

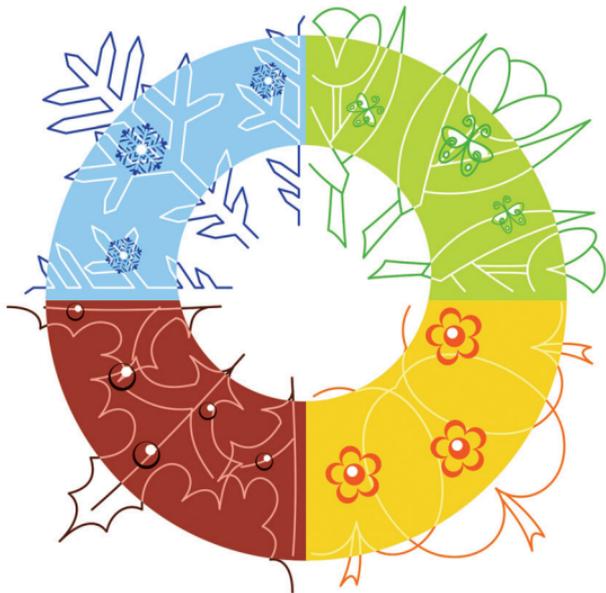
NAXOS

VIVALDI

The Four Seasons

La tempesta di mare • Il piacere

Cho-Liang Lin, Violin • Sejong
Anthony Newman, Harpsichord and Organ



Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741): Concertos, Op. 8 Nos. 1-6 The Four Seasons • La tempesta di Mare • Il piacere

Every biography of Antonio Vivaldi begins with the fact that his father Giovanni was a barber, but Giovanni was also a professional violinist, and he was the only teacher his famous son would ever have. Antonio quickly became a first-class violinist, good enough to perform with his father at St Mark's in Venice, but no one thought of a musical career for the boy because he was headed for a life as a priest. He was tonsured at the age of fifteen and ordained a priest at 25, but soon ceased to say Mass, on the claim of some weakness of health.

Vivaldi had dedicated himself, in fact, not to religion but to music. In 1703, just a few months after his ordination, he was named *maestro di violino* at the Pio Ospedale della Pietà, a school with important musical traditions for orphan or indigent girls in Venice, and he would remain associated with the Pietà in some way for the rest of his life. In that era, perhaps more progressive than our own, the Ospedale believed that teaching these girls to play an instrument would give them a useful skill, rescue them from a life of poverty, and keep them from becoming lifelong burdens on the state. At the Ospedale, Vivaldi's responsibilities were to teach the violin and to write music for the girls to play, and it was for the use of these girls that he wrote most of his 450 concertos.

Vivaldi did not remain an unknown violin teacher at the school. With the 1705 publication of his *Opus 1*, a set of trio sonatas, his name quickly spread throughout Europe. By the time he came to publish his set of *concertos, L'Estro armonico*, in 1711, he turned to Estienne Roger, a music publisher in Amsterdam. Not only were Roger's printing techniques far superior to anything then available in Italy, but Vivaldi's music was better known in Northern Europe than in Italy. Among its admirers was Johann Sebastian Bach, who transcribed ten of Vivaldi's concertos as a way of understanding what he had achieved with concerto form.

Little is known about Vivaldi the man. He was nicknamed *il prete rosso* (the red priest), apparently for

his red hair, and by all accounts he was a difficult person. He was sickly, suffering from asthma throughout his life, vain, hot-tempered, and fascinated by money; everyone who met him said that Vivaldi drove a very hard bargain. Yet he squandered his fortune, much of it in the effort to succeed as an opera composer. He died unexpectedly on a trip to Vienna at the age of 63, and, like Mozart, he was buried in an unmarked grave in that city of music.

In 1725, when he was 47, Vivaldi published in Amsterdam a set of twelve concertos as his *Opus 8*, giving them the title *Il cimento dell'armonia e dell'inventione* (The Contest between Harmony and Invention). The first six of these concertos, the concertos on this recording, have descriptive titles, and the first four, *The Four Seasons*, have become some of the most famous music ever written. Each is a miniature tone-poem depicting events of its respective season, and Vivaldi printed a *sonetto dimostrativo* (illustrative sonnet) with each concerto that explained what the music depicts. *The Four Seasons* are an early example of programme music, but audiences should not expect the kind of detailed musical depiction of a composer like Richard Strauss. Strauss, who once said that his highest aim was to write fork music that could never be mistaken for a spoon, was a master at painting scenes with an orchestra. Vivaldi's music, written nearly two centuries earlier, can seem a little innocent by comparison: his fast movements tend to depict storms, the slow movements shepherds falling asleep, but this music is so infectious and appealing, the many little touches so charming, that *The Four Seasons* seem to have an air of eternal freshness about them. They were popular from the first instant, and the music was quickly reprinted in Paris and performed throughout Europe. In our own day, it was a recording of *The Four Seasons* after World War II that led the revival of interest in baroque music, and they have been recorded over two hundred times since then.

