

***The Four Seasons* – Antonio Vivaldi (1648-1741)**

By Music Director Charles Barker

Antonio Vivaldi, nicknamed “The Red Priest” (*il Prete Rosso*) for his bright red hair and lifetime devotion, is today one of the most performed composers from the Baroque era. He was born and lived in Venice most of his life, composing sacred works and producing numerous operas, including a 1733 opera *Motezuma* about the Aztec emperor. But his fame comes from the over 500 concertos he wrote mostly for the virtuosic young female musicians of the Ospedale where he was employed on and off for decades.

You will hear four of his most famous violin concertos, *The Four Seasons*. Their popularity has given rise to many arrangements and transcriptions, including for hurdy-gurdy, the Japanese Koto, and a vocal arrangement for the Swingle Singers. Even the Swiss philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau in 1775 published his own transcription of *Spring* for solo flute. The concertos set a high standard for 18th Century programmatic music by closely following the thematic outline of the accompanying sonnets probably written by Vivaldi himself (see below). We’ll never know which came first, the words or the music. Each concerto has three movements neatly ordered Fast-Slow-Fast.

What To Listen For

In the first movement of the *Spring Concerto* (E-major), listen for the birds chirping and trilling, the brook murmuring, and sudden thunder; in the second movement, the sleepy shepherd and his growling dog; and the shepherd’s bagpipe accompanying a Spring Pastoral in the third movement.

In *Summer* (G-minor), swelter in the heat, then the Cuckoo, Turtledove and Goldfinch sing before a sudden storm interrupts. The *Adagio* second movement has mosquitos and distant thunder leading directly into the devastating thunderstorm of the third movement.

The *Autumn Concerto* (F-major) depicts a merry Oktoberfest with stumbling drunkards who eventually fall asleep for the exquisitely serene second movement. In the final movement we’re off on a hunt (*La Caccia*) complete with horn calls in parallel thirds from the solo violin, while gunshots and barking dogs pursue the dying stag.

Winter (F-minor) begins with a stinging wind so cold our teeth chatter as we stamp our feet to keep warm. In the *Largo* second movement, probably the most beloved of all the movements from *The Four Seasons*, pizzicato strings portray the continuous dripping of a cold rain. It’s a slippery walk across a frozen lake in the final movement. The ice cracks when a warm wind, a harbinger of Spring, briefly blows, only to be overwhelmed by the fierce, freezing North wind.

Tonight’s performance of *The Four Seasons* is an audience-friendly *relaxed* performance. The normal “rules of theater attendance” need not apply. These pieces are

thrilling, so please feel free to applaud between movements and enjoy this great music and beautiful space the way you feel most comfortable.

Spring Concerto in E Major

Allegro

Spring arrives full of joy
The birds welcome it with bright song
As streams with sweet murmuring
Babble beneath warm Zephyrus;
They scatter covering the sky in black
As thunder and lightning menace,
Then quietly, the little birds alight
Singing their enchanted song anew.

Largo e pianissimo sempre

In the blossoming meadow
To the rustle of leaves and petals
The shepherd sleeps with his
Watchful dog at his side.

Allegro

Young maidens and shepherds accompanied
By the raucous bagpipe
Dance in their festivities
When generous Spring gleams.

Summer Concerto in G Minor

Allegro non molto

Sweltering under the Season of Sun,
Shepherds languish, flocks languish,
And the pine withers;
The Cuckoo's call comes joined
By the Turtledove and Goldfinch;
Boreas aroused, goads on
His complacent neighbor,
So the shepherd fears the looming
Storm and his own destiny.

Adagio

He fears the lightning and frightful thunder,
But it's the buzzing flies and blowflies
Pestering the restless flock
That disturb his ease and deny
His limbs their rest.

Presto

Woe is he, his fears come good

With thunder and lightning in the vast sky;
Hail crashes down scoring
The tops of the tall grain.

Autumn Concerto in F Major

Allegro

Villagers carouse dancing and singing
The sweet pleasure of a bountiful harvest;
And taking their fill of the liquor of Bacchus
Succumb to the gratification of sleep.

Adagio molto

All leave off dancing and song,
The temperate air gives grace
And the season invites one and all
To take pleasure in sweetest sleep.

Allegro

The Hunters at first light start the chase,
Out come the reeds and horns and shotguns,
The Hind fleeing, they follow her trail.
Already frightened and wearied
By the din of the guns and reeds,
And her bleeding wound,
Too spent to flee, overcome, she falls.

Winter Concerto in F Minor

Allegro non molto

Frozen, shivering in the glistening darkness
In piercing blasts of the Winter wind
Constantly running, stamping my feet,
My teeth chattering uncontrollably.

Largo

Draw closer to the fire, relaxed and content,
Meanwhile, outside the cold rain
Drenches the rest.

Allegro

Tiptoe on the ice, treading carefully,
Concentrate, you might fall;
Slide on in haste, slip and fall,
Quick, up again, now run on the ice,
It might crack and break,
A warm wind, Sirocco clashes
With Boreas, the Winds at War.
This is winter, but still, it brings joy.

Translation: C. Barker

Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre Orchestra -- Vivaldi *Four Seasons*

Violin I

Charles Stegeman, Leader and Soloist

Rachel Stegeman, Co-leader and Soloist

Jennifer Madge

Mary Beth Schotting

Rochelle Agnew

Joshua Huang

Violin II

Dawn Posey, Principal

Juan Jaramillo

Anne Jakovic

Eleanor Cameron

Maureen Conlon-Gutierrez

Tobias Chisnall

Viola

Jennifer Gerhard, Principal

Louise Farbman

John McCarthy

Justin J. Johnson

Cello

Elisa Kohanski, Principal

Paula Tuttle

Joseph Bishkoff

Paul Critser

Double Bass

Jeffrey Mangone, Principal

Andy Kohn

Robert Skavronski