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# THE EIGHT SEASONS

JONATHAN MORTON violin



VIVALDI • PIAZZOLLA

# THE EIGHT SEASONS

## LE QUATTRO STAGIONI

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

## LAS CUARTO ESTACIONES PORTEÑAS

Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992)

	<b>'La Primavera' – Spring</b>	Vivaldi	
1	Allegro		[3.20]
2	Largo		[2.44]
3	Allegro		[4.10]
4	<b>'Verano porteño' – Summer in Buenos Aires</b>	Piazzolla	[6.38]
	<b>'L'Estate' – Summer</b>	Vivaldi	
5	Allegro non molto		[5.29]
6	Adagio e piano – Presto e forte		[2.17]
7	Presto		[2.37]
8	<b>'Otoño porteño' – Autumn in Buenos Aires</b>	Piazzolla	[7.28]

	<b>'L'Autunno' – Autumn</b>	Vivaldi	
9	Allegro		[5.07]
10	Adagio molto		[2.31]
11	Allegro		[3.25]
12	<b>'Invierno porteño' – Winter in Buenos Aires</b>	Piazzolla	[7.19]
	<b>'L'Inverno' – Winter</b>	Vivaldi	
13	Allegro non molto		[3.36]
14	Largo		[1.59]
15	Allegro		[3.25]
16	<b>'Primavera porteña' – Spring in Buenos Aires</b>	Piazzolla	[6.37]
	Total timings:		[68.45]

JONATHAN MORTON  
VIOLIN & ARTISTIC DIRECTOR  
SCOTTISH ENSEMBLE

## PROGRAMME NOTE

### **Le Quattro Stagioni, Op.8 No. 1-4**

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

Born in Venice in 1678, Vivaldi had come to the violin through his father (violinist at the St Mark's Cathedral), a normal enough route in those days when musical nepotism assisted performing dynasties to flourish over many generations in the city. Atypically, Vivaldi pursued Holy Orders alongside his musical studies, and was fully ordained in his mid-twenties (1703). For the rest of his days he struggled to maintain a balance of sacred and secular (profane, even) that seems never to have been especially easy. One boon of his holy status was a distinctive nickname that has survived to this day: 'il prete rosso' – 'the red priest'.

In 1725 the publication *Il Cimento dell' Armenia e dell'invenzione* (The trial of harmony and invention), opus 8, appeared in Amsterdam. This consisted of twelve concertos, seven of which were descriptive: *The Four Seasons*, *Storm at Sea*, *Pleasure* and *The Hunt*. Each of the 'seasons' is prefaced with a descriptive sonnet, possibly by Vivaldi himself, though we do not know for sure. They are not great poetry which prompts

speculation that perhaps Vivaldi's rich patron, the Count von Morzin may be the author. Vivaldi dedicated the concertos – and the whole collection in which he published them – to the Count with these obsequious lines:

“Pray be not surprised if, among these scant and feeble concertos, Your Most Illustrious Lordship finds *The Four Seasons* which have so long enjoyed the indulgence of Your Most Illustrious Lordship's kind generosity, but believe that I have deemed it fitting to print them because, while they may be the same, 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 that they will appear new to you.”

To incarnate a patron's poor poetry in great music would be a deft move indeed; but we will never know if that is the one that Vivaldi made.

That dedication reveals that these concertos stood out from the crowd right from the very beginning. Publication made them available far and wide and they were soon heard in Britain, France, Germany and beyond. With Vivaldi's death they suffered the fate of so much music – they simply fell into obscurity. It is hard

for us nowadays to remember how much the audiences of past centuries only really wanted to hear contemporary music. With very few exceptions, a composer, once dead was generally forgotten. Vivaldi was re-discovered, like so many others, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when audiences decided they preferred the music of the past to challenging scores of the present. At the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century it is debatable whether there is any other piece of any kind more popular than *The Four Seasons*. Its undeniable appeal lies in its immediacy. Vivaldi was not just a great tunesmith; he conjures up his poetic landscapes and populates them with birds, dogs, hunters, nymphs and shepherds in brilliant colours that have not faded nearly 300 years later.

