

## ***Double Concert in F Major by Antonio Soler***

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**Abstract:** *In his vast creation, Soler mirrors a complex and visionary thinking. The work we are analyzing is the 4th Solerian concert, which imagines a majestic picture. It is one of the six concerts for two bound organs destined for the infant of Spain, their festive character not being accidental. From the very beginning, Soler guides in finding the right tempo to create the royal atmosphere. It should be noted that this concert is the only one of the six with an anacrusis profile. In part 2, Soler greets us with Minué, the refinement and gallant style of the beloved dance developing during 4 variations. As a whole, this concert is a real jewel of instrumental complexity in a balanced construction of expressive richness. Noble, singable and virtuoso, Soler's complex language capitalizes on the three facets of the artist who brings them on stage: the expressive performer, the virtuoso instrumentalist and the inquisitive musician.*

Key-words: *double concert, keyboard instruments, organ, Soler, variation*

### **1. Introduction**

A prominent figure in eighteenth-century Spanish musical history, both as a composer and organist, and as a pedagogue and theorist, Father Antonio Soler (1729-1783), the "cheerful and solitary" priest (Encyclopaedia Universalis 1990, 796) mirrors in his vast creation a complex and visionary thinking. Set in the Spanish atmosphere of Escorial, its language abounds with elements specific to the music of the Iberian space. The strong rhythm and the Spanish baroque ornament are intertwined with the antiphonal style. The preclassic construction of the musical idea meets the gallant style - despite the fact that the Escorial "had an austere and religious destination" (Gautier 1983, 116) – the specific counterpoint of the polyphonic discourse is acquainted with the new breath brought to music by

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the accompanied song, a germ that will splendidly fruit with the great classics. Soler anticipates this direction in which music will evolve in the next century, and the 6 concerts dedicated to the keyboard duo bring subtle but valuable and indisputable evidence in this regard. A musicologist and performer alike, he discovers in the pages of these musical jewels a special thinking that is reflected in a particularly refined mix in the dance of the two keyboard instruments, be they organs, harpsichords, clavichords or pianos.

## **2. Concert no. 4, in F Major, for two bound pipe organs – stylistic coordinates**

The choice of this concert was not accidental but came as a natural continuation after performing in 2014, together with pianist Viniciu Moroianu, in a national premiere for the first time in Brasov, the complete double concerts for keyboard instruments, composed by Padre Soler.

Built in two movements - *Afectuoso - Andante non Largo and Minué* - concert no. 4 invites us through its magnificent debut theme to a return in time in the imposing atmosphere of the imperial court. The six concerts for two bound organs were "destined for Prince Gabriel" (Larousse 2000, 458), the infant of Spain, their festive character not being accidental. In the edition edited by M. S. Kastner, the one I used, it is specified that the concert can also be performed on "two harpsichords, clavichords, pianos or an organ and a harpsichord" (Soler 1972). Taking this into account, during the work we will also use in addition to the term organ that of keyboard instruments or keyboard.

### **2. 1. Part 1: *Afectuoso – Andante non Largo***

From time immemorial, Soler opens the doors of the auditorium. The audience watches the imposing picture with the eyes of a courtier. In the silence of the second keyboard, in whose pause we find ourselves following the balanced and majestic steps of the debut phrase, Soler's music makes its entrance dressed in F Major. We see it stepping elegantly and firmly, discreetly ornamented, with the balanced step of the ostinato bass (Figure 1).

Fig. 1. Soler – Concert for two bound organs no. 4, p. I, meas. 1-4

From the very beginning, Soler guides in finding the right tempo to create the royal atmosphere, tempering a possible boost that "alla breve" could induce for the performers: *Andante non Largo*. In addition, the composer gives the instrumentalists a fine landmark of interpretation, that *Afectuoso* with *Mozartian Amoro*so iridescences. It should be noted that this concert is the only one of the six with an anacrusis profile, the punctuated rhythm of the auftakt projecting with emphasis the first beat. In strong contrast, the response of the second keyboard opens the dance, a richly ornamented courant, suggested by the rhythmicity of the successions of triolets. Both instruments evolve together, thus creating a wide sound in which we distinguish a kind dialogue, based on repetition. Thus, the message that Soler conveys to us is that of consensus and not of debate, as in the case of question-answer dialogues (Figure 2).

