

# Three Centuries of Sonatas

1 - Baroque Origins

# Sonata, noun

(from Italian: *suonare*, 'to sound')

— Grove's Dictionary

From the 13th century onwards the word 'sonnade' was used in literary sources simply to denote an instrumental piece, as for example in the Provençal 13th-century *Vida da Santa Douce*: 'Mens que sonavan la rediera sonada de matinas'. In a mystery play of 1486 the phrase 'Orpheus fera ses sonnades' occurs as a stage direction.

—Grove's Dictionary

The word *sonata* appears on instrumental works in the mid- to late Renaissance.

But such pieces have little in common with modern sonatas. Music life in the Renaissance was very different from our modern world.

Consider what WASN'T around yet:

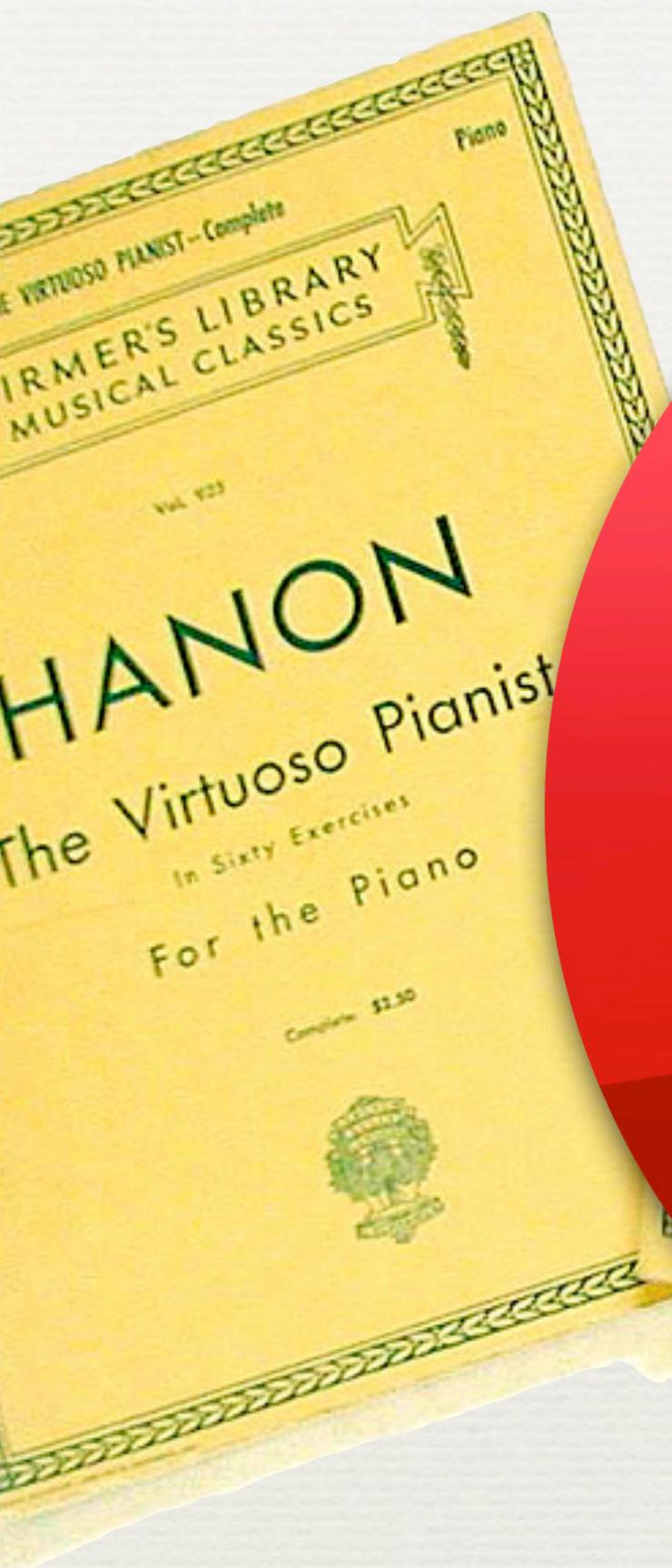




















In the Renaissance, most music was vocal and *a cappella* — that is, without any accompaniment.

Most Renaissance music-making happened in the church.

A painting of a 17th-century interior. In the center, a woman in a white and black dress stands with her back to the viewer, looking at a large framed picture on the wall. To her right, another woman in a black dress with white cuffs stands near a table. In the foreground, a lute is visible on a table. The room has a checkered floor, a window with a lattice pattern, and a white pitcher on a table to the right.

Instrumental music was made mostly in the home,  
or in social settings.

Ability to play the lute, or a keyboard instrument,  
was considered an indispensable for courtiers as  
well as young ladies of proper upbringing.

Giacomo Gorzanis gave 'sonata' as the actual title for passamezzos and paduanas in the first book of his *Intabolatura di liuto* (1561), and it is similarly employed in later collections of lute music. The rapid development of instrumental music towards the close of the 16th century was accompanied by a plethora of terms which were employed in a confused and often imprecise manner. 'Sonata' was one of them, although it was nearly always applied to something played as opposed to something sung ('cantata').

—Grove's Dictionary

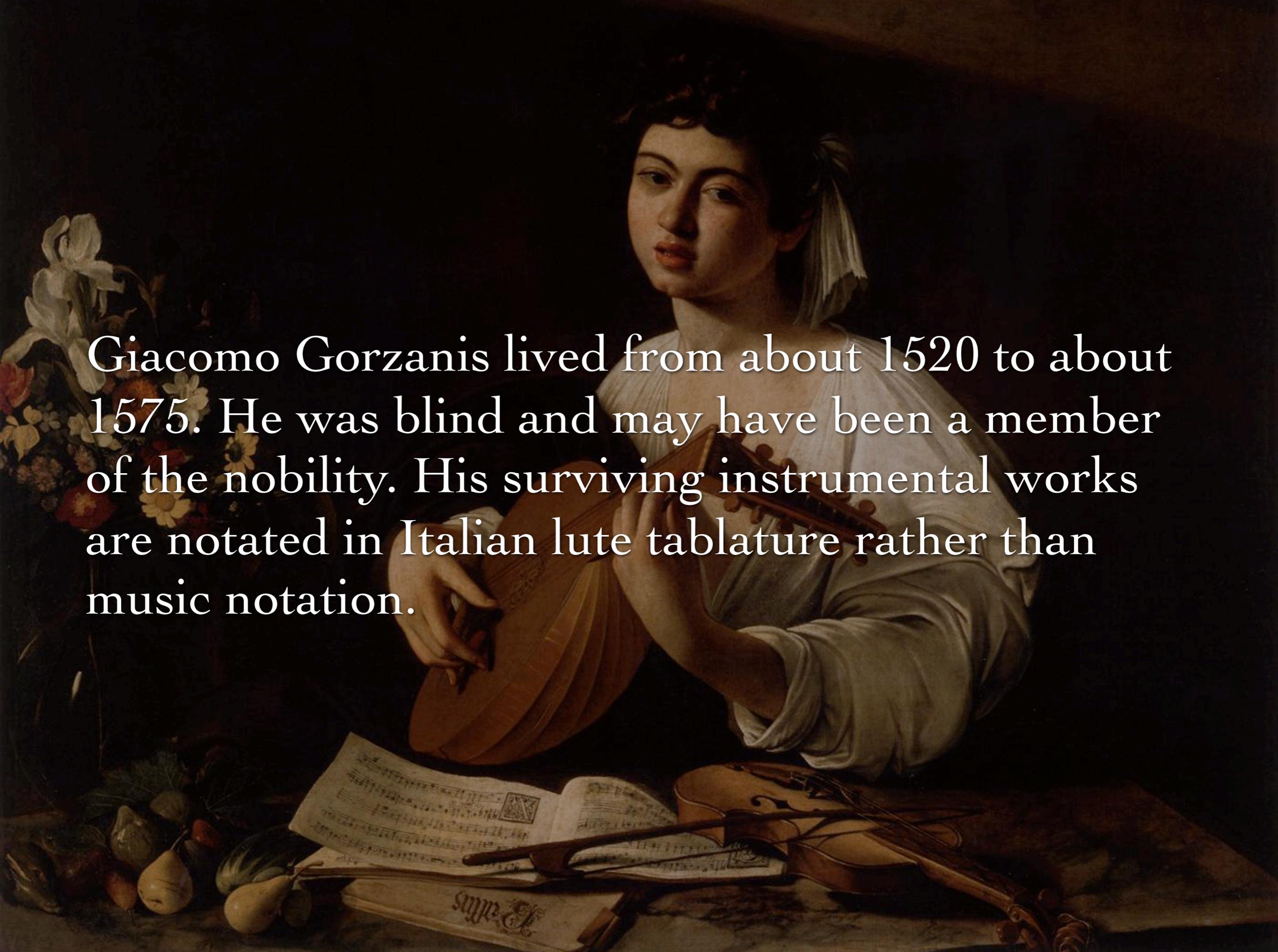


# Giacomo Gorzanis: Pass'e mezo anticho

Jakob Lindberg, Lute

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A painting of a young woman with dark hair, wearing a white dress, playing a lute. She is looking slightly to the left. In the foreground, there is an open book of musical notation, a violin, and a bow. To the left, there is a still life arrangement of various fruits and flowers, including irises and pears. The background is dark and indistinct.

Giacomo Gorzanis lived from about 1520 to about 1575. He was blind and may have been a member of the nobility. His surviving instrumental works are notated in Italian lute tablature rather than music notation.

**1** **ff** **ff** **ff**

**antico primo.**  
**Pafs' e mezzo.**

**ff** **ff**

**ff** **ff** **ff** **ff**

**ff** **C.**

Seconda parte.

**ff**

A painting of a young woman with dark, curly hair, wearing a white, long-sleeved dress, seated and playing a lute. She is looking slightly to her left. In the foreground, a violin and its bow lie on an open book of sheet music. To the left, a still life arrangement includes a pear, a small melon, and a bouquet of flowers, including a large white iris. The background is dark and indistinct.

