

HISTORY OF THE CONCERTO

A SERIES of programmes discussing the history of the concerto is being broadcast from 3YL at 8.15 p.m. on Saturdays. For those who wish to listen to the series but who have missed the first few sessions, here is a summary of the ground covered to date.

From the elementary definition "to play together in concert" the word concerto came to mean, round about 1587, music composed for performance by contrasted bodies of tone—two choirs, for instance, or voices and one instrument. As this was the great polyphonic period, the origins of the instrumental concerto are really found in vocal music.

Gradually the names concerto, concertato, and concertare came to be added to works such as madrigals, motets and masses, which also aimed at embodying this idea of contrast, and by the beginning of the 17th Century, when instrumental music began to develop, we find composers looking for the same idea of contrast within the orchestra itself.

The concerto grosso was the earliest purely instrumental development of the form, and it differed from the modern concerto in that not one soloist but several were opposed to a full string orchestra. The solo group was called the "concertino obligato" or concertino for short, and the larger group the "ripieno" or "concerto grosso," from which the form takes its name. The concerto grosso was in three or more contrasted movements, and the most famous of the type are probably the six Brandenburg Concertos of Bach, which employ six different combinations of instruments. Corelli, Handel and Vivaldi are some of the others who established the concerto grosso as a popular form in the 17th and early 18th Centuries.

The term "concertino" also came to mean a piece for one or more solo instruments with orchestral accompaniment, differing from the full-fledged concerto in the brevity and conciseness of the movements. It sometimes consisted of a trio of first and second violin and cello.

Another early form of the concerto was the solo clavier concerto. Bach composed seven of these, and in contrast to the later concertos of Mozart and Beethoven, the relationship between solo instrument and orchestra in the clavier concerto is not so much one of direct rivalry and opposition, as of a dominance of the clavier over the rest of the instruments. Spitta describes these works as being really clavier compositions which, through being associated with stringed instruments in the concerto form, gained considerably in tone, parts and colour.

With the piano concertos of Mozart we have the beginning of the modern development of the form, where the dominance of the solo instrument is a direct consequence of its frank opposition to and rivalry with the orchestra. Mozart's contribution to the history of the concerto will be discussed at 8.15 p.m. on Saturday, February 28.

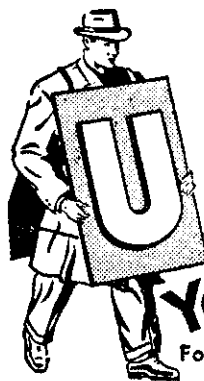
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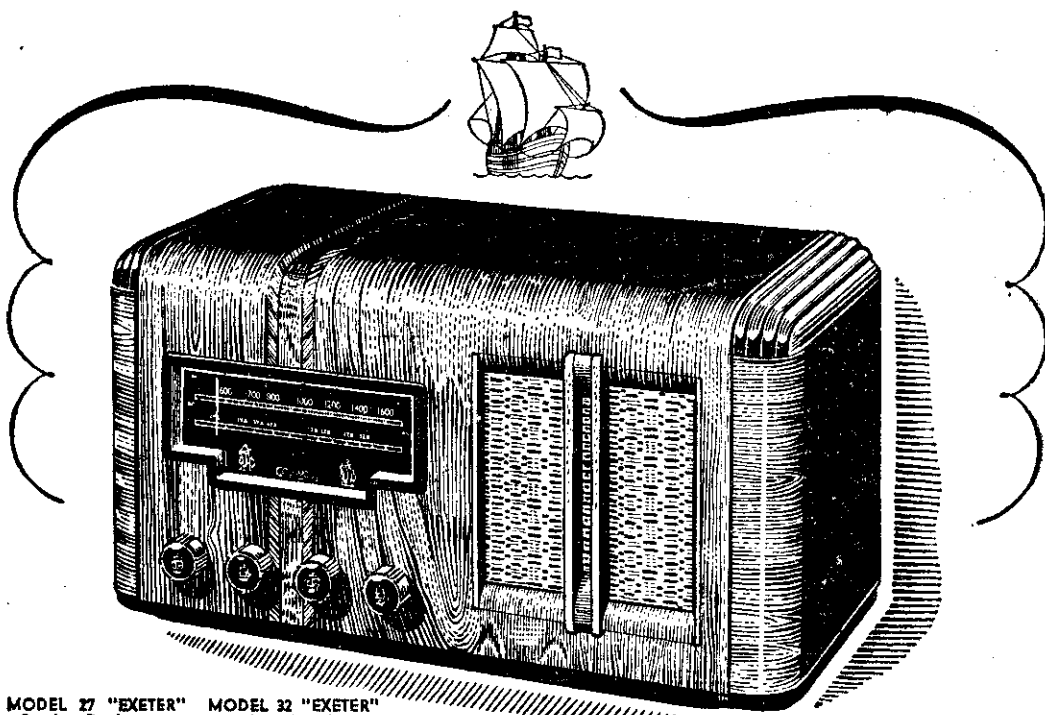
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