### **Spring**

*Allegro*

Springtime is upon us.

The birds celebrate her return with festive song, and murmuring streams are softly caressed by the breezes.

Thunderstorms, those heralds of Spring, roar, casting their dark mantle over heaven, Then they die away to silence, and the birds take up their charming songs once more.

*Largo*

On the flower-strewn meadow,  
with leafy branches rustling overhead,  
the goat-herd sleeps, his faithful dog beside him.

*Allegro*

Led by the festive sound of rustic bagpipes,  
nymphs and shepherds lightly dance  
beneath the brilliant canopy of spring.

### **Summer**

*Allegro non molto*

Beneath the blazing sun's relentless heat  
men and flocks are sweltering, pines are scorched.  
We hear the cuckoo's voice;  
then sweet songs of the turtle dove and finch  
are heard.

Soft breezes stir the air...

but threatening north wind sweeps them  
suddenly aside.

The shepherd trembles,  
fearful of violent storm and what may lie ahead.

*Adagio e piano – Presto e forte*

His limbs are now awakened from their repose  
by fear of lightning's flash and thunder's roar,  
as gnats and flies buzz furiously around.

*Presto*

Alas, his worst fears were justified,  
as the heavens roar and great hailstones  
beat down upon the proudly standing corn.

**Autumn**

*Allegro*

The peasant celebrates with song and dance  
the harvest safely gathered in.  
The cup of Bacchus flows freely,  
and many find their relief in deep slumber.

*Adagio molto*

The singing and the dancing die away  
as cooling breezes fan the pleasant air,  
inviting all to sleep  
without a care.

*Allegro*

The hunters emerge at dawn,  
ready for the chase, with horns and dogs and cries.  
Their quarry flees while they give chase.  
Terrified and wounded,  
the prey struggles on,  
but, harried, dies.

**Winter**

*Allegro non molto*

Shivering, frozen mid the frosty snow  
in biting, stinging winds;  
running to and fro to stamp one's icy feet,  
teeth chattering in the bitter chill.

*Largo*

To rest contentedly beside the hearth,  
while those outside are drenched by pouring rain.

*Allegro*

We tread the icy path slowly and cautiously,  
for fear of tripping and falling.  
Then turn abruptly, slip, crash on the ground  
and, rising, hasten on across the ice lest it cracks up.  
We feel the chill north winds course through the home  
despite the locked and bolted doors ...  
this is winter, which nonetheless brings its  
own delights.

**Las Cuarto Estaciones Porteñas**

Astor Piazzolla (1921-1992)

*The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires* is the tribute  
of two 20<sup>th</sup> century men – the Argentinean Astor  
Piazzolla and the Russian Leonid Desyatnikov – to  
an 18<sup>th</sup> century Venetian master, Antonio Vivaldi.

Piazzolla grew up musically with a foot in  
each of two camps. He developed a formidable  
reputation as a promising young player of the  
popular bandoneon (an accordion-like Argentinian  
instrument used mostly in dance bands), but  
also studied under the leading Argentinian  
composer Alberto Ginastera. By 1945 he had  
made his name as a bandleader and even  
recorded 25 albums. His next step was to deepen  
his classical studies, and in 1954 he received a  
grant to travel to Paris to work with the legendary  
composer and teacher Nadia Boulanger in  
Paris. The impact of this woman on 20<sup>th</sup> century  
music – especially that of the Americas – has  
yet to be fully understood. The roll call of her  
students is astounding, including such giants as  
Aaron Copland. Three qualities made her such  
a great teacher: she could assimilate a score  
at sight; she had an astonishing penetrating  
and open ear and mind; and she was unsparingly  
honest. She could spot a square peg trying to

fit into a round hole in seconds, and she did  
Piazzolla a huge favour. He had brought with  
him his 'classical' scores to play to her – and  
she found them too full of everybody else's  
influences – Stravinsky and Bartók particularly.  
"The truth is", Piazzolla later wrote, "I was  
ashamed to tell her that I was a tango musician,  
that I had worked in the warehouses and  
cabarets of Buenos Aires. Tango musician was  
a dirty word in Argentina when I was young. It  
was the underworld. But Nadia made me play a  
tango for her on the piano, and then she said, 'You  
idiot! Don't you know, this is the real Piazzolla,  
not the other one? You can throw all that other  
music away'. So I threw away ten years work, and  
started with my nuevo tango."

