

"The Four Seasons", Op. 8, Nos. 1 – 4

Antonio Vivaldi (1678 – 1741)

Antonio Vivaldi, nicknamed "il Prete Rosso" (the red priest), was born on March 4, 1678 in Venice to Giovanni Battista Vivaldi, a professional violinist at the church of St. Mark's and Camilla Calicchio. Although Antonio was a gifted violinist, he was actually ordained a priest in 1703; however he celebrated very few masses due to his chronic asthma. Immediately after his ordination, Vivaldi was appointed Maestro di violino at the Ospedale della Pietà, a girls' orphanage in Venice. In 1711, he was promoted to Maestro de' concerti (music director); and in 1735, he became Maestro di cappella. This was a position that he held between 1703 and 1738. During his lifetime, Vivaldi wrote more than 500 concerti, some 50 operas, numerous cantatas, trio sonatas, the Magnificat in G minor and his most famous choral work "Gloria".

Vivaldi's signature composition "The Four Seasons" violin concertos is undisputedly one of the world's most recorded works, with each one depicting the moods and scenery of each season. They were published in 1725 in Amsterdam by Le Cène under the title "Il Cimento dell'Armenia e dell'invenzione" (The trial of harmony and invention). There are a total of twelve concertos in this particular opus, seven of which have descriptive titles such as The Four Seasons, Storm at Sea, Pleasure and The Hunt. Presumably, Vivaldi has set the music of the "Four Seasons" to the sonnets that he penned. It is scored for strings and harpsichord, and there are three movements in each concerto (fast-slow-fast). They are considered early examples of program music, which means that the music is written based on a specific event, play or poem. While listening to the music, one should pay attention to the following sounds imitated by various combinations of instruments: barking dogs in the second movement of the "Spring" concerto, frozen landscapes in the "Winter" concerto, and other musical materials that mimic the sound of a bird or the rustling of leaves.

Unfortunately, Vivaldi's music did not receive the recognition that he deserved while he was still alive. In fact, it was not until the 20th century that there was a revival of his music. Vivaldi died on July 28, 1741 and was buried at the Vienna's Cathedral of St. Stephen.

Program notes written by Eric D. Fahn ©