

Vivaldi

12 Concertos, Op. 8

'Il cimento dell'armonia e dell'invenzione'

Includes The Four Seasons

Bournemouth Sinfonietta • Ronald Thomas

collect

Antonio Vivaldi (1678–1741)

COMPACT DISC ONE

**Concerto in E major 'La primavera' (Spring),
Op. 8 No. 1 (RV 269)** 10:23
in E-Dur · mi majeur

- | | | | |
|---|-----|---------------------------|------|
| 1 | I | Allegro | 3:19 |
| 2 | II | Largo e pianissimo sempre | 2:37 |
| 3 | III | Allegro | 4:21 |

**Concerto in G minor 'L'estate' (Summer),
Op. 8 No. 2 (RV 315)** 10:36
in g-Moll · sol mineur

- | | | | |
|---|-----|----------------------------------|------|
| 4 | I | Allegro non molto | 5:42 |
| 5 | II | Adagio | 2:01 |
| 6 | III | Tempo impetuoso d'estate: Presto | 2:50 |

**Concerto in F major 'L'autunno' (Autumn),
Op. 8 No. 3 (RV 293)** 11:24
in F-Dur · fa majeur

- | | | | |
|---|-----|---------------------|------|
| 7 | I | Allegro | 5:11 |
| 8 | II | Adagio | 2:44 |
| 9 | III | Allegro (La caccia) | 3:36 |

**Concerto in F minor 'L'inverno' (Winter),
Op. 8 No. 4 (RV 297)** 9:14
in f-Moll · fa mineur

- | | | | |
|----|-----|-------------------|------|
| 10 | I | Allegro non molto | 3:25 |
| 11 | II | Largo | 2:25 |
| 12 | III | Allegro | 3:20 |

**Concerto in E flat major 'La tempesta di mare'
(Stormy sea), Op. 8 No. 5 (RV 253)** 9:52
in Es-Dur · mi bémol majeur

- | | | | |
|----|-----|--------|------|
| 13 | I | Presto | 3:07 |
| 14 | II | Largo | 2:50 |
| 15 | III | Presto | 3:54 |

**Concerto in C major 'Il piacere' (Pleasure),
Op. 8 No. 6 (RV 180)** 9:46
in C-Dur · ut majeur

- | | | | |
|----|-----|-------------------|------|
| 16 | I | Allegro | 3:15 |
| 17 | II | Largo e cantabile | 3:22 |
| 18 | III | Allegro | 3:04 |

TT 61:45

COMPACT DISC TWO

Concerto in D minor, Op. 8 No. 7 (RV 242) 9:12

in d-Moll · ré mineur

1	I	Allegro	2:59
2	II	Largo	2:51
3	III	Allegro	3:15

Concerto in G minor, Op. 8 No. 8 (RV 332)

10:27

in g-Moll · sol mineur

4	I	Allegro	3:18
5	II	Largo	3:21
6	III	Allegro	3:46

Concerto in D minor, Op. 8 No. 9 (RV 236)

8:45

in d-Moll · ré mineur

7	I	Allegro	3:25
8	II	Largo	2:27
9	III	Allegro	2:49

John Digney oboe

Concerto in B flat major 'La caccia' (The hunt), Op. 8 No. 10 (RV 362)

9:31

in B-Dur · si bémol majeur

10	I	Allegro	3:49
11	II	Adagio	2:46
12	III	Allegro	2:51

Concerto in D major, Op. 8 No. 11 (RV 210)

13:27

in D-Dur · ré majeur

13	I	Allegro	5:10
14	II	Largo	3:08
15	III	Allegro	5:04

Concerto in C major, Op. 8 No. 12 (RV 178)