The *Pass'e mezo anticho* is of interest to us because it is described as a “sonada”—i.e., a piece to be played. In actuality it is one of two dances, each dance accompanied by an increasingly virtuosic set of variations.

Theme

Phrase a:  
Minor mode

Phrase b:  
Major mode

Variation 1

Phrase a:  
Minor mode

Phrase b:  
Major mode

Variation 2

Phrase a:  
Minor mode

Phrase b:  
Major mode

Variation 3

Phrase a:  
Minor mode

Phrase b:  
Major mode

Variation 4

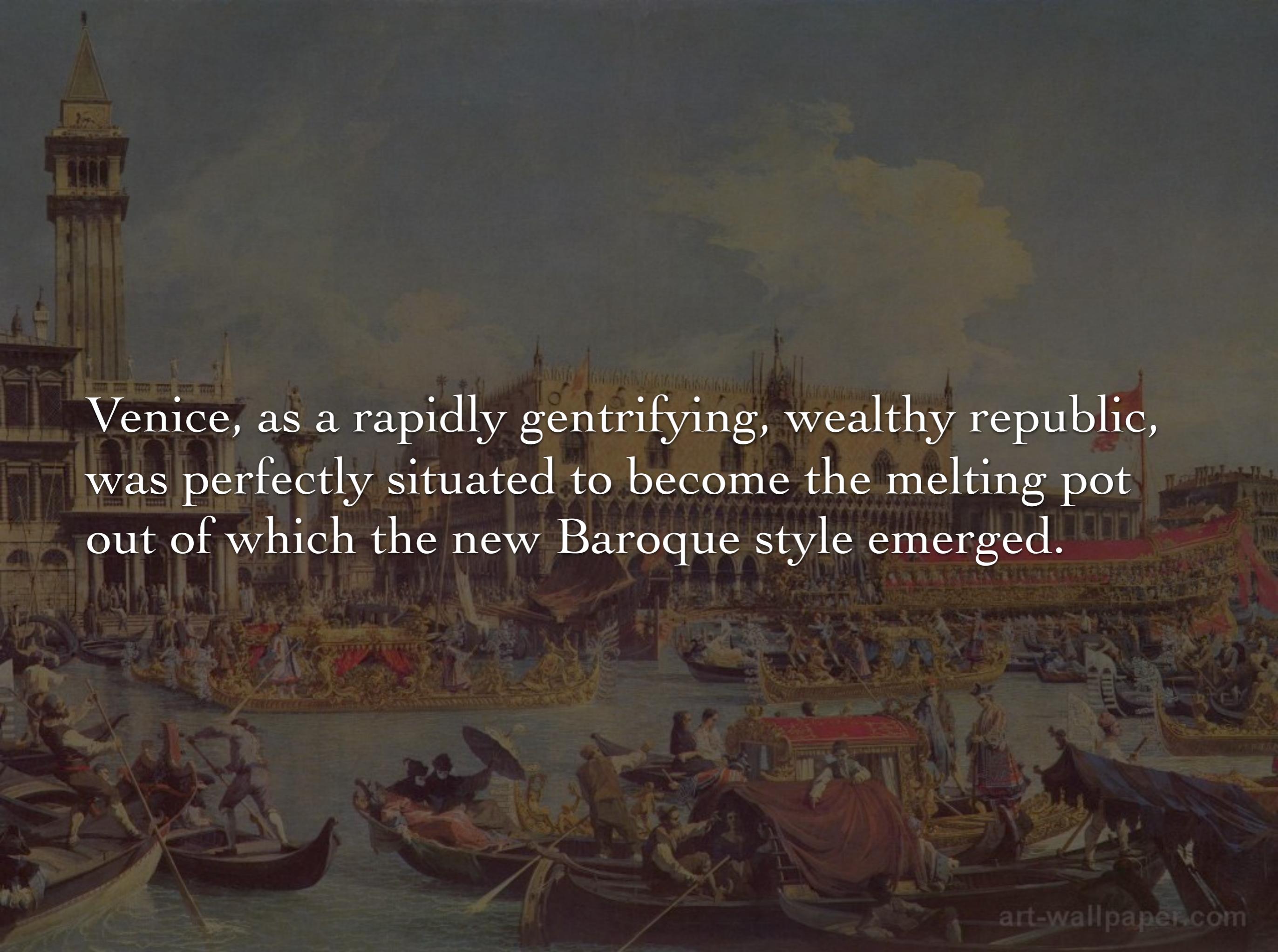
Phrase a:  
Minor mode

Phrase b:  
Major mode



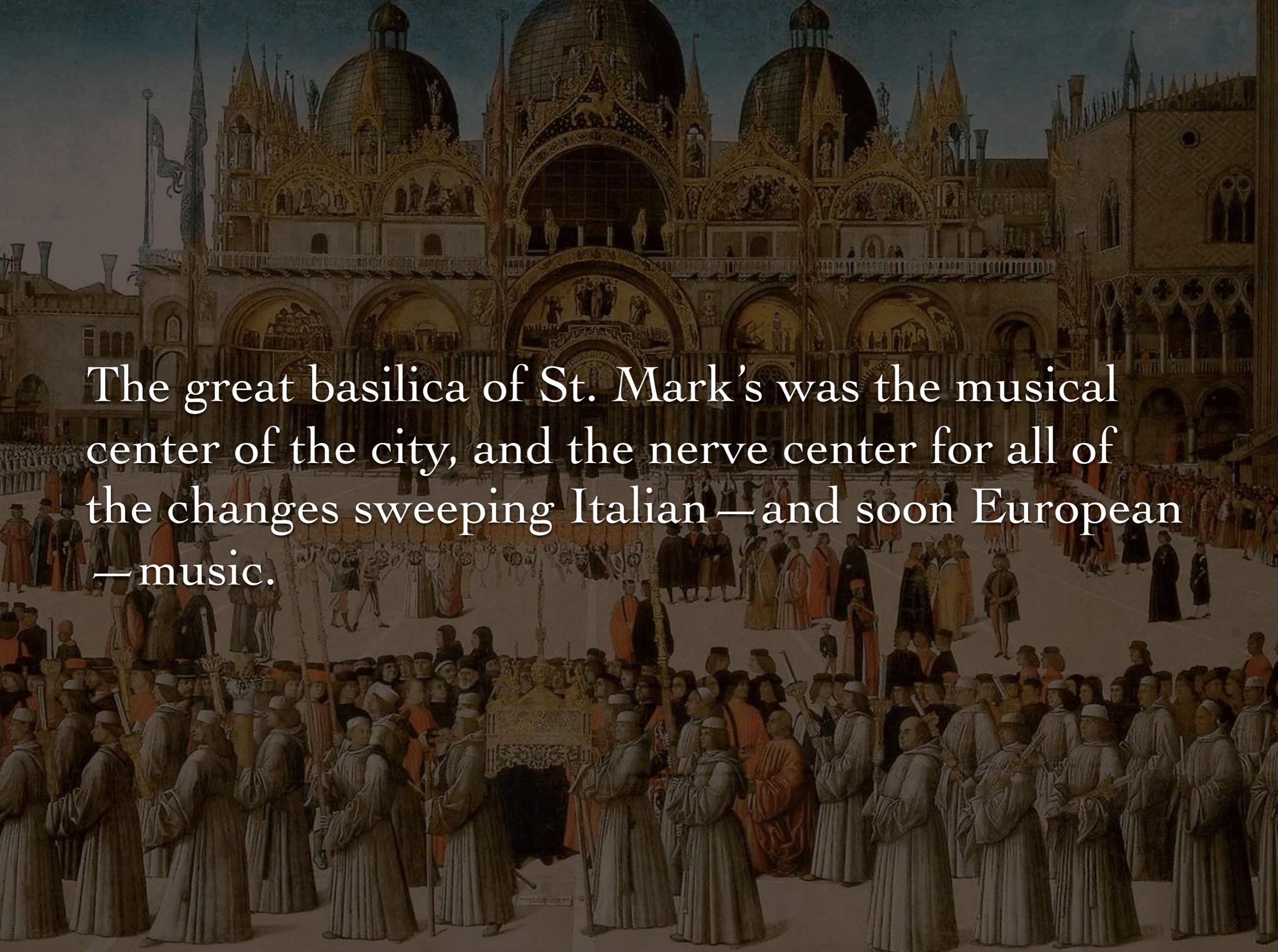
# The Baroque Era





Venice, as a rapidly gentrifying, wealthy republic, was perfectly situated to become the melting pot out of which the new Baroque style emerged.



