

February 10, Young Peoples' Concert
Musical Stories told by Beethoven, Tchaikovsky and Vivaldi

Vivaldi Biography:

Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* - Soloist: Concertmaster Erin Aldridge

Autumn, 3rd Movement

Winter, 1st Movement

ANTONIO VIVALDI *The Four Seasons (Le quattro stagioni)*

BORN: March 4, 1678, in Venice, Italy

DIED: July 27 or 28, 1741, in Vienna, Austria

WORK COMPOSED: c. 1723, published in 1725

WORLD PREMIERE: Unknown



One of the most famous comments musicians make about Vivaldi is that he “wrote the same concerto 500 times.” Well, he did write more than 500 concertos in addition to in excess of 100 solo sonatas, 150 vocal works and 50 operas. Vivaldi, like Handel, was born with an incredible ability: he could compose a piece faster than others could write it down. An extraordinarily large number of these works have withstood the test of time and there is a good chance that one of his works is heard everyday somewhere around the world. To say that Vivaldi is a household name is a gross understatement.

Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* is unquestionably his most famous work and arguably one of the most famous works of the entire classical music oeuvre. As the number in the title suggests, *The Four Seasons* is a compilation of four separate violin concertos: E major, Op. 8, No. 1, RV 269, *La primavera* (Spring); G minor, Op. 8, No. 2, RV 315, *L'estate* (Summer); F major, Op. 8, No. 3, RV 293, *L'autunno* (Autumn); and F minor, Op. 8, No. 4, RV 297, *L'inverno* (Winter). In 1725 they were published in Amsterdam along with eight additional violin concertos as *Il cimento dell'armonia e dell'inventione* (The Contest of Harmony and Invention).

Although Vivaldi's idea of depicting the seasons through music was not original, having been a favorite topic of Renaissance madrigals, *The Four Seasons* is one of the most eloquent expressions of them. Each of the concertos is separated into three movements, fast-slow-fast, and included in the first publication were sonnets for each concerto which were also divided into three parts. The sonnets were most likely written by Vivaldi as well, probably after he composed the music.

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Spring

Spring has come, and joyfully the birds welcome it with cheerful song,
and the streams, at the breath of zephyrs, flow swiftly with sweet murmurings.
But now the sky is cloaked in black and thunder and lightning announce themselves;
when they die away, the little birds turn afresh to their sweet song.

Then on the pleasant flower-strewn meadow,
to the gentle rustle of the leaves and branches the goatherd rests,
his faithful dog at his side.

To the rustic bagpipe's gay sound,
nymph and shepherd dance beneath the fair spring sky in all its glory.

Summer

In the torrid heat of the blazing sun,
man and beast alike languish, and even the pine trees scorch;
the cuckoo raises his voice, and soon after the turtledove and finch join in song.
Sweet zephyrs blow, but then the fierce north wind intervenes;
the shepherd weeps anxious for his fate from the harsh, menacing gusts;

He rouses his weary limbs from rest in fear of the lightning,
the fierce thunder and the angry swarms of gnats and flies.

Alas! his fears are justified, for furious thunder irradiates the heavens,
bowing down the trees and flattening the crops.

Autumn

The peasant celebrates with song and dance his joy in a fine harvest
and with generous draughts of Bacchus' cup his efforts end in sleep.

Song and dance are done,
the gentle, pleasant air and the season invite one and all
to the delights of sweetest sleep.

At first light a huntsman sets out with horns, guns, and dogs,
putting his prey to flight and following its tracks;
Terrified and exhausted by the great clamor of guns and dogs,
wounded and afraid, the prey tries to flee but is caught and dies.

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Winter

To shiver icily in the freezing dark in the teeth of a cruel wind,
to stamp your feet continually, so chilled that your teeth chatter;

To remain in quiet contentment by the fireside
while outside the rain soaks people by the hundreds;

To walk on the ice, with slow steps in fear of falling, advance with care.
Then to step forth strongly, fall to the ground,
and again run boldly on the ice until it cracks and breaks;
To listen as from the iron portals
winds rush from south and north,
and all the winds in contest; such is winter, such the joys it brings.

In the Louvre Museum there are paintings by Italian artist Giuseppe Arcimboldo (1526/7-1593) that are titled Four Seasons which are an excellent companion to Vivaldi's music. Arcimboldo was best known for creating imaginative portraits using objects such as fruits, vegetables, flowers, fish and books. The concertos were written for the Bohemian Count Wenzel von Morzin, whom Vivaldi served in absentia for many years as "Music Master in Italy." Vivaldi wrote in the ornate letter of dedication to the Count: "Pray do not be surprised if, among these few and feeble concertos, Your Most Illustrious Lordship finds the Four Seasons which have so long enjoyed the indulgence of Your Most Illustrious Lordship's kind generosity."

— Vincent Osborn © 2016

Suggested Listening Activities for Vivaldi Four Seasons:

1. Vivaldi's Four Seasons: Winter with violinist Itzhak Perlman

<https://youtu.be/hXq-imi271w>