10:11

in C-Dur · ut majeur

16	I	Allegro	3:22
17	II	Largo	3:03
18	III	Allegro	3:41

John Digney oboe

TT 61:48

Bournemouth Sinfonietta

Ronald Thomas director/violin

Vivaldi: 12 Concertos, Op. 8

Vivaldi's first two publications contained sonatas and it was not until 1712–13 that his first concertos were printed. These were collected under the title *L'estro armonico* and published by Estienne Roger in Amsterdam. At the same time Roger brought out another set of twelve concertos by Vivaldi called *La stravaganza* which, according to Charles Burney, 'among flashy players, whose chief merit was rapid execution, occupied the highest place of favour'. In the years 1716–17 the Roger family published two further sets of Vivaldi's concertos: Opus 6 (six concertos), and Opus 7 (twelve concertos), neither set being given a fanciful title, this time. Then nothing further appeared until around 1725, when another Amsterdam publisher, Michele Le Cène, brought out Vivaldi's Opus 8: *Il cimento dell'armonia e dell'invenzione*. It contained the four concertos which, had he written nothing else, would have secured an undoubted niche in posterity for Vivaldi. These were the 'Four Seasons' concertos, works which fall into the category of true 'programme' music. Vivaldi was by no means the first in this field, nor the only man of his generation, to experiment with programmatic titles and musical content.

Vivaldi's Opus 8 was elaborately dedicated to Count Morzin whom Vivaldi apparently had served as 'Maestro di Musica in Italia'. Count Morzin came from a Bohemian aristocratic family whom Haydn was to encounter in the late 1750s when Count Ferdinand engaged him as director of his private orchestra. Vivaldi's dedicatory note makes it clear that the 'Four Seasons' were actually composed some years prior to their publication in 1725. But for publication, Vivaldi explains, four sonnets have been added, together with notes of a descriptive character. It is not known who composed the sonnets, though the closeness with which score and poem agree with one another suggests that it might have been Vivaldi himself, or, perhaps, a gifted pupil.

Concerto in E major 'La primavera' (Spring), Op. 8 No. 1 (RV 269)

This concerto, the first of the 'Four Seasons', seems to have been the most popular of them during the eighteenth century. It was performed, according to contemporary sources, more frequently than any of the other three concertos, and this can be further testified by the numerous transcriptions made of it.

Allegro: The opening theme, observing Vivaldi's own careful markings of the score and of the sonnet, greets the Spring. The first solo represents the song of the birds, and the second *tutti* describes gentle breezes but with a hint of impending thunderstorm. Bird song is the basis of both the next solo episodes, but the last one is more representative of the gentle breezes of an earlier *tutti* section.

Largo: An expressive *cantilena* is given to the solo violin, whilst a syncopated quaver/crotchet motif, repeated at regular intervals throughout the movement represents the watchfulness of the faithful dog over his sleeping master.

Allegro: The finale, in 12/8, is a brisk siciliano, evoking pastoral revelries of nymph and shepherd. Tied notes in the viola and in the continuo lines at frequent intervals conjure up the sound of the drone bass, associated with country dances.

Concerto in G minor 'L'estate' (Summer), Op. 8 No. 2 (RV 315)

Allegro non molto: The sonnet speaks of torrid heat and brilliant sunshine, but it is humidity and stillness which Vivaldi so vividly portrays here. From this opening we progress into a more familiar Vivaldi idiom – the imitation of a cuckoo, followed by turtledove and goldfinch (similarly treated to the bird song in *Il gardellino*, Op. 10 No. 3). This is

followed by a trio section of violins and violas representing gentle breezes, only to be overtaken, however, by demi-semiquaver gusts of North wind (*Vento borea* and *Venti diversi*). Then a short solo section, portraying the unease of shepherd and villager and the approach of a storm, leads us into the last vigorous *tutti*.

Adagio: The full fury of the elements is not yet fully upon us and, in this movement, we hear the lull before the storm in the peaceful *arioso* of the solo violin, restlessly accompanied by a dotted motif, and interrupted by ominous threats from the full orchestra.

Presto: The storm bursts upon us in furiously repeated notes and scale passages. The solo violin indulges in torrential *bariolage* which, as Pincherle has commented, although not Vivaldi's invention, is used by him with an unequalled authority and pertinence. The extraordinary momentum of this movement is kept up right until the close, bringing the concerto to an end in the tradition of a good English summer's day!

Concerto in F major 'L'autunno' (Autumn), Op. 8 No. 3 (RV 293)

Allegro: There is a strongly bucolic, Breughel-like quality about the opening and closing movements of this concerto. For one thing they progress in a more four-square manner than the other movements of the 'Seasons' and

the sonnet, too, conjures up that picture which, through familiarity, we have come to regard as peculiarly Flemish. The rhythmic simplicity and insistence of the opening ritornello recalls one's standard image of a country bumpkin with a tankard of ale in one hand, and his arm round a milk-maid's waist. The first solo episode echoes the theme of the *tutti* in passages of double-stopping. These are the revelries of Bacchus, enjoyed by one and all until, in a drunken stupor (semiquaver and demi-semiquaver runs on the solo violin) they fall asleep. A linking *larghetto* section takes over, but the movement ends with a return to the opening ritornello.