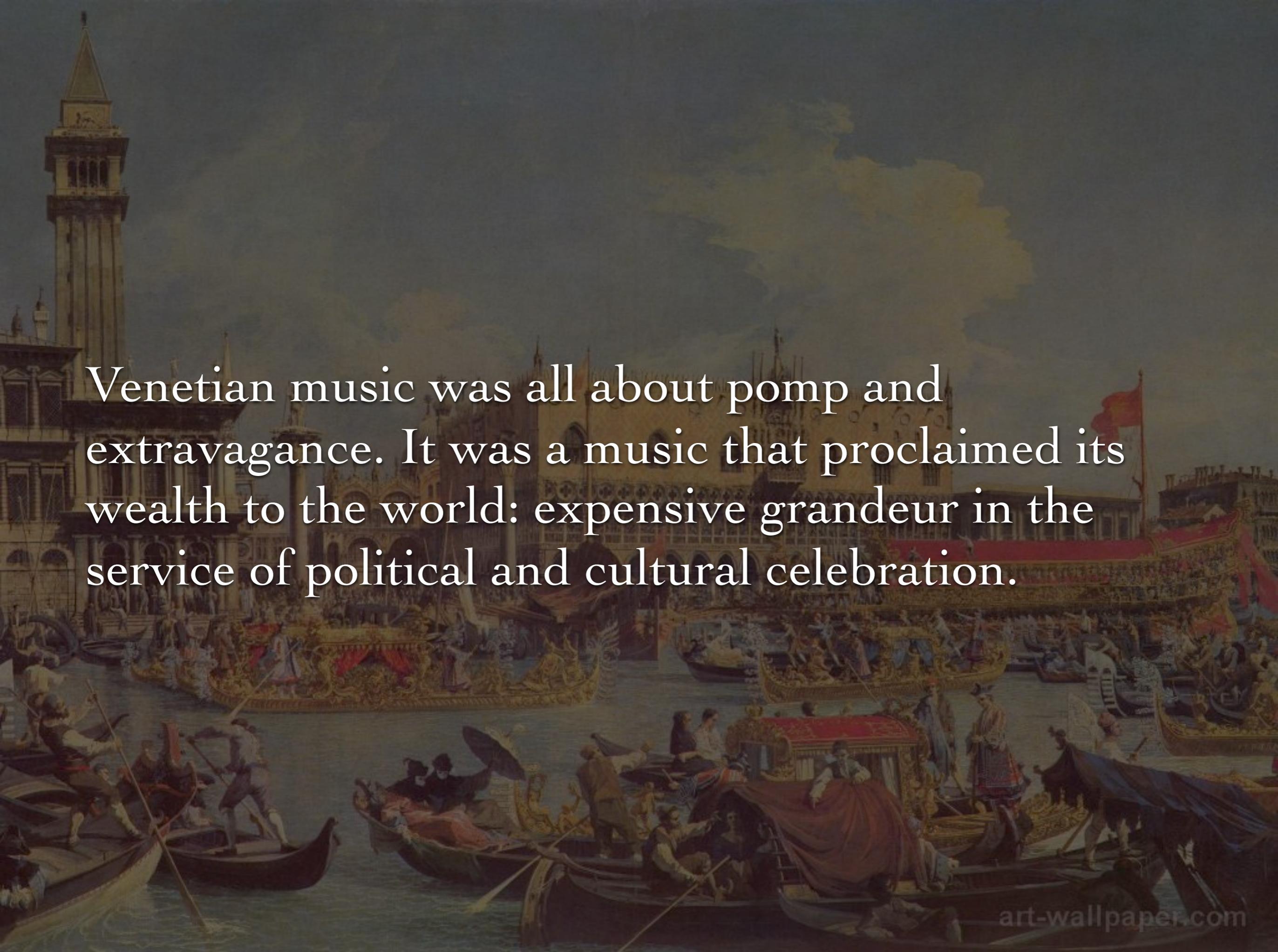
The image is a detailed Renaissance painting of St. Mark's Basilica in Venice. The basilica is the central focus, with its ornate facade, multiple domes, and intricate carvings. In the foreground, a large crowd of people is gathered in the square. A prominent group of monks in white robes is seen in the lower foreground, some holding staffs and others carrying a large, ornate canopy. The scene is set in a bright, open square, with other buildings visible in the background. The overall style is characteristic of the Venetian school of painting, with a focus on architectural detail and a sense of grandeur.

The great basilica of St. Mark's was the musical center of the city, and the nerve center for all of the changes sweeping Italian—and soon European—music.



The image shows the interior of St. Mark's Basilica in Venice, Italy. The architecture is characterized by its intricate mosaics and multiple levels of arches. The central nave is flanked by two levels of galleries, each with a decorative balustrade. The floor is a complex mosaic pattern. In the foreground, a group of people is gathered, and a large, ornate chandelier hangs from the ceiling. The text overlay is centered in the upper half of the image.

The interior of St. Mark's was perfectly designed to accommodate multiple ensembles and choirs, performing in an *antiphonal* style — i.e., in dialog with each other, creating vast stereophonic effects.



Venetian music was all about pomp and extravagance. It was a music that proclaimed its wealth to the world: expensive grandeur in the service of political and cultural celebration.



