

## The Concerto

(Antonio Vivaldi)

### Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

- ▶ Italian conductor, composer, violinist and teacher
- ▶ He was the general superintendent of music at the Conservatory of the Pietà in Venice, Italy
  - ▶ These conservatories were founded to shelter orphans and illegitimate children, and musical training was part of the curriculum
- ▶ Vivaldi's concertos were primarily composed for talented students in the conservatory
- ▶ Vivaldi wrote about 425 concerti for one or more soloists (many with virtuosic violin solos)
  - ▶ His opus 8 contains the famous *Four Seasons* concertos

### The concerto

- ▶ One of the most important styles of instrumental music to emerge during the Baroque period is the concerto
- ▶ A *concerto* is a type of piece in which a soloist (or group of soloists) is pitted against a large group of instruments
- ▶ In the concerto, the soloist alternates with the whole orchestra (called *tutti*)
- ▶ When there is more than one soloist, the concerto is called a *concerto grosso*
- ▶ In the *concerto grosso*, the solo group is called the *concertino* (and the *tutti* group is sometimes called the *ripieno*)

### Ritornello form

- ▶ The late Baroque concerto is in *ritornello form*
- ▶ In ritornello form, solo sections alternate with recurring ritornellos played by the *tutti* group
- ▶ There are different kinds of contrasts in ritornello form:
  - ▶ Contrasts of forces: alternation between *tutti* and solo sections (normally there are four or five such alternations)
  - ▶ Contrasts of key: the first and last ritornelli are in the tonic key, with internal ritornelli and solo sections being in a number of related keys
  - ▶ Contrasts of material: the ritornello sections feature the same material at each return (although not all of the music returns each time—some ritornelli are shortened); by contrast, the solo sections may draw on the material of the ritornelli (often in ornamented, virtuosic variations), or they may introduce completely new materials

### Analysis of ritornello form

- ▶ An effective way to analyze ritornello form is to create a diagram with four columns labeled "section," "measures," "key areas," and "thematic material"
  - ▶ In the "section" column, we label the ritornello and solo sections as R1, S1, R2, etc.
  - ▶ The "measures" column gives the starting measure of each section
  - ▶ The "key areas" column lists the key or keys of each section
  - ▶ The "thematic material" column is used to describe the thematic materials used in each section (including information about harmonic sequences)