Adagio: In this short movement subtitled 'Ubriachi dormienti' (sleeping drunkards), strings play *con sordini*, and the continuo harpsichord is instructed to play arpeggios.

Allegro: Subtitled 'La caccia' (the hunt), this movement is made-up of numerous motifs intended to evoke various aspects of the sport. The flight of the prey, for instance, is represented first by triplets, then by demi-semiquaver runs which are finally run to earth at the end of the last solo section. Then the horn-call ritornello reappears once more and brings the movement to a swift close.

Concerto in F minor 'L'inverno' (Winter), Op. 8 No. 4 (RV 297)

Allegro non molto: The wonderfully icy, chilling

effect of the opening *tutti* is achieved by technical rather than melodic means. The basic quaver motif is rarely interrupted, acting both as the main body of the movement as well as a subdued continuo accompaniment to the demi-semiquaver passages of the solo violin. Two impassioned *tutti* outbursts half way through the movement and at the close give an impression of binary structure.

Largo: Surely one of the most beautifully sustained melodies of the whole baroque era is contained in this lyrical *arioso* for solo violin accompanied by *pizzicato* violins, viola and continuo. The rather banal words of the sonnet, however, have little to do with the music.

Allegro: This movement represents the dangers of walking on ice and the howling of the winds. In a remarkably free style for its time, it is not without musical surprise and excitement. Unusual, for instance, is the way in which the solo violin with continuo, and not the orchestra, introduces the theme; a theme which, even more exceptionally, is in no sense a main theme or, for that matter, a recurring one.

Concerto in E flat 'La tempesta di mare' (Stormy sea), Op. 8 No. 5 (RV 253)

The opening movement discloses several easily recognisable hallmarks of Vivaldi's concerto style – repeated semiquaver notes,

arpeggios, brisk passage-work in scale-wise motion, and *bariolage*; and, as so frequently with Vivaldi, the tonic–dominant relationship is strong. The movement ends on the dominant, not on the tonic, thereby creating a moment of suspense before the beginning of the *Largo*. This too possesses some unusual features not least of which are incursions into the dominant F minor and its close with a Phrygian cadence ending in the key of G major. The somewhat desolate solo melodic line becomes interrupted with increasing regularity by broken chords in unison creating a feeling of unrest. It prepares us admirably for the finale where another storm breaks out. Here, though, the elements are confined largely to the solo violin part which contains several idiomatic scale and arpeggio patterns as well as some bravura passage-work. An effective contrast with the opening movement is created by the noticeable difference in texture which is much thinner owing to the increased focus on the solo melodic line.

Although displaying many of the same ideas as this concerto, the *Tempesta di mare* for flute and strings, Op. 10 No. 1 is an entirely different work which, despite its later publication date (1729–30), is nevertheless almost certainly an earlier one, shorter in length and simpler in form.

Concerto in C major 'Il piacere' (Pleasure), Op. 8 No. 6 (RV 180)

The relevance of the title, 'Il piacere' to the music of this Concerto is not particularly apt. Perhaps Vivaldi wished to create uniformity in the first volume by giving each of its six works a title. Certainly there is nothing here to diminish pleasure, but the title must at most be regarded as mildly evocative. Bravura passage-work is less of a feature in the opening *Allegro* than the syncopated rhythms which pervade the ritornelli. Of the three solo violin sections the last is the most ambitious both in its material and in its length. The *Largo e cantabile*, a siciliano in 12/8 rhythm, is not in the relative minor key but, in the key of E minor, a favourite with Vivaldi. The notation is simple and unadventurous though, of course, the soloist may allow himself a degree of embellishment. The ritornello is characterised by unusually wide intervals which at their greatest extent span an octave and a seventh. Most of the solo violin line is straightforward but in the first and third of the three solo sections, the performer has to negotiate even wider intervals than those of the *tutti* passage.

