

CHAN 6510

# Vivaldi

## The Four Seasons

Bournemouth Sinfonietta  
**Ronald Thomas**

collect

**Antonio Vivaldi** (1678–1741)

**The Four Seasons**

<b>1</b>	<b>Concerto in E major, Op. 8 No. 1, RV 269 'Spring'</b>	<b>10:17</b>
	Allegro – Largo – Allegro	
<b>2</b>	<b>Concerto in G minor, Op. 8 No. 2, RV 315 'Summer'</b>	<b>10:35</b>
	Allegro non molto; Allegro – Adagio – Presto	
<b>3</b>	<b>Concerto in F major, Op. 8 No. 3, RV 293 'Autumn'</b>	<b>11:31</b>
	Allegro – Adagio molto – Allegro	
<b>4</b>	<b>Concerto in F minor, Op. 8 No. 4, RV 297 'Winter'</b>	<b>9:13</b>
	Allegro non molto – Largo – Allegro	
		<b>TT 41:53</b>

**Bournemouth Sinfonietta**

**Ronald Thomas** director/solo violin

**Vivaldi: The Four Seasons**

Antonio Vivaldi was born in Venice, the greatest Italian cultural city of the High Renaissance, in 1678. By then, Venice had passed the zenith of its influence, but was still a very important centre: a city to which all artists were drawn, owing to the tradition of inspiring and nurturing such talent. During Vivaldi's lifetime there were four orphanages or convents in Venice which were renowned for their musical accomplishments. These unique schools, for illegitimate, orphaned or abandoned girls, provided the best possible musical education. One school in particular, the *Ospedale della Pietà*, for which Vivaldi was responsible, was famous for its superb orchestra, reputedly one of the best in Europe. Most of Vivaldi's life as a professional musician was spent in the employment of this orphanage as teacher, conductor and composer, although he also became famous for his recital performances as a virtuoso violinist outside the *Pietà*.

Vivaldi's father, a musician, had urged his son to enter the priesthood rather than follow in his footsteps. However, within a year of being ordained Vivaldi changed his career, claiming that he was not strong enough to celebrate Mass and follow the duties of

priesthood. Yet as a musician he rehearsed the school orchestra, gave violin recitals, conducted opera and orchestral concerts, and composed as well as taught at the orphanage, being permitted to do so only because he had been ordained.

At the *Pietà* the girls were closely cloistered: many of their concerts in the church of the *Ospedale* were performed behind iron-grilled lattices so that the audience could not see their faces. The directors of the orphanage expected Vivaldi to compose concertos for the orchestra and to 'instruct the girls in the way to play them well'. Vivaldi could therefore experiment: not only did he conduct and compose for the orchestra but he built up a collection of excellent instruments so that its sound would be of the highest quality.

The four concertos 'Spring', 'Summer', 'Autumn' and 'Winter', commonly known of course as *The Four Seasons*, were almost certainly written for the girls and performed many times in the church of the *Pietà*. The complete collection of twelve concertos, which is entitled *Il cimento dell'Armonia e dell'Invenzione* (The Contest between Harmony and Invention) and begins with *The Four Seasons*, was famous before it was eventually

published, in 1725 when the composer was forty-seven. In his dedication to Count Wenceslas Morzin, Vivaldi wrote:

...I decided to have this volume printed, so as to lay it most humbly at the feet of Your Highness. I beseech you not to be surprised if Your Highness should find among these few feeble concertos the Four Seasons which, with your noble goodness, Your Highness has looked on indulgently for so long...

*The Four Seasons* are often conveniently labelled 'programme music', and throughout the four concertos Vivaldi added the words of a sonnet above the particular section to which each line applies. For example, in the first concerto Vivaldi wrote above the opening bars, '...Spring has arrived...', and a few bars later, when three solo violins enter, he indicated that they represent 'the song of the birds'. Vivaldi himself may even have been the author of the four sonnets.

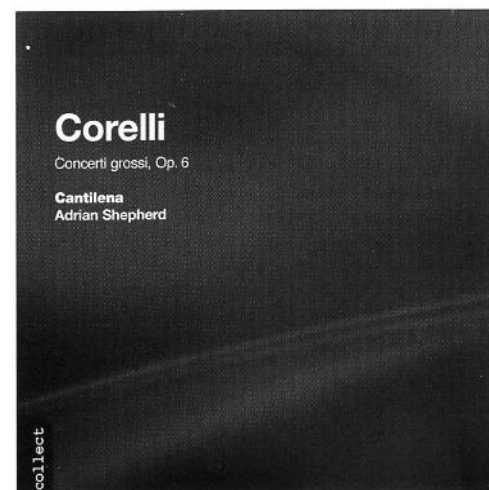
Vivaldi was not as well appreciated in his native city as he was outside it and he

travelled widely towards the end of his life. His love of Venice was so great, however, that he always returned. Finally, a year before his death, he left the *Pietà* for the last time, and he died in poverty in Vienna in 1741 aged sixty-three.

Vivaldi composed at an amazing rate, producing hundreds of sonatas, and much vocal music including an impressive body of operas. But his greatest contribution was in the concerto genre: he wrote well over 500. He extended violin technique, experimented with orchestral effects, and established a form of the concerto which other composers, notably Johann Sebastian Bach, were to follow. Vivaldi was a typical Venetian as manifested by the theatrical and easy-going qualities of his music. These concertos, *The Four Seasons*, which spread his fame far and wide during his lifetime, have today taken their place as the most famous and best-loved of all his works.

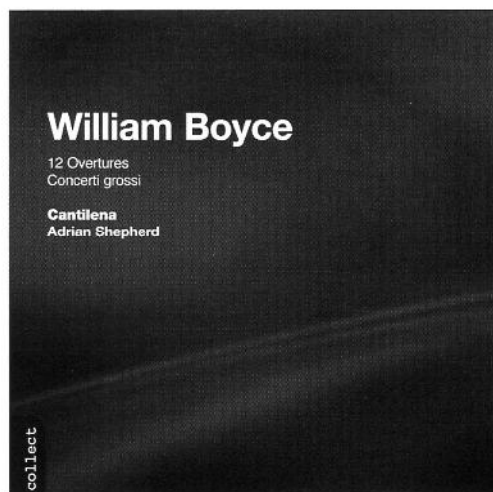
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