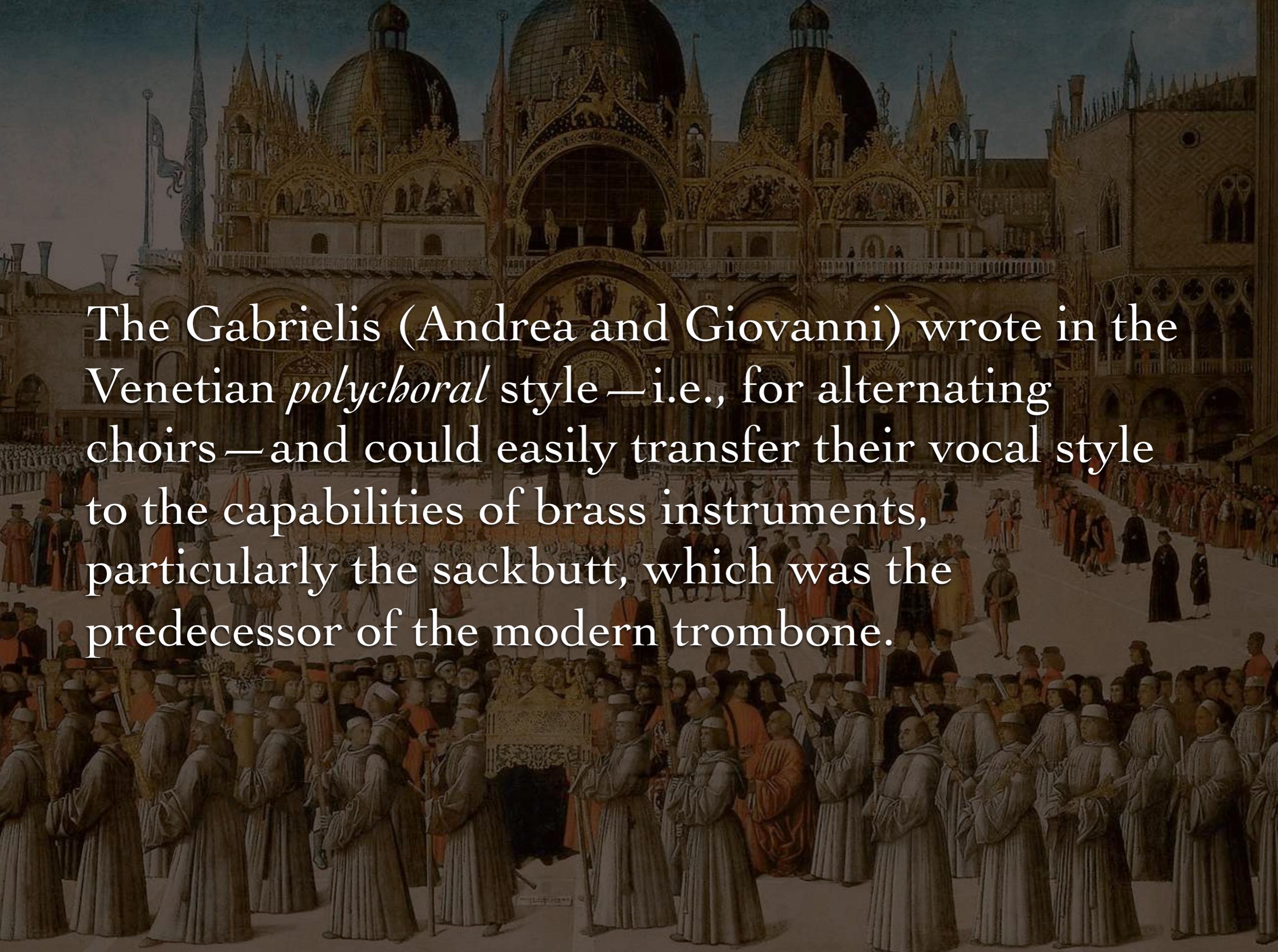


# Giovanni Gabrieli: *Sonata pian' e forte*

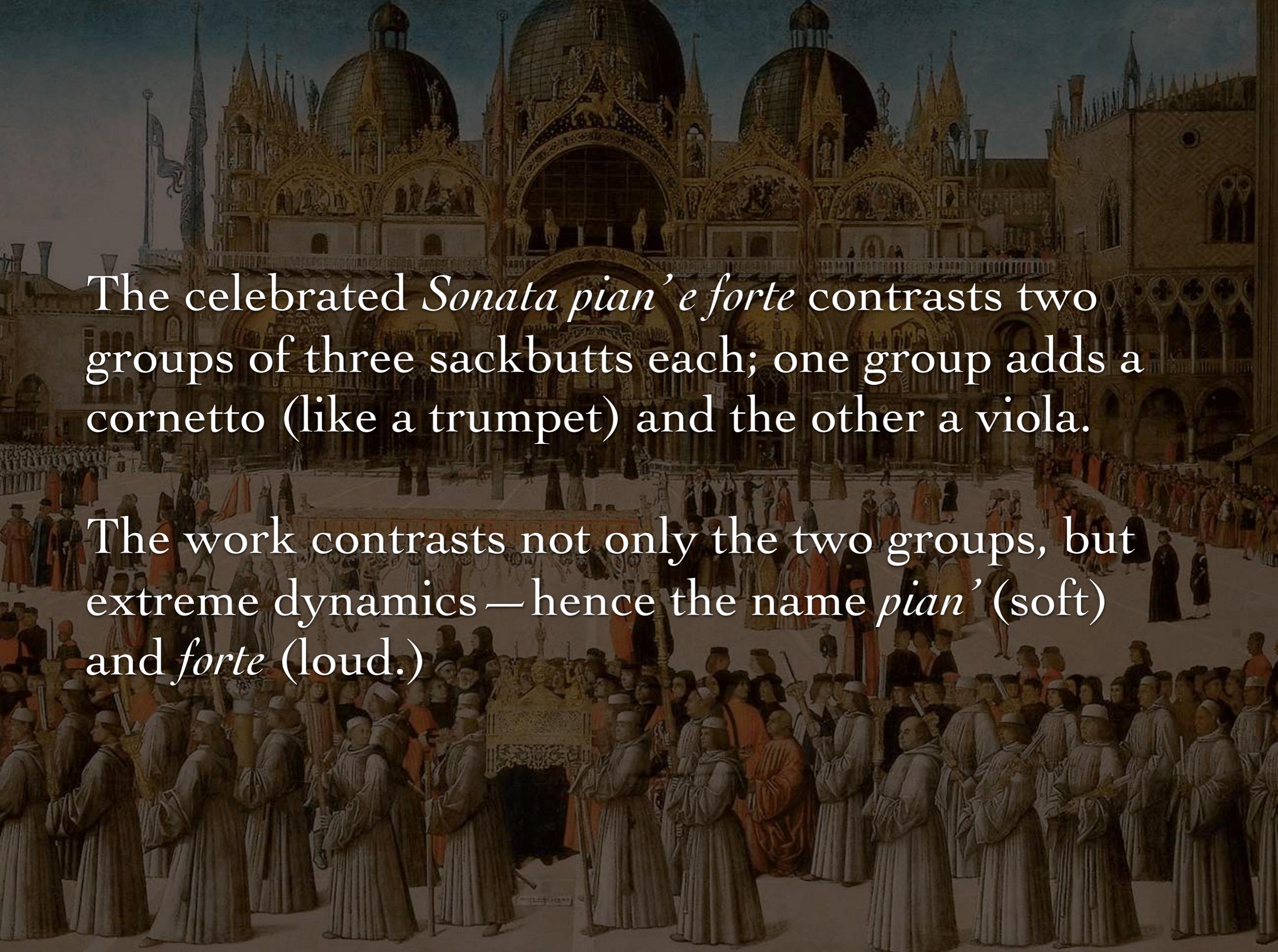
His Majesty's Sagbutts & Cornetts

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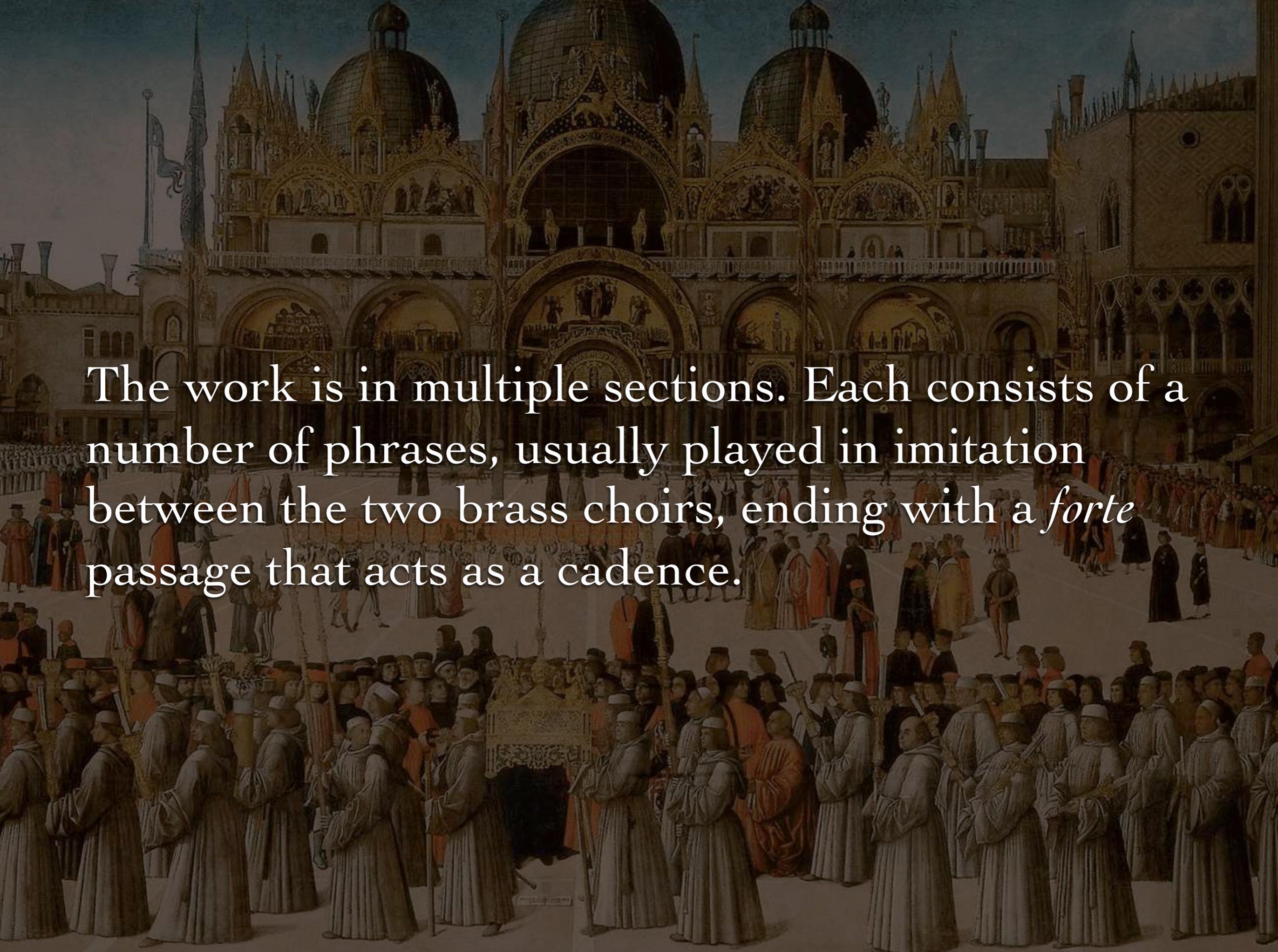


The Gabrielis (Andrea and Giovanni) wrote in the Venetian *polychoral* style — i.e., for alternating choirs — and could easily transfer their vocal style to the capabilities of brass instruments, particularly the sackbutt, which was the predecessor of the modern trombone.

The background image is a highly detailed Renaissance painting, likely by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, depicting a large crowd of people gathered in a square in front of a grand, ornate Gothic church facade. The church features multiple domes and intricate architectural details. The foreground is filled with numerous figures in period clothing, some holding staffs or banners, suggesting a public event or a religious procession. The overall scene is bustling and captures a moment of significant social or religious activity.

The celebrated *Sonata pian' e forte* contrasts two groups of three sackbutts each; one group adds a cornetto (like a trumpet) and the other a viola.

The work contrasts not only the two groups, but extreme dynamics — hence the name *pian'* (soft) and *forte* (loud.)



The work is in multiple sections. Each consists of a number of phrases, usually played in imitation between the two brass choirs, ending with a *forte* passage that acts as a cadence.

Group 1  
Cornetto & 3 Sackbutts

Group 2  
Viola & 3 Sackbutts

a

b

c

a

b

c

Blue stands for *piano* passages. The two brass choirs are shown, as are the phrases they are playing.

Group 1  
Cornetto & 3 Sackbutts

Group 2  
Viola & 3 Sackbutts

Most cadential passages are *forte*, in red.