Concerto in D minor, Op. 8 No. 7 (RV 242)

The texture of the opening *Allegro* is a full one and the melody, broad and supple, derives its energy both from the strong

pattern of the continuo line and from the recurring passages of syncopation. There is little out of the ordinary in the solo melodic line though ten bars or so of characteristic arpeggios are effective and provide a climax to the movement. The *Largo* is straightforward and its binary form affords the soloist ample opportunity for melodic elaboration. The violone is excluded throughout. This movement, like *La tempesta di mare*, also occurs in a slightly different form, as the slow movement of the Flute Concerto in G major, Op. 10 No. 6 where, in the finale, it serves subsequently as the basis of a series of brilliant variations. The last movement is the most extended of the three and includes long sections of double-stopping in the solo line. Unison passages in the ritornelli contribute towards the strong rhythmic pulse of this music.

Concerto in G minor, Op. 8 No. 8 (RV 332)

The ritornello of the opening movement is closely related to the harmonic minor scale of G which is used in a variety of ways. Each of the three solo sections differs in pattern and content; the first is not particularly idiomatic and, compass apart, resembles much of Vivaldi's solo woodwind writing. The second is bolder and contains a short passage of wide intervals; the third incorporates these elements in extended semiquaver arpeggio

figures with some bravura writing as well. The brief slow movement consists of a short *tutti* opening with prominent and affecting suspensions followed by a simple solo melody in the character of a recitative. Four bars of *tutti* then round off the movement.

The most remarkable music of the Concerto lies in the extended finale whose ritornello has the energy and character of a robust country dance. As for the solo passages, not only do they outweigh the ritornello in length, but they also make considerable technical demands on the player. Here we find in the first solo section bar upon bar of semiquaver arpeggios over the tied notes of the cello continuo. In the second solo section the first and second violins provide the accompaniment and, in the third and most spectacular of the solo episodes, twenty bars of unbroken *bariolage* eventually give way to a condensed restatement of the ritornello which brings the movement to a powerful conclusion.

Concerto in D minor, Op. 8 No. 9 (RV 236)

This is the first of two concertos contained in Vivaldi's Opus 8 which seem intended primarily for an oboe. However, Le Cène, the Amsterdam publisher, treats it foremost as a violin concerto stating that it may also be played by an oboe; but Vivaldi's manuscript terms the work an oboe concerto. As we might expect, the dual intentions of composer

or publisher regarding this Concerto strictly limit the tessitura and technical requirements of its soloist. By comparison with those works written expressly for the violin this one appears conservative. The most striking feature of the first movement is the persistent syncopated rhythm which characterises both the *tutti* and the solo passages.

The second movement, a lyrical melody with a four-part accompaniment of viola, cello, violone and harpsichord continuo, is particularly well suited to the plangent timbre of an oboe. By contrast the finale is fiercely energetic; its power is derived in part from the movement's fundament which, in the *tutti* passages, consists of broken scale passages in downward motion, and in part from the repetition of a strong initial crotchet beat which pervades the ritornelli.

Concerto in B flat major 'La caccia' (The hunt), Op. 8 No. 10 (RV 362)

In the first movement, at least, the music makes reference to the spirit of 'The Hunt' of the title. Horn calls are depicted in the *tutti* by octave leaps and repeated notes first in the tonic then, by way of a simple but typical Vivaldi progression, in the dominant. Frequent tied notes in the viola, cello, and continuo lines add to the pastoral flavour of this movement. The three solo violin sections also pursue the rural imagery with passages of

double-stopping in intervals of thirds, fifths and sixths evocative both of horn calls and of galloping horses. Vivaldi provides a contrast of rhythm, too, in his solo triplet sequences which are absent from the *tutti*s. Rapidly ascending and descending scale passages in each of the violin parts add excitement to this landscape.

The *Adagio* is short, consisting of a somewhat bland melody simply accompanied by cello and keyboard continuo. The structure allows opportunity for ornamentation of the solo line in each of its repeats. The finale is in the spirit of the opening and makes use, once more, of octave leaps in the violin parts. The first two solo violin sections are accompanied by cello and continuo, but most of the third is supported by first and second violins in unison. A shortened version of the opening statement brings the Concerto to a terse conclusion.