Each of the four is in the standard form of Vivaldi's concertos; the first movement opens with a *ritornello*, a refrain that will recur throughout the movement; between its appearances, the soloist breaks free with florid, virtuosic music of his own. The slow movement, always the briefest in the concerto, is a melodic interlude, while the finale, dynamic and extroverted, is sometimes cast in dance form.

Spring marches in joyfully with a buoyant *ritornello*, and soon the solo violin brings trilling bird-songs and the murmur of brooks and breezes. Thunder and lightning break out, but the birds return to sing after the storm. In the slow movement a shepherd sleeps peacefully while his dog keeps watch, his vigilant bark heard throughout in the violas. Nymphs and shepherds dance through the final movement, which shows some relation to the gigue, but the movement is no wild bacchanal, and *Spring* concludes with this most dignified dance.

At the beginning of *Summer* the world limps weakly under a blast of sunlight; the *ritornello* is halting and exhausted. Soon the solo violin plays songs of different birds, cuckoo, dove, and goldfinch, and later the melancholy music of a shepherd boy, weeping at the prospect of a storm. The *Adagio* depicts more of his fears: buzzing mosquitoes and flies alternate with blasts of thunder. The concluding *Presto* brings the storm. A rush of sixteenth-notes (semiquavers) echoes the thunder, and lightning rushes downward in quick flashes.

The jaunty opening of *Autumn* depicts a peasants' dance, and the solo violin picks up the same music.

Soon the violin is sliding and staggering across all four strings, as the peasants get drunk and are collapsing and falling asleep; the *Adagio molto*, an exceptionally beautiful slow movement, shows their "sweet slumber". The final movement opens with the sound of the orchestra mimicking hunting horns. Vivaldi's portrait of the hunt is quite graphic; the violin's rushing triplets depict the fleeing game that finally collapses and dies from exhaustion.

At the beginning of *Winter* the orchestra "shivers" with the cold, and later vigorous "stamping" marks the effort to keep warm. In the *Largo*, a graceful violin line sings of the contented who sit inside before a warm fire while outside raindrops (pizzicato strokes) fall steadily. In the concluding *Allegro*, the solo violin shows those trying desperately to walk over ice. The ice shatters and breaks and strong winds blow, but Vivaldi's music concludes with a sort of fierce joy; this is weather that, however rough, brings pleasure.

The next two concertos in *Opus 8* also have descriptive titles, but, lacking the *sonetto dimostrativo* that would spell out the events depicted, this music remains more generalised in its expression. The *Concerto in E flat major, La tempesta di mare* (The Storm at Sea), frames an expressive central *Largo* with outer movements marked *Presto* and driven by non-stop energy. The *Concerto in C major*, has the title *Il piacere* (The Pleasure), but that, the only verbal clue to the programmatic content of this concerto, may well have been added after this music had been composed.

Eric Bromberger

This recording is made possible in part by the generous support of the Jung-Hun Foundation.

 **JUNG-HUN FOUNDATION**



Cho-Liang Lin

Cho-Liang Lin is a violinist whose career has spanned the globe for 27 years. He was born in Taiwan in 1960 and began playing the violin at the age of five. He went on to study in Sydney and New York City where he was a student of Dorothy DeLay at the Juilliard School. Since his début at Lincoln Center's Mostly Mozart Festival at the age of nineteen, he has appeared with virtually every major orchestra in the world, including the Boston Symphony, Cleveland Orchestra, Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, London Symphony, Philadelphia Orchestra and New York Philharmonic. He has over twenty recordings to his credit, ranging from the concertos of Mozart, Mendelssohn, Sibelius, and Prokofiev, to Christopher Rouse and Tan Dun, as well as the chamber music of Schubert, Brahms, Tchaikovsky and Ravel. His recording partners include Yefim Bronfman, Yo-Yo Ma, Wynton Marsalis, Esa-Pekka Salonen, Leonard Slatkin, Michael Tilson Thomas and Isaac Stern. His recordings have been critically acclaimed, winning several Grammy nominations and *The Gramophone's* Record of the Year award. He has been a member of the Juilliard School faculty since 1991. He is also the music director of La Jolla SummerFest in California. For this recording he plays the 1715 Antonio Stradivari 'Titian' and uses a bow by Etienne Pajot.