Group 1  
Cornetto & 3 Sackbutts

Group 2  
Viola & 3 Sackbutts

a

b

c

a

b

c

## Section 1: Imitative Phrases

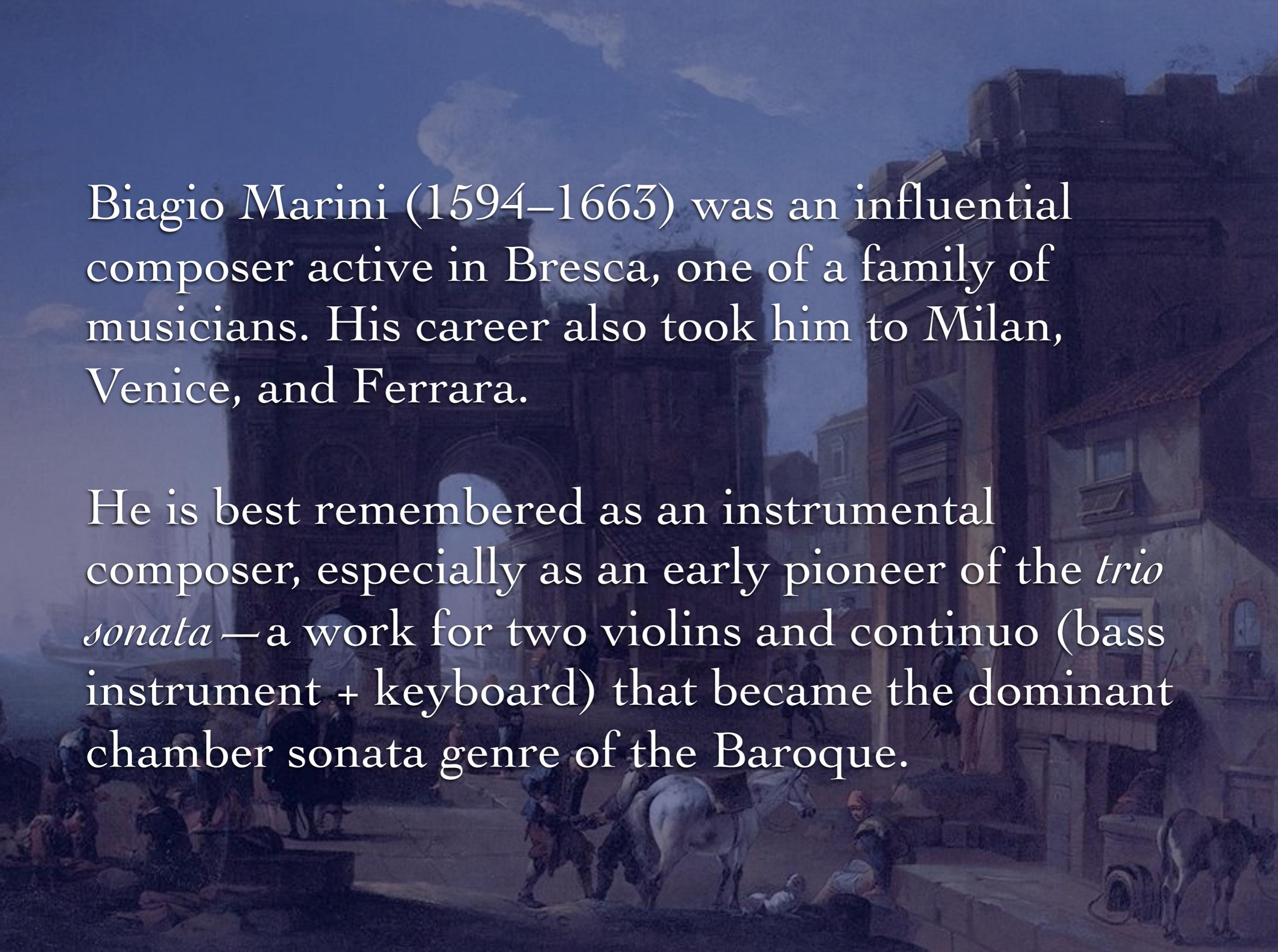


# Biagio Marini: Sonata *Fuggi dolente core*

London Baroque

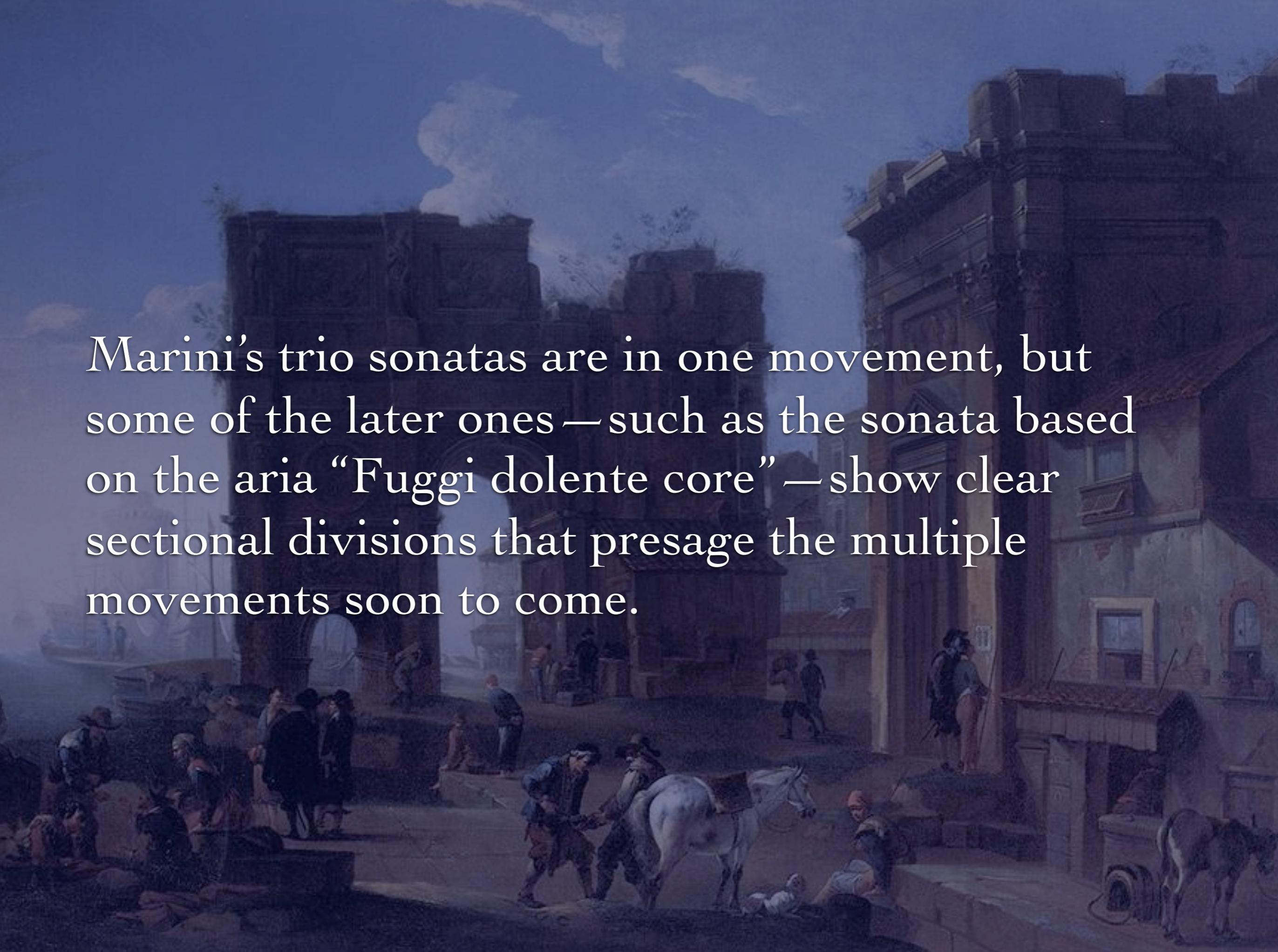
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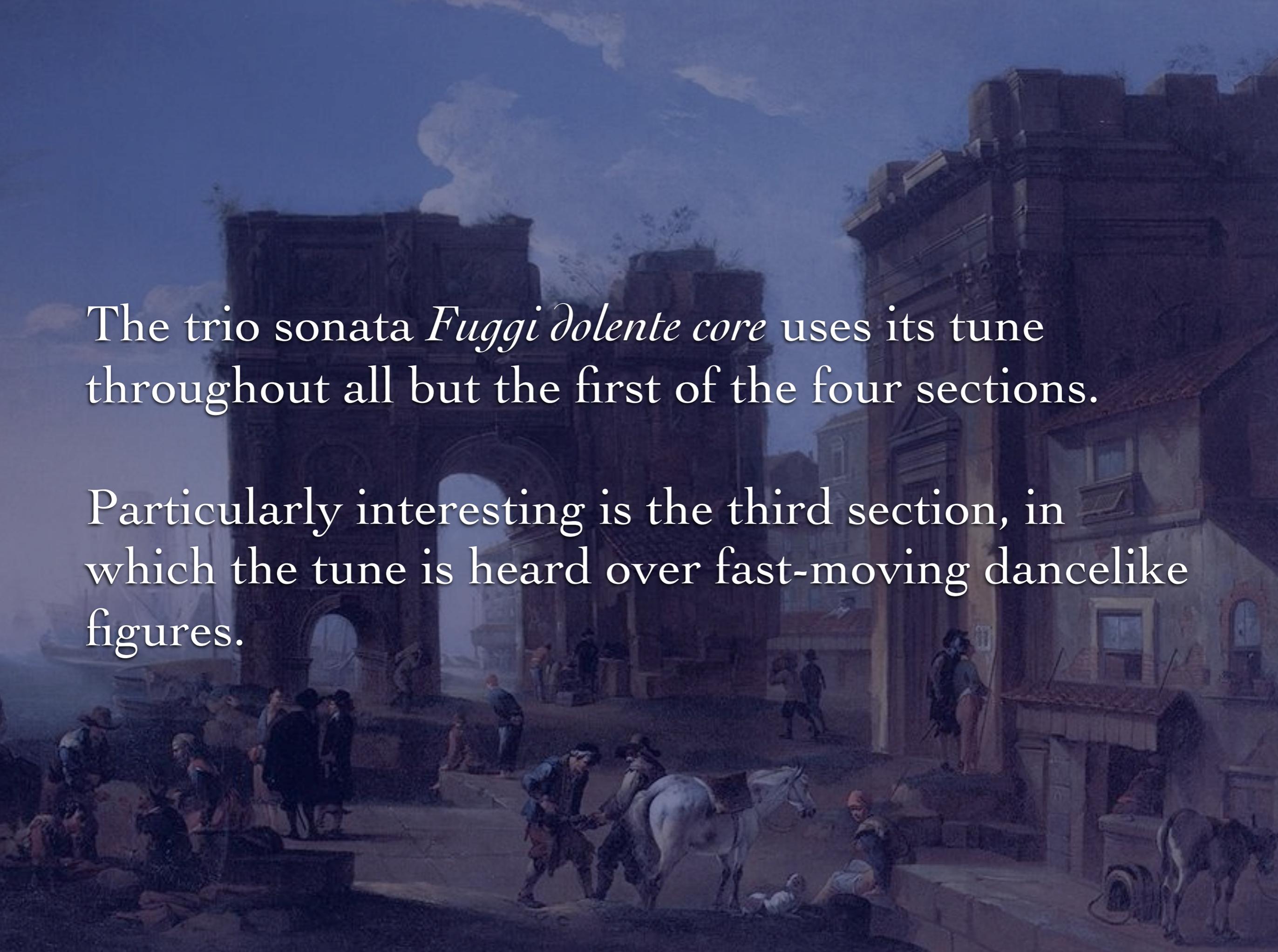


Biagio Marini (1594–1663) was an influential composer active in Brescia, one of a family of musicians. His career also took him to Milan, Venice, and Ferrara.

He is best remembered as an instrumental composer, especially as an early pioneer of the *trio sonata* — a work for two violins and continuo (bass instrument + keyboard) that became the dominant chamber sonata genre of the Baroque.

A detailed painting of a busy street scene in a historical setting. The scene is dominated by a large, dark stone archway in the center-left. To the right, there are several multi-story buildings with windows and balconies. In the foreground, a white horse is being led by a man, and another man is sitting on the ground. There are many other people in the scene, some walking, some standing, and some carrying goods. The overall atmosphere is one of a bustling, everyday life in a past era.