Concerto in D major, Op. 8 No. 11 (RV 210)

This is the largest and, in some respects, finest concerto of the set. The opening movement is introduced by the solo violin in unison with the first violins of the band. The strongly tonic-based idea is then taken up by the second violins, viola and, lastly, the bass instruments. It is in two of the solo sections, however, that Vivaldi departs from his more familiar procedure. The first solo section

conforms with a predominant pattern in his concertos; but the second and third are more ambitious since, instead of providing just an accompaniment to the extended *bariolage* of the solo violin, Vivaldi elaborates the initial ritornello material in all the band parts underneath. The same procedure may be seen to even greater effect in the opening movement of the Concerto in B minor, Op. 9 No. 12. Furthermore, in the second solo section a new melodic idea is briefly presented in the first few bars although, where Bach, for instance, would certainly have developed it, Vivaldi is content to let it merge into violinistic figurations. The movement ends with a terse reference to the opening melody which is linked to the closing bars of the initial *tutti*, a device which we have already seen in these concertos.

The *Largo* is unusually short for one separating two such substantial fast movements. Beneath the solo violin melody in D minor, first and second violins with viola provide a simple quaver accompaniment. The finale is the most extended movement of the entire set and begins, like the first, in imitative manner. The melody, a rather promising subject for a fully developed fugue, is presented by the second violins and is taken up almost at once by the soloist and first violins in unison. Last come the viola, cello and keyboard. The violin, however, is silent

until the second statement of the ritornello. In the solo sections there is not the same degree of orchestral participation as that found in the first movement. Nevertheless, brief interjections are made during the second solo episode in which a short quotation from the ritornello can be heard.

Concerto in C major, Op. 8 No. 12 (RV 178)

Like the D minor Concerto, Op. 8 No. 9 this one, too, seems to have been originally intended as an oboe concerto. In the first movement there are, in fact, three occurrences of a note which sounds a third beneath the lowest note which can be uttered by an oboe but it appears each time in the *tutti* rather than in the solo passages. The solo line lies, for the greater part, within the most comfortable range of an oboe. It consists largely of extended semiquaver passages, but also includes some melodic ideas independent of the ritornelli.

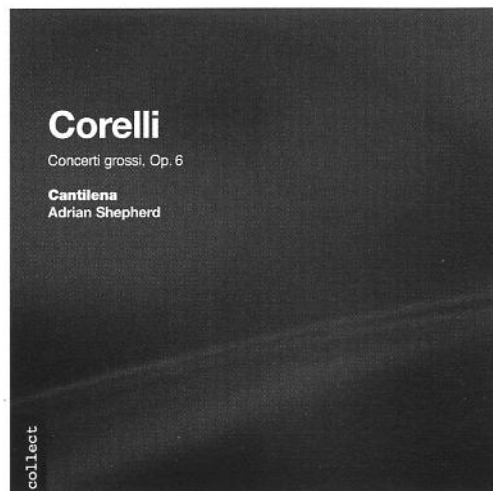
The *Largo* comprises an expressive melody for the oboe accompanied by cello and keyboard continuo. The finale is a robust dance-like piece in which at first the solo instrument with the first violins sustains a different melodic pattern from the second violins; at the third bar the roles are reversed briefly before the music assumes a more conventional character. The solo line is a carefree one containing several snatches of

melody suggestive of folk derivation. As the movement draws to a close Vivaldi makes effective use of material from its opening *tutti* section by halving the note values of a seven-bar quaver passage in the manner of non-

fugal *stretto*. In the final *tutti* the pattern remains the same but the music ends in a tumultuous semiquaver burst of excitement.

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VIVALDI: CONCERTOS, OP. 8 - Bournemouth Sinfonietta/Thomas

CHANDOS
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Antonio Vivaldi (1678–1741)

COMPACT DISC ONE

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|-------|---|----------|
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| 10–12 | Concerto in F minor 'L'inverno' (Winter), Op. 8 No. 4 (RV 297) | 9:14 |
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| | | TT 61:45 |

COMPACT DISC TWO

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| 7–9 | Concerto in D minor, Op. 8 No. 9 (RV 236)
John Digney oboe | 8:45 |
| 10–12 | Concerto in B flat major 'La caccia' (The hunt), Op. 8 No. 10 (RV 362) | 9:31 |
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Bournemouth Sinfonietta
Ronald Thomas director/violin



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