

Tafelmusik

Vivaldi *Four Seasons* Programme Notes

VENETIAN STRING SONATAS

In the first half of the concert Stefano Montanari introduces us to little-known string sonatas by three of Vivaldi's colleagues in Venice: Baldassare Galuppi, Tomaso Albinoni and Giuseppe Tartini. Galuppi was considered Venice's most esteemed composer during the 18th century, a prolific composer of opera and oratorio. His fame led him to successful stays in London and Moscow, and his few volumes of instrumental music were published in England.

Tomaso Albinoni was the son of a well-to-do paper merchant, and throughout his career he expressed appreciation of his enviable position. He published nine volumes of instrumental music and produced numerous operas and intermezzi.

Giuseppe Tartini had an unusual upbringing – destined at first for the priesthood, then enrolling in law at Padua University but devoting his time to becoming a master fencer. He came to music relatively late, but went on to become one of Italy's finest violinists and established a violin school that attracted students from all over Europe.

VIVALDI *The Four Seasons*

The Four Seasons appeared in Vivaldi's 1725 publication of twelve violin concertos entitled *Il Cimento dell'Armonia e dell'Inventione*, which translates roughly as "bold experiments with harmony and invention." The *Seasons*, full of audacious experiments of every kind, were undoubtedly the main reason for the title. The four concertos are accompanied by four sonnets, giving detailed descriptions of the programmatic elements of the music. The author of the sonnets is unknown, and it is quite possible that Vivaldi penned them himself. To ensure that the musicians were aware of the effects they were to create, Vivaldi labelled the various lines of the sonnets to correspond with letters in each of the instrumental parts. He also included very detailed instructions for performance, including dynamics, bowing and articulations. The concertos are dazzling proof of Vivaldi's skill as a violinist and his ingenuity and inventiveness as a composer.

Spring was apparently the most popular of the four concertos, appearing in adaptations by several French composers (including a full-scale sacred motet by Michel Corette) as well as in Vivaldi's own oratorio *Juditha Triumphans*. The first movement opens with a joyous dance, accompanied by bird songs and soft, murmuring breezes. A thunderstorm interrupts the calm. The slow movement

depicts a shepherd lulled to sleep by the gentle rustle of the leaves in the wind. At his side is his faithful dog, whose barking is imitated by the violas, who are instructed to play *molto forte e strappato* (very loudly and abruptly). The last movement evokes the pastoral revelries of nymphs and shepherds, accompanied by flutes and bagpipes.

Summer opens with languid, oppressive heat from the blazing sun, accompanied by bird calls, and finally interrupted by a summer storm. A shepherd, terrified by the storm, attempts to calm himself in the second movement, but is pestered by insects and troubled by approaching thunder. The storm lets loose its fury in the final movement.

Autumn opens with a merry peasant dance, the solo violin depicting the happy drunkard staggering about. The merrymakers slumber in the second movement, only to be interrupted by huntsmen in the finale, accompanied by rifle shots, barking dogs and horn calls.

Winter opens with a depiction of shivering in the icy cold, interrupted by gusts of wind and the brisk stamping of feet. In the slow movement, the solo violinist sits contentedly by the fireside while outside the rain and wind are represented by the pizzicato violins and the busy cello. The final movement opens with a representation of slipping on ice, followed by the appearance of the warm winds of the sirocco, and finally the cold rush of winter winds.