

Program Notes by Ken Meltzer

The Four Seasons, Opus 8, Nos. 1-4

Composed in 1725

ANTONIO VIVALDI

Born in Venice, Italy; March 4, 1678

Died in Vienna, Austria; July 28, 1741

These are the first performances of this work by the Charlotte Symphony.

Antonio Vivaldi's most popular composition, *The Four Seasons (Le quattro stagioni)*, is actually part of a larger work, a series of twelve concertos for violin and orchestra the composer entitled *Il cimento dell'armonia e dell'inventione (The Contest of Harmony and Invention)*, Opus 8. *The Four Seasons* comprises the first four of the Opus 8 concertos.

Le Cène, in Amsterdam, published *Il cimento dell'armonia e dell'inventione* in 1725. The 1725 score of *The Four Seasons* includes sonnets (that may have been written by the composer), describing the programs for each movement. Each "Season" consists of a three-movement concerto. Two fast-tempo outer movements frame a central slow movement. As the sonnets included in the score provide a specific description of each movement, a prose translation is provided below.

Spring (La primavera)

Opus 8, No. 1, in E Major

I. *Allegro*—

Spring has arrived merrily;
The birds hail her with happy song.
And meanwhile, at the breath of the Zephyrs,
The streams flow with a sweet murmur.

Thunder and lightning, chosen to proclaim her,
Come covering the sky with a black mantle.
And then, when these fall silent, the little birds
Return once more to their melodious incantation.

II. *Largo*—

And so, on the pleasant, flowery meadow,
To welcome murmuring of fronds and trees,
The goatherd sleeps, with his trusty dog beside him.

III. *Allegro*—

To the festive sound of the shepherd's bagpipes,
Nymphs and shepherds dance beneath the beloved roof
At the joyful appearance of Spring.

Summer (L'estate)

Opus 8, No. 2, in G minor

I. *Allegro non molto*—

Beneath the harsh season inflamed by the sun,
Man languishes, the flock languishes, and the pine tree burns;
The cuckoo unleashes its voice, and as soon as it is heard,
The turtledove sings and the goldfinch, too.

Sweet Zephyrus blows,
But Boreas suddenly opens a dispute with his neighbor,
And the shepherd weeps, for he fears
A fierce storm looming – and his destiny.

II. *Adagio; Presto*—

The fear of lightning and fierce thunder,
And the furious swarm of flies and blowflies
Deprives his weary limbs of repose.

III. *Presto*—

Oh, alas! His fears are only too true.
The sky thunders, flares, and with hailstones
Severs the heads of the proud grain crops.

Autumn (L'autunno)

Opus 8, No. 3, in F Major

I. *Allegro*—

The peasant celebrates in dance and song,
The sweet pleasure of the rich harvest,
And fired by Bacchus's liquor,
Many end their enjoyment in slumber.

II. *Adagio*—

The air, which, fresher now, lends contentment,
And the season which invites so many

To the great pleasure of sweetest slumber,
Make each one abandon dance and song.

III. *Allegro*—

At the new dawn, the hunters set out on the hunt
With horns, guns, and dogs.
The wild beast flees, and they follow its track;

Already bewildered, and wearied by the great noise
Of guns and dogs, and wounded,
It threatens weakly to escape, but overwhelmed, dies.

Winter (L'inverno)

Opus 8, No. 4, in F minor

I. *Allegro non molto*—

To shiver, frozen, amid icy snows
At the harsh wind's chill breath;
To run, stamping one's feet at every moment,
With one's teeth chattering from the excessive cold;

II. *Largo*—

To pass the days of calm and contentment by the fireside,
While the rain outside drenches a hundred others;

III. *Allegro*—

To walk on the ice, and with slow steps
To move about cautiously for fear of falling;

To go fast, slip, and fall to the ground;
To go on the ice again and run fast
Until the ice cracks and breaks open;

To hear, as they sally forth through the iron-clad gates,
Sirocco, Boreas, and all the winds at war.
This is winter, but of a kind to bring joy.

The score calls for solo violin, strings and continuo.

Duration: c. 40 minutes

Fantasia and Fugue in C Minor, BWV 537 (orchestrated by Edward Elgar)

Composed 1708-17; orchestrated 1921-22

JOHANN SEBASTIAN BACH

Born in Eisenach, Germany; March 21, 1685

Died in Leipzig, Germany; July 28, 1750

These are the first performances of this work by the Charlotte Symphony.

