virtuosity and undemonstrative but persistently demonic quality in the outer movements, as well as a brooding seriousness in the central one (in the cantata it accompanies a chorus singing about entry into the kingdom of God through tribulation), that have long made it the most frequently performed of the Bach keyboard concertos.

**But first, the Ouverture**

The repertoire that Bach performed at the Collegium Musicum is not known for certain, but probably also included his four surviving orchestral suites (also known as 'ouvertures'), a form with origins in French dance music that was much in vogue in Germany at the time. It is not known precisely when they were composed, but the earliest source for the one known as no. 3 dates from 1731, and is a set of orchestral parts in which the first violin was written out by the composer while the others were copied by other members of his household. This is just the kind of thing to alert scholars to the possibility that the piece was not new, and further speculation has been prompted by the fact that the oboe parts mainly double what the strings are playing while the trumpets and drums, despite contributing so strikingly to the work's sound-world, nevertheless have the look of optional 'add-ons'. In fact, the work is perfectly coherent played by strings alone, thus raising the possibility that it previously existed in a version for just this scoring. We will never know unless a copy turns up, but in the meantime we can certainly listen to it in this putative original form with the wind parts left out (as we do tonight) and enjoy the fine detail of its counterpoint and construction, from the pomp and majesty of the Ouverture, to the exquisitely delivered melody of the famous Air, to the running Gigue which ends the work in a simple gladness that could easily have earned it the same title as its counterpart in the Fourth Ouverture: 'Réjouissance'.

## Academy of Ancient Music

**Bojan Čičić** *director & violin*

James Toll, Liz MacCarthy, Alice Earll, Davina Clarke,
Stephen Pedder, Valentín Sánchez Piñero *violins*
Thomas Kettle, Joanne Miller *violas*
Carina Drury, Imogen Seth-Smith *violincellos*
Judith Evans *double bass*
Stephen Farr *harpsichord*

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Beyond the concert hall, AAM is committed to nurturing the next generation of musicians and music-lovers through our innovative side-by-side learning and participation initiative, *AAMplify*. Working with music colleges and universities across the UK, we engage the next generation of period instrumentalists with side-by-side sessions, masterclasses and other opportunities designed to bridge the gap between the conservatoire and the profession, safeguarding the future of historical performance.

AAM proudly holds the position of Associate Ensemble at London's Barbican Centre and the Teatro San Cassiano, Venice, and Orchestra-in-Residence at the University of Cambridge and The Apex, Bury St Edmunds.

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## Bojan Čičić

Croatian-born violinist Bojan Čičić has established himself as one of the leading names on the early music scene, as both a soloist and music director. In addition to being the leader of the Academy of Ancient Music, he directs ensembles including Lyra Baroque Orchestra, De Nederlandse Bachvereniging, Dunedin Consort, Slovenian Philharmonic Orchestra and Phion Orkest van Gelderland & Overijssel. As a soloist he has appeared with Academy of Ancient Music, Orchestra of the 18th-Century, Kioi Hall Chamber Orchestra Tokyo and Orquesta Barocca de Sevilla. In May 2025 he was appointed as the Artistic Director of the Lyra Baroque Orchestra in St Paul, Minnesota.

Bojan formed his own group, Illyria Consort, which explores and specialises in lesser-known repertoire of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Their debut Delphian Records album of *Giovanni Stefano Carbonelli: Sonate da camera* achieved great critical acclaim and won Presto Recordings of the Year Award in 2017. A collaboration with Marian Consort titled *Adriatic Voyage* won the same award in 2021. The same year saw the release of *Pyrotechnia: Fire & Fury from 18th-century Italy* featuring Italian virtuoso violin concertos by Vivaldi, Tartini and Locatelli. In 2022, Illyria Consort released the first-ever complete recording of Johann Jacob Walther: *Scherzi da violino solo*, as well as an album of Christmas instrumental music titled *La Notte*. Their latest release of *Heinrich Biber: Violin Sonatas 1681* was named the Recording of the Month in the *Gramophone* magazine.

Bojan's recording *JS Bach: Sonatas and Partitas* was nominated for the Critic's Choice 2023 in the *Gramophone* magazine and Editor's Choice in BBC *Music Magazine.*

In 2016, Bojan was appointed Professor of Baroque Violin at the Royal College of Music, and is passionate about training the next generation of instrumentalists in historically-informed performing styles.

bojancicic.com

# YORK EARLY MUSIC FESTIVAL

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