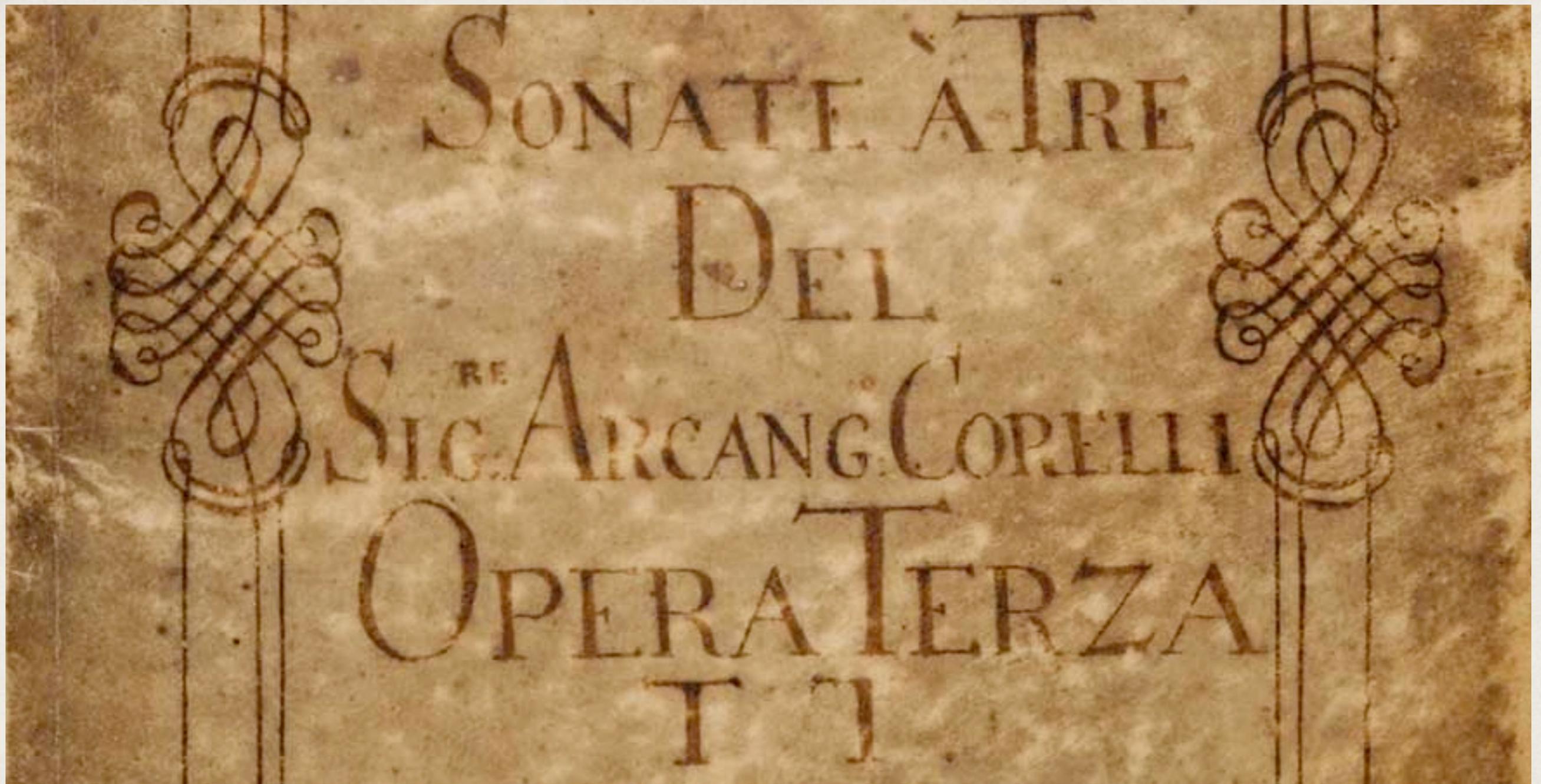
Marini's trio sonatas are in one movement, but some of the later ones — such as the sonata based on the aria “Fuggi dolente core” — show clear sectional divisions that presage the multiple movements soon to come.

The background image is a dark, atmospheric painting of a ruined city. In the foreground, a man leads a white horse up a set of stone steps. To the right, a man sits on the steps, and a donkey stands nearby. In the middle ground, several figures are scattered across the scene, some appearing to be in motion. The background features large, dark stone arches and buildings, suggesting a city in ruins. The sky is a deep, dark blue with some light clouds. The overall mood is somber and desolate.

The trio sonata *Fuggi dolente core* uses its tune throughout all but the first of the four sections.

Particularly interesting is the third section, in which the tune is heard over fast-moving dancelike figures.





# Arcangelo Corelli: *Sonata da chiesa* Op. 3 No. 3

Purcell Quartet

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From the time he emerged from Bologna, where he had been admitted to the elite Accademia Filarmonica at age 17, Arcangelo Corelli was employed by the well-heeled and influential. Two cardinals (Ottoboni and Pamphili) and one queen (Christina of Sweden) saw to it that the patrician violinist and composer stayed fully occupied and well paid. The combination of steady income and discriminating listeners allowed Corelli the luxury of honing his works via frequent performances, so he never committed a piece to publication hastily or carelessly. Corelli was an exemplar of the 'pure' musician—i.e., dedicated to the highest standards of playing and composition, even if those ideals mandated a sharply limited output.

—Scott Foglesong, *Philharmonia Baroque program book*

The *sonata da chiesa* — church sonata — appears to have originated in the 17th century as some churches began replacing organ solos during services with instrumental music.

By Corelli's day the *sonata da chiesa* was laid out in four movements, usually slow-fast-slow-fast, without discernible dance elements, although Corelli himself began incorporating dance-like movements into his church sonatas.

Also, well before Corelli's day the *sonata da chiesa* had moved out of the church and into common usage. In fact, most Italian publications call them simply *sonata* without the extra label.

The opposite of the *sonata da chiesa* is the *sonata da camera*, or “court sonata.” It’s a collection of stylized dances, and as such would be called a *suite* or *partita* by many other composers.

This *sonata da chiesa* in B-flat Major, from Corelli's second set of church sonatas, is a prime example of the genre in full flower. It is written for two violins and *continuo* — a combination of a bass instrument plus keyboard playing chords, in this case an organ.

In this trio sonata we can hear that the overall harmonic language of Western music—the sound of Bach, Handel, Mozart, Haydn, and their successors—had come to full fruition. Corelli was, in fact, the most influential composer of his generation and it was his harmonic practices that were eagerly adopted by his many followers, such as Antonio Vivaldi.

In particular, Corelli was able to make superb use of the distinction between *major* and *minor* mode, a duality that was to become critically important in Western music.

# Mode and Key

- ♦ “Happy Birthday” in major, as we usually hear it.

# Mode and Key

- ♦ “Happy Birthday” in minor, as we don’t as a rule hear it.

Each of the movements is *through-composed*, meaning that it proceeds along its own internal logic — generally dictated by modulations from one key to another — instead of following sectional forms such as AB or ABA.

Because of that, the chart for this work offers text descriptions of the phrases only, and makes no attempt to assign formal labels.

