

The Trio Sonata

(Arcangelo Corelli)

The trio sonata

- ▶ A *sonata* was originally a piece of music that was meant to be played (*sonata*) rather than sung (*cantata*)
- ▶ The trio sonata was a piece of instrumental chamber music (originating in Italy) written on three lines but requiring *four* performers
 - ▶ The top lines were written for two melodic instruments
 - ▶ The lower line was played by the *continuo*: a keyboard player (who filled in the chords above this line) doubled by a bass viol player (similar to a cello)
- ▶ There were two main types of trio sonatas
 - ▶ Those played at church (*sonata da chiesa*)
 - ▶ Those played in the “chamber” at court (*sonata da camera*)

Church sonata vs. chamber sonata

- ▶ The church sonata (*sonata da chiesa*) and the chamber sonata (*sonata da camera*) did not always sound all that different from one another, but here are a few commonly cited differences between them
 - ▶ The church sonata is typically in four movements with the order *slow-fast-slow-fast*
 - ▶ The church sonata often has a fugue in it somewhere and tends to be more serious
 - ▶ The church sonata often uses the organ in the continuo
- ▶ The chamber sonata more often has dance movements in it (such as the *gigue*)
- ▶ The chamber sonata may have any number of movements, often beginning with a freer introductory movement

Corelli's trio sonatas

- ▶ Corelli's trio sonatas were extremely influential
- ▶ Many stereotypically-Baroque patterns originated in Corelli's sonatas, which were imitated by many other composers
- ▶ One important development was the use of sequences, logical modulations, and repetition to generate greater length
- ▶ Other characteristics:
 - ▶ Chains of suspensions in the upper melodic voices
 - ▶ “Leap-frogging” (frequently crossing) upper voices
 - ▶ Purposeful walking bass lines
 - ▶ Harmonic sequences that go around the circle of fifths
 - ▶ Descending parallel sixth chords
 - ▶ The “Corelli clash” (the tonic and the leading tone sounding together at the cadence)