In addition to his incomparable talents as a composer, Johann Sebastian Bach was one of the finest keyboard virtuosos of his day. Bach's mastery extended to both the harpsichord and organ, and his technique was so superb that he was able to execute the most difficult passages with a minimum of visible effort. As Bach's first biographer, Johann Nikolaus Forkel, described:

Bach is said to have played with so easy and so small a motion of the fingers that it was hardly perceptible. Only the first joints of the fingers were in motion; the hands retained, even in the most difficult passages, its rounded form; the fingers rose very little from the keys, hardly more than in a trill, and when one was employed the others remained quietly in position. Still less did the other parts of his body take any share in his playing, as happens with many whose hand is not light enough. He rendered all of his fingers, of both hands, equally strong and serviceable, so that he was able to execute not only chords and all running passages, but also single and double trills with equal ease and delicacy.

Bach's employment as an organist occurred during his early years in Arnstadt, Mülhausen, and Weimar. It was during the Weimar years (1708-1717) that he composed the majority of his music for organ, including, in all likelihood, the great Fantasia and Fugue in C minor, BWV 537. In this work, the Fantasia (which is improvisational and florid) and the Fugue (a far more structured form in which a theme is subjected to intricate, multi-voiced treatment) sections are of approximately equal duration.

British composer Edward Elgar's (1857-1934) robust orchestration of the Bach Fantasia and Fugue spanned the years 1921-22. In April of 1921, Elgar orchestrated the Fugue portion, which premiered in Queen's Hall in London on October 27, 1921, Eugene Goossens, conducting. Elgar was hopeful that Richard Strauss would orchestrate the opening Fantasia. When that did not occur, Elgar orchestrated the Fantasia as well. The Bach/Elgar Fantasia in C minor premiered at the Gloucester Festival on September 7, 1922, under Elgar's direction.

The score calls for 2 flutes and piccolo, 2 oboes and English horn, 2 clarinets and bass clarinet, 2 bassoons and contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, 2 harps and strings.

Duration: c. 10 minutes

Symphony No. 4 in A Major, Opus 90 ("Italian")

Composed in 1833

Premiered in London on May 13, 1833, with the composer conducting the London Philharmonic Society.

FELIX MENDELSSOHN

Born in Hamburg, Germany; February 3, 1809

Died in Leipzig, Germany; November 4, 1847

This work was first performed by the Charlotte Symphony on March 27, 1942 with Guillermo S. de Roxlo conducting at the Armory Auditorium. The ninth and most recent performance set was heard on March 7& 8, 2003 with André Raphel Smith conducting at the Belk Theater of the Blumenthal Performing Arts Center.

Music lovers are the happy beneficiaries of Felix Mendelssohn's love for travel. The young composer's fulfilling 1829 journey to Scotland inspired two of his masterpieces, the *Hebrides (Fingal's Cave) Overture* (1830) and the "Scottish" Symphony (begun in 1829, and finally completed in 1842).

As much as Mendelssohn enjoyed his Scottish travels, it was the visit to Italy that he anticipated with the greatest relish. On May 8, 1830, the 21-year-old Mendelssohn departed Berlin for his Italian journey, stopping first in Weimar (where he visited the great German poet Goethe), Munich, and Vienna. Mendelssohn then continued his travels to Venice, Florence, Rome, and finally, Naples.

Mendelssohn began the composition of the "Italian" Symphony while in the midst of his travels. He wrote from Rome on February 22, 1831: "The 'Italian' Symphony is making rapid progress. It will be the jolliest piece I have so far written, especially the last movement. I have not yet decided on the (slow movement) and I think I shall wait until I get to Naples."

Mendelssohn finally completed his "Italian" Symphony in 1833, in response to a commission by the London Philharmonic Society. The work received its premiere in London under Mendelssohn's direction, on May 13 of that year.

A relentless perfectionist, Mendelssohn was never entirely pleased with his "Italian" Symphony. He did not allow the work to be published, and throughout his lifetime, continued to revise the score. The symphony was finally issued posthumously, and although it apparently never satisfied Mendelssohn's standards, the "Italian"—with its wealth of melodic inspiration and infectious *joie de vivre*—has continued to delight audiences for more than a century and a half.

Mendelssohn's high spirits during his Italian journey are apparent from the very opening bars of the symphony, as the violins, over chirping woodwind accompaniment, sing the *Allegro vivace's* principal melody. The slow second movement (*Andante con moto*) may have been inspired by a religious procession Mendelssohn witnessed in Naples. The graceful third movement (*Con moto moderato*) recalls the minuets of the Classical-era symphonies of Haydn and Mozart. The whirlwind finale (*Saltarello: Presto*) is based

upon an energetic Italian dance known as a *saltarello*, whose name is derived from the word “saltare” (“to jump”).

The score calls for woodwinds in pairs, 2 horns, 2 trumpets, timpani and strings.

Duration: 27 minutes