# Grave

**Violins in thirds; full cadence**

Violin 1 leads to another cadence

Long phrase with imitation between the violins

Climbing phrases to a brief cadence

Violins in “leapfrog” style over faster-moving bass

Cadential figure

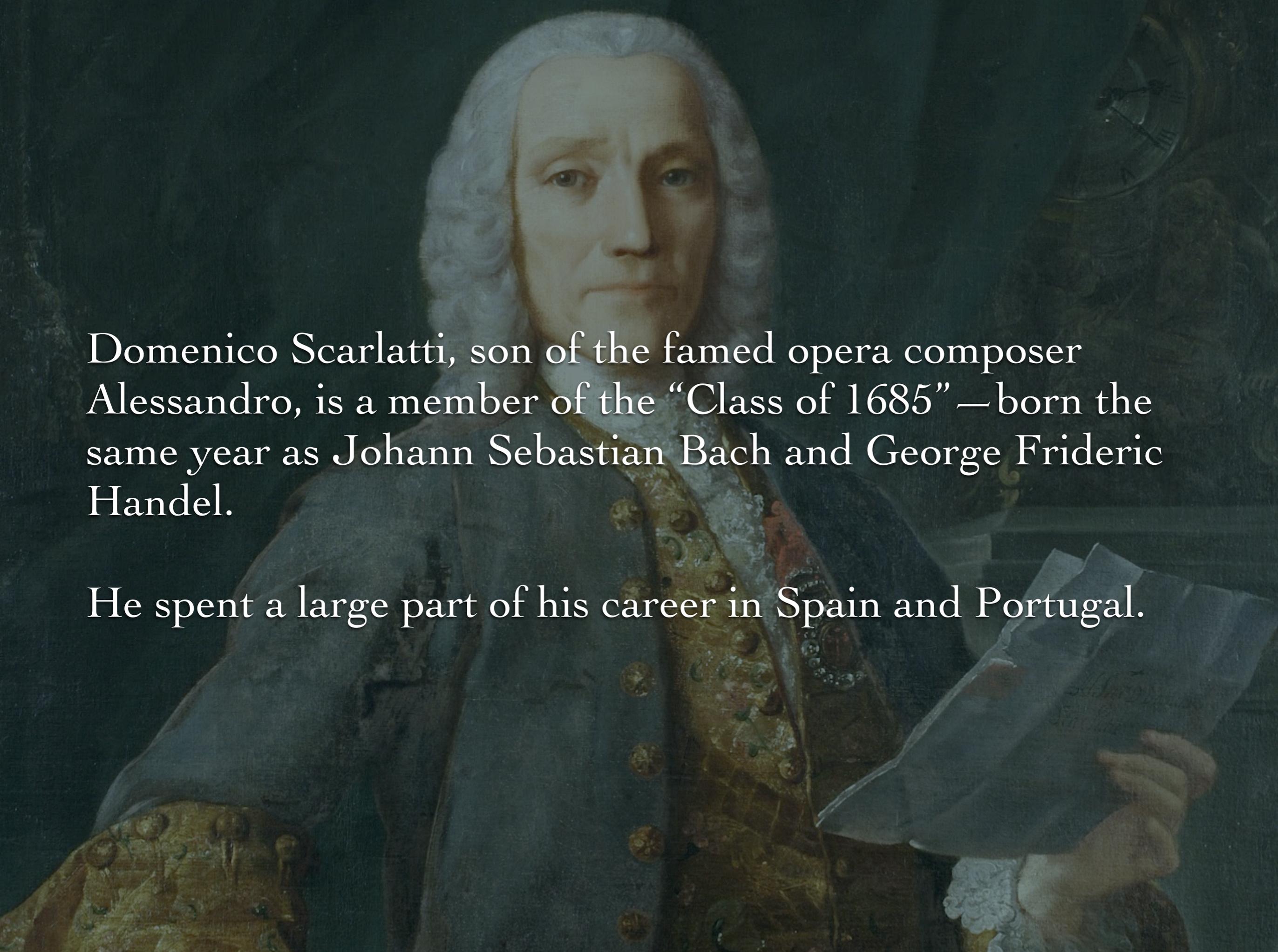


# Domenico Scarlatti: Sonata in D Major, K. 491

Murray Perahia, piano

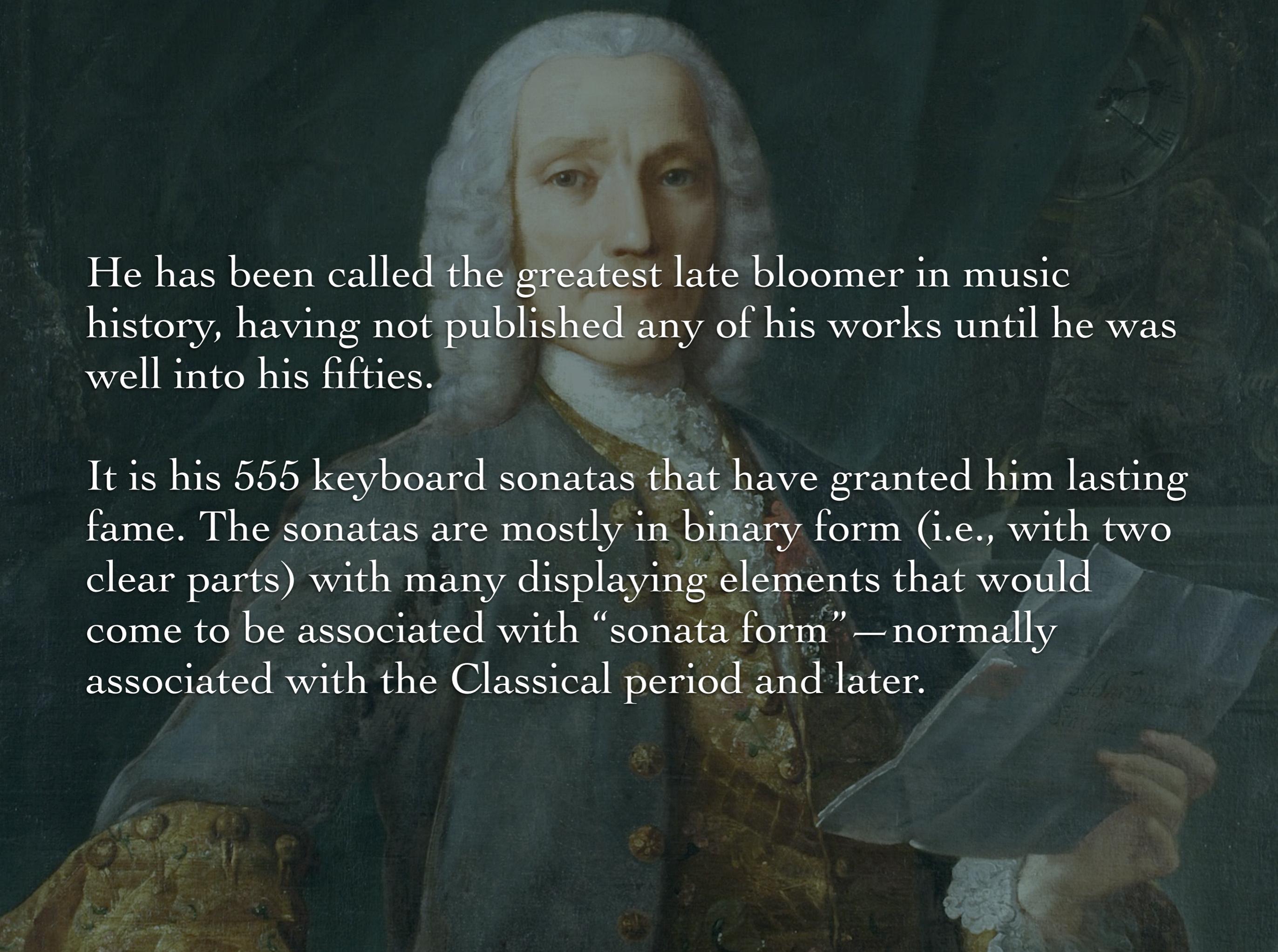
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A portrait of Domenico Scarlatti, an Italian composer. He is depicted from the chest up, wearing a dark grey or blue coat with gold buttons and a white cravat. He has long, wavy white hair. He is holding a large, folded piece of paper in his left hand. The background is dark and indistinct.

Domenico Scarlatti, son of the famed opera composer Alessandro, is a member of the “Class of 1685” —born the same year as Johann Sebastian Bach and George Frideric Handel.

He spent a large part of his career in Spain and Portugal.

A portrait of Johann Sebastian Bach, an elderly man with long, wavy white hair, wearing a grey coat over a gold-embroidered waistcoat and a white cravat. He is holding a large sheet of paper in his left hand. The background is dark and indistinct.

He has been called the greatest late bloomer in music history, having not published any of his works until he was well into his fifties.

It is his 555 keyboard sonatas that have granted him lasting fame. The sonatas are mostly in binary form (i.e., with two clear parts) with many displaying elements that would come to be associated with “sonata form” — normally associated with the Classical period and later.

# Part 1



D Major

A Major .....

# Part 2



D Major

## Part 1



## Part 2



### Primary Theme in D Major

Transition 1

Transition 2

Secondary Theme, Phrase a (A Major)

