

BMC 19 - ANTONIO VIVALDI: The 4 Seasons & Gloria RV589

One of the earliest uses of music was in the accompaniment of theatrical dance and story-telling, so it is natural that composers should from time to time produce what we know as "program music" – music written to portray events, activities or moods such as pastoral scenes or storms. Concertos representing the moods of the four seasons have always been popular, but none were to do so in such precise pictorial detail as the Four Seasons of Antonio Vivaldi.

Vivaldi was employed for most of his working life by the Venice Ospedale della Pietà. Often termed an "orphanage", this Ospedale was in fact a home for the female offspring of noblemen and their numerous dalliances with their mistresses. The Ospedale was thus well endowed by the "anonymous" fathers; its furnishings bordered on the opulent, the young ladies were well looked-after, and the musical standards among the highest in Venice. Many of Vivaldi's Concerti were composed as advanced exercises which he would play with his many talented pupils, and the wide variety of instruments for which he wrote testifies to their tremendous versatility.

In addition to the concertos for diverse instruments composed for the ladies of the Ospedale, Vivaldi also produced several "prestige" sets of concertos for which he arranged publication. In 1725 the publication *Il Cimento dell' Armonia e dell'invenzione* (The trial of harmony and invention), Opus 8, appeared in Amsterdam. This consisted of twelve concertos, seven of which were descriptive: *The Four Seasons*, *Storm at Sea*, *Pleasure* and *The Hunt*.

As a descriptive basis for his Four Seasons, Vivaldi took four Sonnets, apparently written by himself. Each of the four Sonnets is in turn divided into three phrases or ideas, reflected in the three movements (fast-slow-fast) of each Concerto. The published Concertos are marked to indicate which musical passages are representative of which verses of the sonnet. It is advisable, at least during the first few hearings, to follow the Sonnets and music together, for they are bound up with one another to an extent rarely heard in any other programmatic pieces either of the Baroque period or subsequently.

The Four Seasons I: SPRING - Concerto in E Major

Allegro

Springtime is upon us. The birds celebrate her return with festive song, and murmuring streams are softly caressed by the breezes. Thunderstorms, those heralds of Spring, roar, casting their dark mantle over heaven, Then they die away to silence, and the birds take up their charming songs once more.

Largo

On the flower-strewn meadow, with leafy branches rustling overhead, the goat-herd sleeps, his faithful dog beside him.

Allegro

Led by the festive sound of rustic bagpipes, nymphs and shepherds lightly dance beneath the brilliant canopy of spring.

The Four Seasons II: SUMMER – Concerto in g-minor

Allegro non molto

Beneath the blazing sun's relentless heat men and flocks are sweltering, pines are scorched. We hear the cuckoo's voice; then sweet songs of the turtle dove and finch are heard. Soft breezes stir the air...but threatening north wind sweeps them suddenly aside. The shepherd trembles, fearful of violent storm and what may lie ahead.

Adagio e piano - Presto e forte

His limbs are now awakened from their repose by fear of lightning's flash and thunder's roar, as gnats and flies buzz furiously around.

Presto

Alas, his worst fears were justified, as the heavens roar and great hailstones beat down upon the proudly standing corn.

The Four Seasons III: AUTUMN – Concerto in F Major

Allegro

The peasants celebrate with song and dance the harvest safely gathered in. The cup of Bacchus flows freely, and many find relief in deep slumber.

Adagio molto

The singing and the dancing die away as cooling breezes fan the pleasant air,
inviting all to sleep without a care.

Allegro

The hunters emerge at dawn, ready for the chase, with horns and dogs and cries.
Their quarry flees while they give chase.
Terrified and wounded, the prey struggles on, but, harried, dies.

The Four Seasons IV: WINTER – Concerto in f-minor

Allegro non molto

Shivering, frozen mid the frosty snow in biting, stinging winds;
running to and fro to stamp one's icy feet, teeth chattering in the bitter chill.

Largo

To rest contentedly beside the hearth,
while those outside are drenched by pouring rain.

Allegro

We tread the icy path slowly and cautiously, for fear of tripping and falling.
Then turn abruptly, slip, crash on the ground and, rising,
hasten on across the ice lest it cracks and breaks up.
We feel the chill north winds coarse through the home
despite the locked and bolted doors...
this is winter, which nonetheless brings its own delights.

GLORIA in D major, RV 589

Vivaldi also produced a number of sacred pieces for the Ospedale between 1713 and 1719, when he was called upon to “stand in” as Choirmaster. In 1715 he was voted a special emolument in respect of "A complete Mass, a Vespers, an Oratorio, over thirty Motets and other labours". A further opportunity arose between 1737 and 1739, when the Pieta paid him for six Psalm settings and eleven Motets. Although not established with certainty, the Gloria RV 588 was probably an early work, with the more popular, present setting RV 589, being a later re-working of RV 588.

1. **CHORUS:** *Gloria in excelsis Deo;* Glory to God on high,
2. **CHORUS:** *et in terra pax hominibus bonae voluntatis.*
and on Earth, peace, good will toward men.
3. **DUET:** *Laudamus te, benedicimus te, adoramus te, glorificamus te.*
We praise Thee, we bless Thee, we worship Thee, we glorify Thee.
4. **CHORUS:** *Gratias agimus tibi propter magnam gloriam tuam.*
We give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory.
5. **ARIA:** *Domine Deus, rex coelestis! Deus Pater omnipotens!*
Lord God, heavenly King! God the Father Almighty!
6. **CHORUS:** *Domine Fili unigenite Jesu Christe.* Oh Lord, the only begotten Son
7. **Solo with CHORUS:** *Domine Deus, Agnus Dei, Filius Patris! Qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.* Oh Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the Father!
Thou that takest away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.
8. **CHORUS:** *Qui tollis peccata mundi, suscipe deprecationem nostram!*
Thou that takest away the sins of the world, receive our prayer!
9. **ARIA:** *Qui sedes ad dexteram Patris, miserere nobis!*
Thou that sittest at the right hand of the Father, have mercy on us!
10. **CHORUS:** *Quoniam tu solus sanctus, tu solus dominus, tu solus altissimus Jesu Christe.* For Thou only art holy. Thou only art the Lord,
Thou only art most high, Jesus Christ.
11. **CHORUS:** *Cum sancto Spiritu in gloria Dei Patris, Amen.*
With the Holy Ghost, in the Glory of God the Father, Amen.

