

WIGMORE HALL

Monday 11 December 2023
7.30pm

The Four Seasons

La Serenissima

Adrian Chandler director, violin
Oliver Cave violin I
Charlotte Spruit violin I
Abel Balazs violin I
Samuel Staples violin II
Hattie Haynes violin II

Ellen Bundy violin II
Valentin Sánchez Piñero violin II
Oliver Wilson viola
Elitsa Bogdanova viola
Thomas Kirby viola

Vladimir Waltham cello
Carina Drury cello
Cecelia Bruggemeyer double bass
Lynda Sayce theorbo
Robin Bigwood organ, harpsichord

Giuseppe Valentini (1681-1753)

Sinfonia 'per il Santissimo Natale' Op. 1 No. 12 (pub. 1701)
*I. Largo - Andante e forte • II. Allegro •
III. Largo • IV. Presto*

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

Violin Concerto in C RV170
I. Presto • II. Largo • III. Allegro

Giovanni Lorenzo Gregori
(1663-1745)

Concerto grosso in D Op. 2 No. 2 (pub. 1698)

Lorenzo Gaetano Zavateri
(1690-1764)

Concerto in D Op. 1 No. 10 'Pastorale' (pub. 1735)
*I. Grave - Adagio • II. Allegro •
III. Largo • IV. Pastorale. Andante*

Interval

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

Concerto for violin, strings and continuo in E 'La primavera'
RV269 (pub. 1725)
*I. Allegro • II. Largo e pianissimo sempre •
III. Danza pastorale. Allegro*



Scan this QR code for Vivaldi's
The Four Seasons sonnets

Concerto for violin, strings and continuo in G minor 'L'estate'
RV315 (pub. 1725)
I. Allegro non molto • II. Adagio • III. Presto

Concerto for violin, strings and continuo in F 'L'autunno' RV293
(pub. 1725)
I. Allegro • II. Adagio molto • III. Allegro

Concerto for violin, strings and continuo in F minor 'L'inverno'
RV297 (pub. 1725)
I. Allegro non molto • II. Largo • III. Allegro

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Valentini, Vivaldi, Gregori and Zavateri

It was Arcangelo Corelli who first developed the idea of a concerto specially composed for Christmas. For inspiration, he took the idea of the Adoration of the Shepherds, a subject found in countless works of art and depicting shepherds, usually three in number, grouped around the crib of the baby Jesus; others could also be found holding rustic musical instruments, usually bagpipes.

Rome and Naples held a longstanding tradition where shepherds would descend from the surrounding hills during the Novena of Christmas and play before church cribs on the zampogna (a set of bagpipes common to central and southern Italy) in duo with a melody instrument such as the ciaramella or piffaro, supplying a drone and duetting with the melody in sixths and thirds.

Of course, it wasn't Corelli who 'invented' this art-folk pastiche, but he did inspire countless other musicians to compose similar works. **Giuseppe Valentini**, who succeeded Corelli as director of the concertino at the church of San Luigi dei Francesi in Rome, included one such work as the finale to his Opus 1. Although lacking a viola part, it was customary in Rome (famed for its large bands of stringed instruments) for such works to be played with much larger ensembles.

Another Christmas work is the concerto *a Pastorale* by **Lorenzo Gaetano Zavateri**. Born in Bologna, Zavateri was, like Antonio Vivaldi, a pupil of Giuseppe Torelli, and pursued his career in northern Italy. His surviving oeuvre suggests that he was first and foremost a violinist, and a composer second. That said, his two published sets show considerable skill, his Opus 1 concertos (c.1735) receiving praise from Padre Martini for their 'well refined intelligence'. The Christmas concerto, the tenth work in the set, is a rare Italian example of a double violin concerto (if one discounts Vivaldi's large collection of similar works).

Giovanni Lorenzo Gregori spent nearly his entire life in the Tuscan city of Lucca. Apart from three oratorios composed in the late 1730s, the vast majority of his compositions belong to the period 1697–1705 including the Opus 2 concertos. These works are scored for strings and continuo, with the occasional use of one or two solo violins.

Gregori is often cited as a key player in the development of the concerto, but it was **Vivaldi** who put the solo concerto firmly on the map. He composed around 500 examples including around 250 concertos for solo violin, many of which, like tonight's concerto in C, were composed for the Ospedale della Pietà, the Venetian founding institution with which he was associated for much of his career.

Antonio Vivaldi: Le Quattro Stagioni

The concertos that make up *Le Quattro Stagioni* are probably the most famous pieces of classical music ever written. In the 18th Century too, these works were immensely popular, prompting Vivaldi himself to rework the opening of *La primavera* for inclusion in his operas *Giustino* and *Dorilla in Tempe*. This was the concerto that delighted above all others, receiving the approval of King

Louis XV of France who, on one occasion, demanded an impromptu performance.

Vivaldi used *Le Quattro Stagioni* to open his 12 concertos Opus 8 (1725), *Il cimento dell'armonia e invenzione* ('The fusion of harmony and invention'). The collection was dedicated to the Bohemian Count Wenzel von Morzin to whom Vivaldi served as *Maestro di Musica in Italia*. One of the most original characteristics of these works is the programmatic element found in both the occasional descriptive tags and in the sonnets which accompany each concerto (by Vivaldi himself?) to which Vivaldi provides cues in the score.

Published in Amsterdam by the house of Le Cene, the opening dedication states that these concertos were not freshly composed, but that their inclusion was due to the fact that they had 'so long enjoyed the indulgence of Your Most Illustrious Lordship's kind generosity', and in addition 'I have added to them besides the sonnets a very clear statement of all the things that unfold in them, so that I am sure they will appear new to you.'

The subjects of *The Four Seasons* and its closely related *Ages of Man* appeared widely throughout the European arts of the post-Renaissance, inspired by the Arcadian poetry of Theocritus's *Idylls* and Virgil's *Eclogues*. The educated elite would have been schooled in the classical texts and their modern counterparts in addition to the art of rhetoric, which helped artists to disseminate their ideas. Vivaldi's own writings show a knowledge of these texts, the first sonnet containing echoes of Lucretius's *De rerum natura*.

Invention, or *inventio*, was one of the five key parts of rhetoric. Painters used this concept to draw inspiration for their pictorial composition whilst composers used a similar process to help develop 'figures' in order to express their ideas in much the same way; it is this technique to which Vivaldi refers in his title *Il cimento dell'armonia e invenzione*. When viewed thus, it becomes apparent that Vivaldi's skills as an operatic composer have been brought to bear on *Le Quattro Stagioni*. Several themes contained within these works can be found among stock aria-types of Baroque opera, including birds, storm, sleep, hunting and war. In addition to these we can find various affects and concepts, devices that the operatic composer used (as opposed to 'feelings') to communicate with his audience including nature, calm, faith, love, melancholy and suspicion.

With such a complex design, one wonders whether *Le Quattro Stagioni* has an overall allegorical plan and indeed, whether this can be pursued further through the other concerti of Opus 8. Note the use of the dog – the personification of Melancholy – in conjunction with the key of C sharp minor in *La primavera*; the cuckoo, the first bird of *L'estate* foretelling doom for the unfortunate lover, his emotional state of mind shown through the means of the storm in this concerto's finale (a common operatic device); the recycling of rhythmic material from *La primavera* in *L'autunno*; and echoes of the heat of *L'estate* in the coming of the sirocco in *L'inverno*.

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