The first of the *The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires*  
was written in 1965. The title inescapably  
brings Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* to mind, but that  
is where the tribute ends in Piazzolla's original  
versions. His are single-movement works, while  
Vivaldi's all have three. Vivaldi sticks closely to  
his poems and revels in evoking specific images  
from them – dogs barking, storms, drunken  
peasants, birds singing; not so Piazzolla: he  
is more for the spirit or feeling. Above all, the  
solo violin is critical to Vivaldi; Piazzolla did  
not call for one. Then, in the 1990s, along came

composer and arranger Desyatnikov. Seasons generally seem to be something of an obsession with Desyatnikov. Besides his work on Piazzolla's piece, he has also composed a set of pieces called *The Russian Seasons* for violin, soprano and strings. What he did here was to take Piazzolla's originals and 'vivaldify' them, replicating Vivaldi's orchestration – including the solo violin – and weaving in all kinds of clever allusions to Vivaldi. He also adds jokes. Remember, when it is summer in Vivaldi's Venice, it is winter in Piazzolla's Buenos Aires. So listen closely and you will hear bits of Vivaldi's *Summer* worked into *Winter* here. And at the end of *Spring* ... well, you cannot miss the allusion.

Combining Vivaldi and Piazzola together like this underlines the meteorological and cultural differences between Mediterranean Europe and the heart of South America. In Piazzolla's Seasons, the "weather", or rather, the ambience, is always the same – thick air, highly charged with sensuality. Within this frame, though, there are countless variances of emotion, from utmost tenderness, to nearly violent passion. There are no winter chills or violent summer storms, no singing birds or barking dogs but the *Four Seasons of Buenos Aires* nevertheless convey the sultry atmosphere evocative of their homeland.

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## JONATHAN MORTON VIOLIN & ARTISTIC DIRECTOR

Jonathan Morton is Artistic Director and Leader of the Scottish Ensemble, and enjoys a varied career as a chamber musician, leader, soloist, and teacher. His versatility finds him equally at home in the core classical repertoire, 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century music, and in collaborations with musicians from different musical traditions. His eclectic and engaging programming has won praise from audiences and critics alike, offering fresh perspectives on familiar repertoire as well as introducing little-known gems and championing new works.

As a soloist Jonathan has performed works by composers Gavin Bryars, David Horne, Arvo Pärt, Astor Piazzolla, Benjamin Britten, and Toru Takemitsu, in many prestigious venues, including Wigmore Hall, Edinburgh International Festival, and Aldeburgh International Festival. He premièred John Woolrich's *Capriccio* at the 2009 BBC Proms, and he will also give the première of Joe Cutler's violin concerto in 2010 in Scotland. As a chamber musician he has collaborated with the Nash Ensemble, the Schubert Ensemble, and the Academy of St Martin's in the Fields amongst others, and has appeared in numerous festivals and venues, including the Internationales

KammermusikFestival in Nuremberg, the Schoenberg Institute in Vienna, the Barge Music Festival in New York, Concertgebouw in Amsterdam, and Sogakudo in Tokyo. As a leader, Jonathan has performed with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, the London Sinfonietta, the Nash Ensemble, the Goldberg Ensemble and the BBC Symphony Orchestra.