Fig. 2. Soler – Concert for two bound organs no. 4, p. I, meas. 4-6

Master of modulation, Soler takes us naturally to a new chamber of his sound edifice. Through the mosaic game of motifs unpretentiously processed by

sequencing and repetition in the upper octave, taken from one keyboard to another, the dominant tonality towards which the Solerian discourse directs us asserts itself more and more intensely. However, beyond the transient role of the bridge, a tireless performer in search of the meanings encrypted in the writing discovers a melody in which a true musical idea is clothed. The importance that the composer attributes to the bridge and especially to this musical idea is even more obvious, first of all by the fact that it resonates only in the exposition, not in the half. It is a dialogue in which the partner's pause speaks beyond words about the admiration for the melody that evolves in the light of the tonal contrast between the basic key of F Major and the dominant C Major (Figure 3).

The image displays a musical score for two bound organs, measures 10 through 16. The score is presented in two systems. The first system (measures 10-12) features a treble staff with a melodic line containing triplets and a bass staff with a supporting line. The second system (measures 13-16) continues the piece, showing a more complex texture with multiple voices in both staves, including triplets and dynamic markings like 'mf' and 'f'. The key signature is one flat (F Major), and the time signature is common time (C).

Fig. 3. Soler – *Concert for two bound organs no. 4, p. I, meas. 10-16*

As we deepen the Solerian universe as revealed in this part of the concert, the evidence of the way to the homophonic construction and the opening of new horizons that culminates in the bithematism of the classical sonata becomes undeniable. By the way he constructs the secondary theme (starting with measure 17) and the culmination of this section, Soler anticipates the Viennese classics, Haydn and Mozart. Supported by the expansive C Major and the figurative accompaniment, this theme shines (Figure 4).



Fig. 4. Soler – Concert for two bound organs no. 4, p. I, secondary theme, meas. 16 – 19

What Soler creates in the following measures of the concert in F Major is visionary: the idea (concept) of development. Short but intense. Hidden from sight and hearing in the first phase. A real theatrical hit directed by a brilliant master, who keeps under the playful sign of the serene lines between the two keyboards a temperamental getaway to E flat Major, full of virtuosity and tension. The writing changes suddenly, from the calm quarters with which the second instrument responds to the anacrusis motif of the concert's debut, (with which it concludes the first section, thus showing a unitary thinking), to transport the listener for a moment in the middle of a concert with soloist and orchestra. The modulating course is very intense, the tones transiting quickly, so to fully enjoy this complex and special moment, performers and public alike feel the desire to return to it, to listen to it again and again (Figure 5a and b).



Fig. 5a. Soler – Concert for two bound organs no. 4, p. I, bridge with development role, meas. 25 – 28



Fig. 5b. Soler – *Concert for two bound organs no. 4, p. 1, bridge with specific features of the development, meas. 29-33*

The theme with which the half opens, the same theme that once entered the scene imagined by Soler, will not be the same. Maybe here, in the half, we can feel that *Afectuoso* more pregnant? And perhaps it was precisely because of the tension of a modulation that was not glimpsed, but which remained alive in the listener's memory, that Soler wanted a half without a bridge, thus coming out of the symmetry prefigured in the exposition? These are questions to which Soler proposes a predictable answer, knowing the baroque sonata: the tonal consensus, specific to this section. The refined fabric of the secondary theme brings us back to the basic sonority, with the same pirouettes of trills and a brilliant ending.

## 2. 2. Part 2: Minué

Remaining in the atmosphere of the imperial court, Soler greets us with Minué, the refinement and gallant style of the beloved dance taking place during 4 variations. The dance starts in unison, in the same moderate and balanced step of the quarters, reminiscent of the opening of the concert. Interesting how Soler uses isorhythmia to "place" the inner pulsation of the phrase, thus transmitting to interpreters in a cerebral way an abstract and subjective concept. We notice the dissonance created by the small nona interval on the first beat of the second measure, appearing surprisingly from the stable consonance of the unison at the octave with which the dance opens (Figure 6).

