

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) *Le quattro stagioni* = *The Four Seasons* (c. 1716-17)

In 1725, in the city of Amsterdam, the firm of Michel-Charles le Cène published a set of twelve concertos for violin, strings and continuo by the great Venetian virtuoso and composer Antonio Vivaldi. The collection bore the impressive, but somewhat intriguing title *Il cimento dell'armonia e inventione* (*The Contest Between Harmony & Invention*). The first four concertos were each dedicated to a particular season and have become an entity in their own right which we now know as *The Four Seasons*, a division from the whole which Vivaldi could not have foreseen. This set of concertos quickly became popular, especially in France, where *La primavera* (*Spring*), was a favourite of King Louis XV. But after Vivaldi's death the Seasons pretty much disappeared from view, and by the beginning of the twentieth century were known only to a few musicologists.

But a 1948 recording by Louis Kaufman started a kind of bushfire, and by the 1990s *The Four Seasons* was one of the most recorded works of all time. At last count collectors could choose from a daunting field of more than 400 versions – and counting.

One of the remarkable features of Vivaldi's score is the very detailed program attached to each concerto: each has an introductory sonnet, probably by Vivaldi himself, and extra-musical details, including birdlife, meteorological phenomena and human activity, are spelled out in the score. You can see a comprehensive list of these, and where they occur in the performance, below. With a work as popular as *The Four Seasons*, it's hard to find anything original to say, but Harry Ward somehow managed to freshen them up in his performance for ANAM.

La primavera = Spring

(i) *Allegro*

1:30 *Canto de' uccelli* = song of the birds

2:11 *Scorrono i fonti* = flowing fountains

2:37 *Tuoni* = thunder

3:00 *Canto d'uccelli* = song of the birds

(ii) *Largo*

4:20 *Mormorio di fronde e piante* = rustling of branches and plants

Il cane che grida = barking dog (direction to viola: "must be played very loud and raspily throughout")

(iii) *Allegro* (Pastoral Dance) – note bagpipe effects

L'estate = Summer

(i) *Allegro non molto*

12:06 *Languidezza per il caldo* = languid due to the heat

13:15 *Il cucco* = the cuckoo

14:10 *La tortorella* = the turtle dove

14:42 *Il gardellino* = the finch

14:52 *Zeffiretti dolci* = sweet breezes

15:08 *Venti diversi* = various winds; *Vento Borea* = north wind

15:45 *Il pianto del villanello* = the tears of the shepherd boy

(ii) *Adagio*

17:30 *Mosche e mosconi* = flies and blowflies

17:47 *Tuoni* = thunder

(iii) *Presto*

19:39 *Tempo impetuoso d'estate* = stormy summer weather

L'autunno = Autumn

(i) *Allegro*

23:56 *Ballo e canto de' villanelli* = dancing and singing of the villagers

24:56 *L'ubriaco* = the drunkard

25:15 *Ubriachi* = drunkards

26:10 *Ubriaco* = drunkard

27:00 *L'ubriaco che dorme* = the drunkard sleeps

(ii) *Adagio molto*

29:18 *Dormienti ubriachi* =

(iii) *Allegro*

32:11 *La caccia* = the hunt

33:39 *La fiera che fugge* = the (hunted) animal flees

33:46 *Schioppi e cani* = guns and dogs. (note: what did Harry ask players to do for gun effects?)

33:39 *La fiera fuggendo muore* = the fleeing animal dies

L'inverno = Winter

(i) *Allegro non molto*

37:16 *Orrido vento* = horrible wind

37:51 *Correre, e battere li piedi per il freddo* = to run, and stamp our feet in the cold

38:24 *Venti* = winds

(ii) *Largo*

40:15 *La pioggia* = rain

(iii) *Allegro*

42:56 *Caminar piano e con timore* = to walk softly and fearfully (on the ice)

43:26 *Cader a terra* = falling on the ground

43:30 *Correr forte* = running fast

44:26 *Il vento sirocco* = the sirocco wind

44:57 *Il vento borea e tutti li venti* = the north wind and all the winds