Sejong (Artistic Director: Hyo Kang)

The acclaimed string ensemble Sejong was created in New York City in 1995 and met with immediate success. Under the artistic direction of Hyo Kang, it has given more than 250 concerts throughout the United States, Europe, and the Far East. Sejong is known for its cohesiveness, beautiful sound, and refreshing musical style, and is uniquely comprised of today's leading young soloists hailing from eight different nations. The New York based ensemble has given critically acclaimed concerts at venues including Carnegie Hall, London's Wigmore Hall, the Kennedy Center, Suntory Hall in Japan, Seoul Arts Center in Korea, the National Arts Theatre in Taiwan, and on the Rising Stars Series at Ravinia. Ensemble in residence at the Aspen Music Festival since 1997 and host ensemble of the Great Mountains Music Festival and School in Korea, Sejong served as National Public Radio's 'Performance Today Young Artists in Residence' in 2003. The ensemble is sponsored in part by Samsung Electronics and receives a generous loan of several instruments from the Samsung Foundation of Culture: a Guarneri del Gesù violin (1725), Stradivarius violin (1708), Gasparo da Salò viola (ca. 1590), and a Matteo Goffriller cello (ca. 1715).

Violin I

Adele Anthony *leader*
Frank Huang
Yu Jeong Lee
Judy Kang

Violin II

Cornelius Dufallo
Amy Iwazumi
Aaron Boyd
Emilie-Anne
Gendron

Viola

Richard O'Neill
Beth Guterman
Melissa Reardon

Cello

Ani Aznavoorian
Patrick Jee
Jung Eun Choi

Bass

Stephen Sas

Anthony Newman

For more than 35 years, the multi-gifted Anthony Newman has been in the public eye as America's leading organist, harpsichordist, and Bach specialist. His prodigious recording output includes more than 150 CDs on such labels as CBS, Sony, Deutsche Grammophon, and Vox Masterworks. In 1989 *Stereo Review* magazine chose his recording of Beethoven's *Third Piano Concerto*, played on fortepiano with original instruments, as one of the Records of the Year. His collaboration with Wynton Marsalis, *In Gabriel's Garden* on Sony, was the best-selling classical CD for 1997.





Vivaldi's universally popular *Four Seasons* has become one of the most recorded pieces of classical music. The four concertos, with their virtuoso part for solo violinist, depict the changing seasons in a pastoral landscape with dazzling variety. Vivaldi evokes not only the changing atmospheric conditions, for example the dripping rain represented by the *pizzicato* violins in the second movement of *Winter*, but bird calls and animal cries, swaying grass, bubbling brooks, and human events such as drunkards sliding and slithering, and a man walking on ice. Formerly known as International Sejong Soloists, Sejong is a group of virtuoso string players including many well-known young soloists.

Antonio
VIVALDI
 (1678-1741)

Concertos, Op. 8 Nos. 1-6

Le Quattro Stagioni
 (The Four Seasons)

Concerto No. 1 in E major,

'La primavera' (Spring), RV269:49

1	Allegro	3:18
2	Largo	2:20
3	Allegro	4:12

Concerto No. 2 in G minor,
 'L'estate' (Summer), RV315

4	Allegro non molto	5:03
5	Adagio - Presto	2:13
6	Presto	2:42

Concerto No. 3 in F major,
 'L'autunno', (Autumn), RV293

7	Allegro	5:07
8	Adagio	1:57
9	Allegro	3:15

Concerto No. 4 in F minor,
 'L'inverno', (Winter) RV297

10	Allegro non molto	8:34
11	Largo	3:25
12	Presto	2:02
		3:07

Concerto No. 5 in E flat major,
 'La tempesta di mare'
 (The Storm at Sea), RV253

13	Presto	8:24
14	Largo	2:45
15	Presto	2:15
		3:23

Concerto No. 6 in C major,
 'Il piacere' (The Pleasure),
 RV180

16	Allegro	8:08
17	Largo e cantabile	2:57
18	Allegro	2:28
		2:43

Cho-Liang Lin, Violin • Sejong
Anthony Newman, Harpsichord and Portatif Organ

① JUNG-HUN FOUNDATION

Recorded at the The Church of Holy Trinity, New York City, from 6th to 9th September, 2005

Producer: Steven Epstein • Engineer: Richard King • Booklet Notes: Eric Bromberger

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Cover Photo: Circle of Life – The Four Seasons (Dreamstime.com)