Secondary Theme, Phrase b

Secondary Theme, Phrase b

Closing Theme

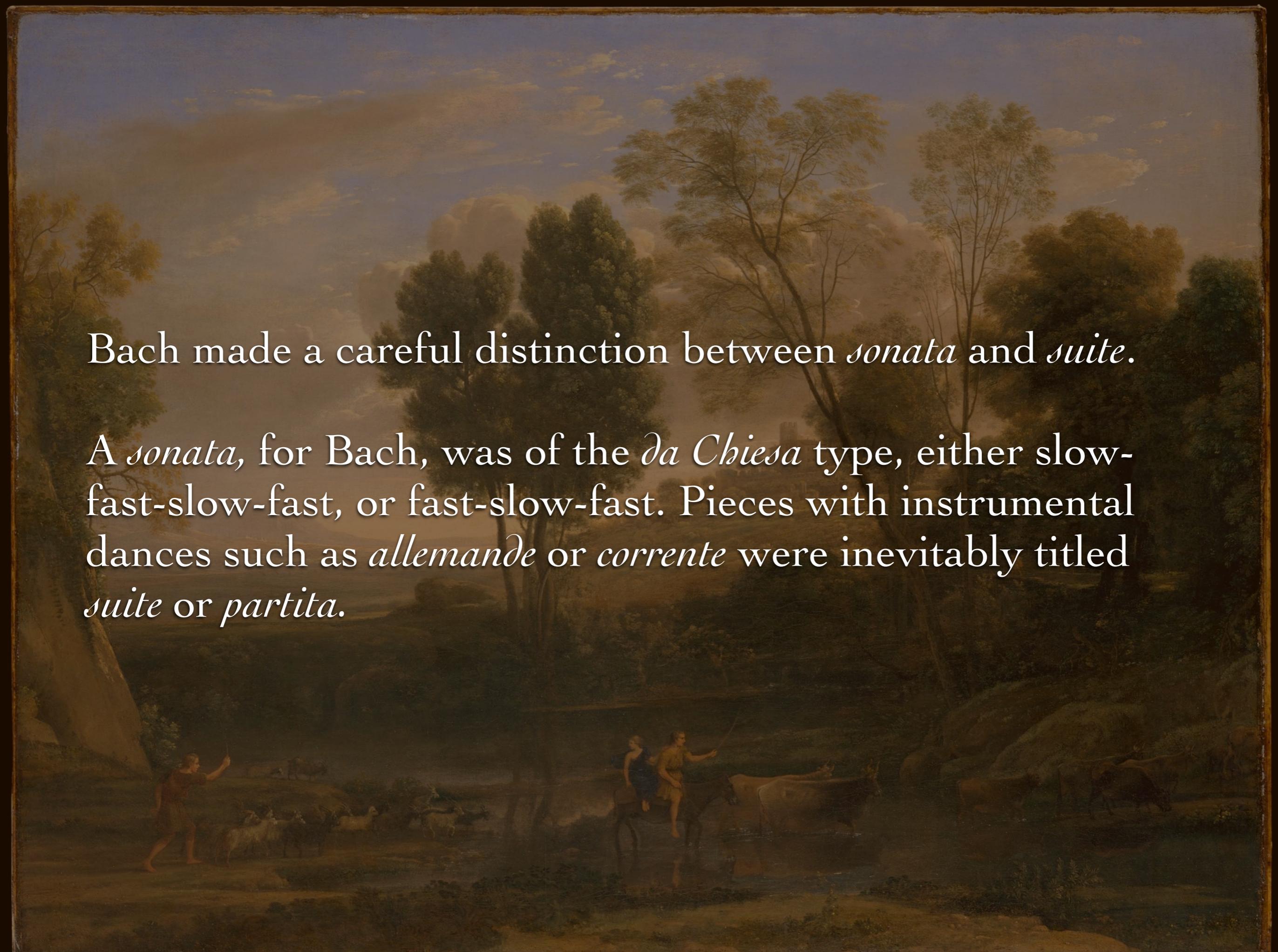


# J. S. Bach: Flute Sonata in B Minor, BWV 1030

Aurèle Nicolet, flute / Karl Richter, harpsichord

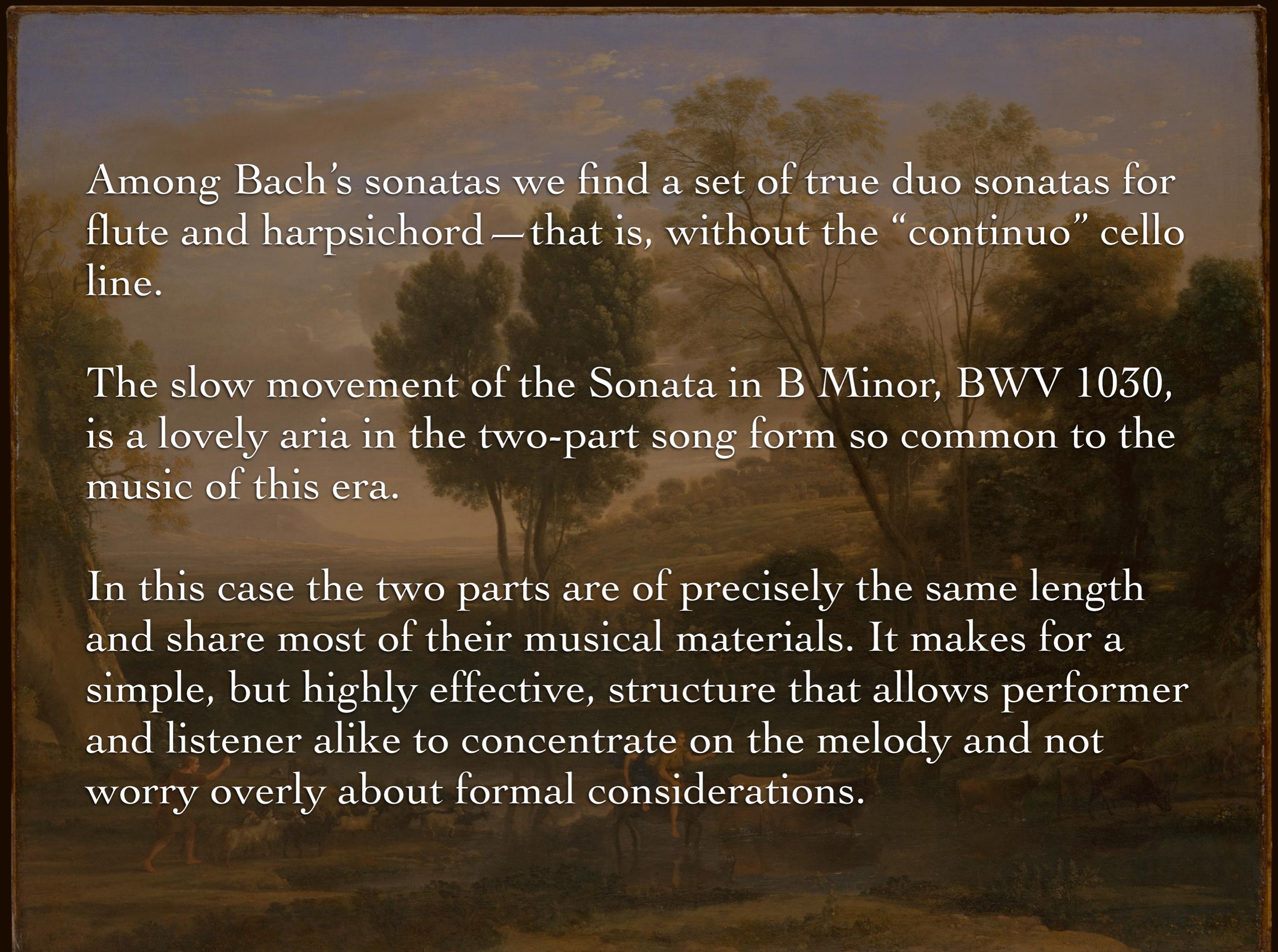
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A classical landscape painting with a text overlay. The scene depicts a rural landscape with a river or stream in the foreground. On the left, a man in a dark tunic stands with his back to the viewer, gesturing towards a flock of sheep. In the center, a woman in a blue dress sits on a horse, and a man in a tan tunic stands beside her, holding a long staff. To the right, a pack animal is being led. The background features a dense forest of tall, slender trees and a distant building on a hill. The sky is filled with soft, white clouds. The overall color palette is muted, with earthy tones and soft blues.

Bach made a careful distinction between *sonata* and *suite*.

A *sonata*, for Bach, was of the *da Chiesa* type, either slow-fast-slow-fast, or fast-slow-fast. Pieces with instrumental dances such as *allemande* or *corrente* were inevitably titled *suite* or *partita*.



Among Bach's sonatas we find a set of true duo sonatas for flute and harpsichord—that is, without the “continuo” cello line.

The slow movement of the Sonata in B Minor, BWV 1030, is a lovely aria in the two-part song form so common to the music of this era.

In this case the two parts are of precisely the same length and share most of their musical materials. It makes for a simple, but highly effective, structure that allows performer and listener alike to concentrate on the melody and not worry overly about formal considerations.

## Part 1

$a$        $a^1$        $b$

## Part 2

$a^2$        $c$        $b^1$

Part 1

*a*      *a1*      *b*

Part 2

*a2*      *c*      *b1*

**Rising figure followed by faster-moving conclusion**

Begins identically but ends a step higher

Long, luxuriant phrase with a conclusive ending

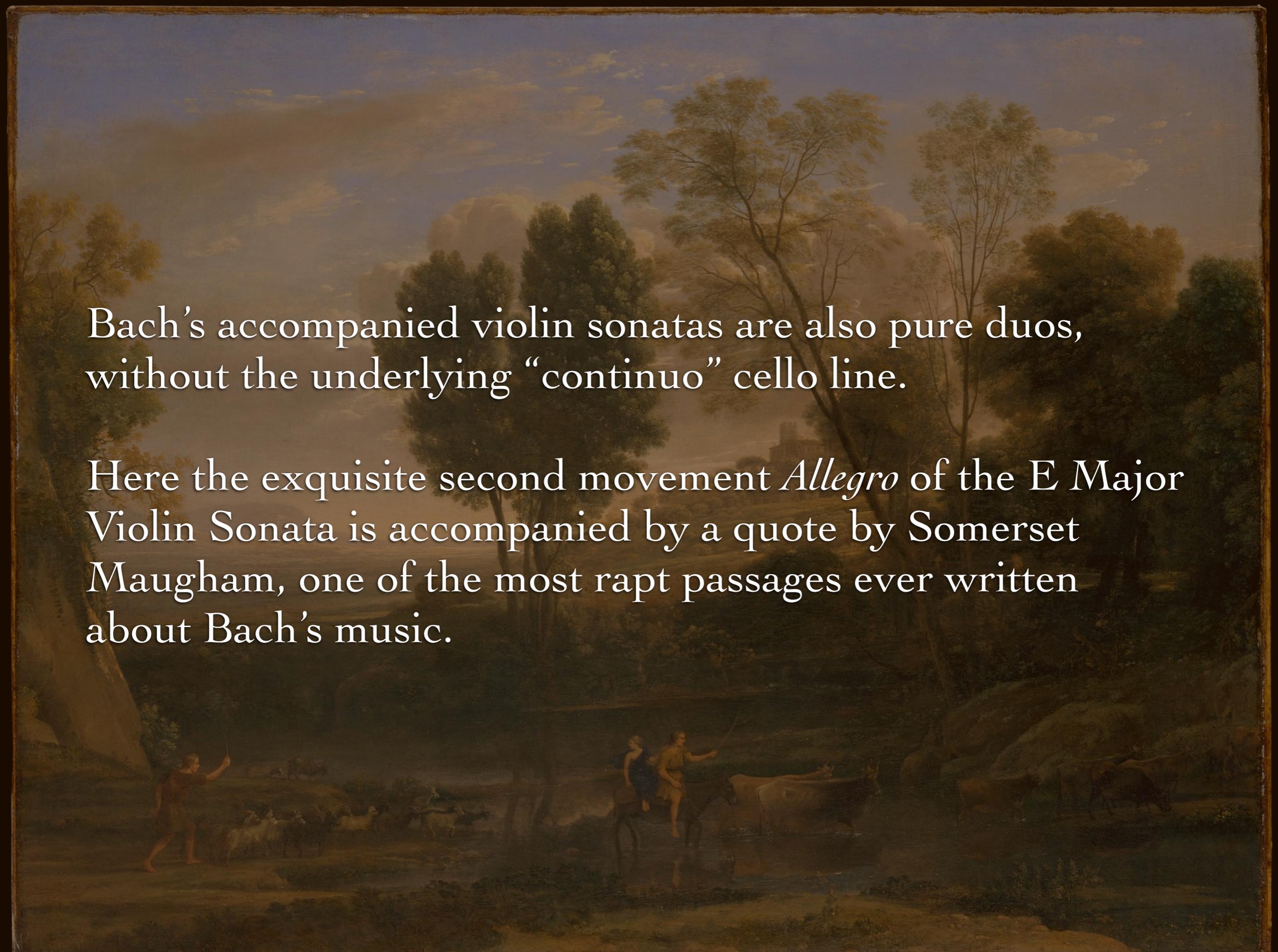


# J. S. Bach: Violin Sonata in E Major, BWV 1016

Andrew Manze, violin / Richard Egarr, harpsichord / Jaap ter Linden, cello

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A classical landscape painting with a text overlay. The scene depicts a valley with a river, trees, and a distant building. In the foreground, a man is herding sheep, and a woman is riding a horse. The text is overlaid in the center of the image.

Bach's accompanied violin sonatas are also pure duos, without the underlying "continuo" cello line.

Here the exquisite second movement *Allegro* of the E Major Violin Sonata is accompanied by a quote by Somerset Maugham, one of the most rapt passages ever written about Bach's music.