Born in Belgium, Jonathan took up the violin at the age of 4. At 13 he was personally invited by Lord Menuhin to study at his acclaimed school in Surrey and less than 2 years later performed as soloist under Menuhin's baton. As a 16 year old he appeared in Europe's leading recital halls, made his radio debut on Classic FM, and made his first CD recording with the pianist Carole Presland, playing works by Szymanowski, Debussy, Suk, and Lekeu. His first recording as Artistic Director of Scottish Ensemble is a critically praised CD of works by Finzi and Walton for the prestigious Wigmore Hall Live label. He also directs the Scottish Ensemble on Alison Balsom's EMI Classics album, *Italian Concertos*.

Directing the Scottish Ensemble has given Jonathan the opportunity to work closely with many acclaimed artists including Michael

Collins, Toby Spence, Alison Balsom, Gwilym Simcock, Pekka Kuusisto, Jane Irwin, Raphael Wallfisch, Steven Osborne, Lawrence Power, and Pieter Wispelwey.

Jonathan plays a Nicolo Amati violin, made circa 1640.



## SCOTTISH ENSEMBLE

Versatile, enterprising and ambitious, the Scottish Ensemble is a tight-knit band of outstanding string players from around Europe who perform together under Artistic Director, Jonathan Morton.

The foundation of their work is the rich repertoire of music for strings of the three centuries since the age of Bach and Vivaldi. They bring a sparky questing attitude to bear on this heritage and new work habitually rubs up against much loved masterworks within the same programme. Commissions from John Tavener, James MacMillan, Sally Beamish, David Horne, John Woolrich, Craig Armstrong, Steve Martland and Thea Musgrave have enriched their concerts in recent years.

They also venture further afield musically by collaborating with musicians of different traditions. Leading Shetland fiddler Aly Bain, and folk musicians Dougie MacLean and Karen Matheson have performed with the Ensemble. Maverick musicians such as American bassist Edgar Meyer, jazz pianist Gwilym Simcock and Finnish violinist Pekka Kuusisto (all free spirits, equally happy in many different musical worlds) have proven the ideal partners, and created joyfully adventurous and unique events in which

Western 'classical' works sat happily alongside folk, electronica and improvisation.

Although it is based in Glasgow, the majority of the Scottish Ensemble's projects tour throughout Scotland, appearing in many major towns and cities, as well as further flung areas including the Islands and northernmost Highlands of Scotland. It also presents programmes of small scale chamber music showcasing the talents of its many excellent individual players. Concerts and recordings may be the most visible aspect of the Scottish Ensemble's work, but its commitment to education, outreach and community work in Scotland is equally important.

The Ensemble appears regularly at London's Wigmore Hall, BBC Proms and Edinburgh International Festival as well as City of London Festival; Aldeburgh Festival; and St Magnus Festival, Orkney. Internationally, it has toured to China, Germany and France. Many music lovers further afield know the Ensemble best through its recordings, which include its award-winning CD of Tavener, as well as the critically acclaimed CD of Britten with tenor, Toby Spence (both on the Linn Records label) and Italian Concertos with Alison Balsom on EMI Classics.

[www.scottishensemble.co.uk](http://www.scottishensemble.co.uk)

### Scottish Ensemble Jonathan Morton *Director / Violin*

Violin I	Cheryl Crockett, Liza Johnson, Sophie Mather
Violin II	Xander Van Vliet, Joanne Green, Laura Ghiro
Viola	Catherine Marwood, Fiona Winning
Cello	Alison Lawrance, Naomi Boole-Masterson
Double Bass	Diane Clark, James Manson
Lute	Jamie Akers
Harpichord	Alastair Ross

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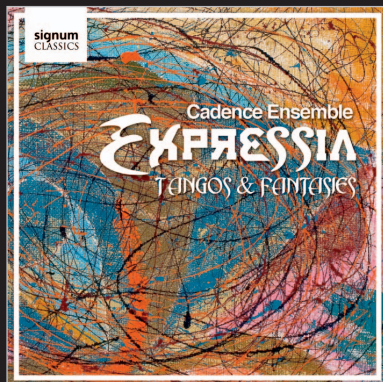
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