

THE CONCERTO

What is a Concerto?

A concerto is a piece for a soloist or group of soloists and an orchestra.

Mendelssohn's Violin Concerto, Rachmaninov's piano concertos, Elgar's Cello Concerto and Vivaldi's Four Seasons concertos are among the more popular concertos performed today.

Concertos are normally made up of three movements.

Concertos often include very demanding and technically difficult passages for the soloist

17TH CENTURY

In the early Baroque period, the Italian style of composition became highly fashionable and many composers sought to emulate it by composing pieces in which voices and instruments (normally string or wind instruments) were given standalone parts rather than just doubling the music played by the orchestra. The term *concerto*, however, was used at the time to mean sacred works for voices and orchestra.

18TH CENTURY

By the start of the 18th century it was generally established that concertos were in three movements, normally with fast first and third movements and a slow second movement. During the 18th century the *cadenza* was also introduced. A *cadenza* is a passage played by the soloist while the orchestra remains silent, usually very technically demanding and designed to show off the soloist's skills.

POST 19TH CENTURY

Composition became far more experimental in the 20th and 21st centuries with exotic influences and innovative ideas being introduced. Notable contributors include Shostakovich, Berg, Schoenberg and Szymanowski.

How did the concerto evolve?

LATE 17TH CENTURY

In the late-Baroque period, a new form of concerto developed, which the Italian composer Archangelo Corelli eventually termed *concerto grosso*. This new form involved a *concertino* — a group of solo instruments and a *ripieno* — the rest of the orchestra, and was typically either a church concerto (*concerto da chiesa*) or a chamber concerto (*concerto da camera*).

Handel and Bach were among the greatest composers of *concerti grossi*, with Bach's famous *Brandenburg Concertos* largely following the form.

19TH CENTURY

Concertos in the 19th century, Romantic period of music, tended to feature large orchestras and challenging solo parts, with *cadenzas* now written by the composer rather than improvised, as they had been in the 18th century.



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The first concerto ever to be recorded was Grieg's Piano Concerto. However, the limits of technology at the time meant that only a few minutes could be captured.

Playing Rachmaninov's piano concertos are quite a stretch for many pianists because the composer had extraordinarily large hands.

The Lithuanian composer Mindaugas Piečaitis wrote a concerto called *CATcerto* for a piano-playing cat called Nora.