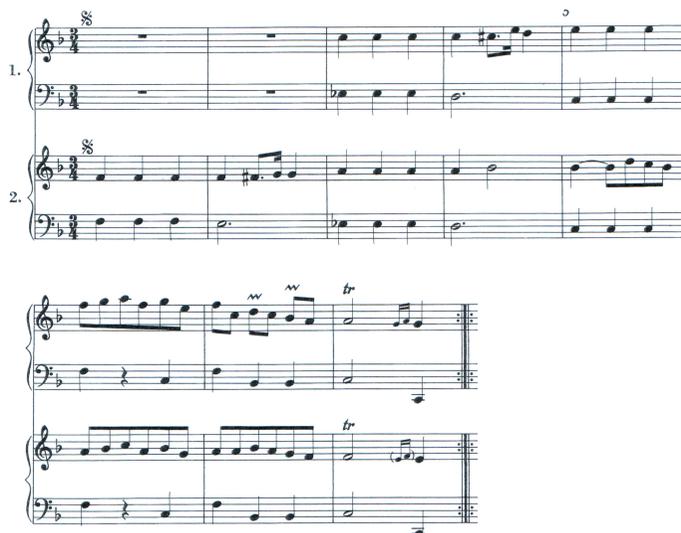


Fig. 6. Soler – Concert for two bound organs no. 4, p. II, meas. 1-8

With the first variation, the minuet comes to life under the agile fingers of the two partners in the art of sounds, through the agile play of the sequenced musical scales. It is a refined demonstration of virtuosity, Solerian compositional creativity inviting performers to juggle creatively both with their own keyboard and with their partner's answers, the writing rendering the jovial character of this dance in pairs.



Fig. 7. Soler – Concert for two bound organs no. 4, p. II, meas. 22-24

Master of the dynamization of discourse by diminishing the values of notes and exploring the valences of rhythm in the music of the Iberian space, Soler continues the game of his imagination on the two keyboards in the second variation (Figure 8).



Fig. 8. Soler – *Concert for two bound organs no. 4, p. II, meas. 49-51*

The last two variations are a gift that the composer gives to the performer and the audience alike. Everything Soler has imagined so far culminates in the performance offered by two instruments that shine in contrast, the first through the explosion of virtuosity that gallops like a cadence from the classical concert, the second raising its wide breath melody like an orchestra in the instrumental concert.

The third variation affirms the virtuosity of the first instrumentalist by displaying his technical attributes: large descending scales, octaves in broken or simultaneous drawing, played quickly on values of sixteenths, punctuated rhythms in polyphonic writing that forces the hand to poly-attack, as we see in meas. 65. All these manifestations of virtuosity are based on the isorhythm of the eighths of the right hand, its role being that of a rhythmic partner that witnesses the brilliant performance of the right hand. The dancing character of the minuet, so visible so far, is overshadowed by the instrumental one at the end of the concert, to assert the writing specific to the works intended for keyboard instruments: scales, octaves, fast passages with scales (Figure 9).

The fourth variation, the last one, is formulated as a sound conclusion, bringing back to the listener's consciousness the opening theme of the Minuet from the opening of the second part of the concert. It is not its imposing and festive character that is put in the light of the second keyboard, but its singable sonority, Soler dressing it with a swaying accompaniment in the partner's figurative writing. Moreover, the composer imagines this moment as a polyphonic duo accompanied in a homophone style (Figure 9).

The image displays a musical score for two bound organs, measures 64-68. The score is written in F Major and consists of two systems. Each system has two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. The first system shows a complex melodic line in the treble staff with many sixteenth notes and some slurs, and a simpler bass line. The second system continues the melodic line in the treble staff, featuring a fermata over a measure and then resuming the sixteenth-note pattern. The bass line remains relatively simple throughout. There are some markings like '(w)' and 'oo' in the score.

Fig. 9. Soler – Concert for two bound organs no. 4, p. II, meas. 64-68

### 3. Conclusions

The 4th Solerian concert imagines a majestic picture. Noble, singable and virtuoso, Soler's complex language capitalizes on the three facets of the artist who brings them on stage: the expressive performer, the virtuoso instrumentalist and the inquisitive musician. Homogeneous thinking transpires behind the construction: phrase, culminations, and tensions growing naturally in the general architecture of the concert. The opening of the stylistic horizons of the end of the century is reflected micro and macro-structurally in the dramaturgy of the dialogue between the two keyboards that Soler invites in his creative, visionary and profound universe. The instrumental complexity, the balance of the construction, the expressive richness, makes us consider this concert a real concert jewel.

### References

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*(English version by Gilda Cristina Marinescu)*