Antonio Vivaldi’s The Four Seasons

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I am evaluating the Four Seasons - Le Quattro Stagioni - by Antonio Vivaldi. This piece by far is Vivaldi’s best-known and most played piece. Vivaldi wrote this piece in the Baroque period; therefore, it was in the Baroque style, but Vivaldi also added his touch which made this piece much bolder than regular Baroque style music. There was a great deal more contained in this piece besides Vivaldi’s embellishments. This piece writes his life story. Antonio Vivaldi’s piece, The Four Seasons, uncovers portions of his life and the period in which his piece was written.

Excerpts from *The Four Seasons* can be found in a multitude of today’s entertainment, such as in wedding ceremonies, popular movies, and TV commercials. Vivaldi composed *The Four Seasons* from 1720 to its date of publication in 1725 in a set of concerti he called *Il Cimento dell'armonia e dell'inventione*, and *The Four Seasons* made up four of these concerti as it was composed of *Spring, Summer, Autumn,* and *Winter*. Vivaldi did something incredibly unique with these concerti by composing them to be accompanied by a set of sonnets that had been written which was later called “program music” in the Romantic Period.[[1]](#footnote-0) This piece is an excellent example of word painting, since the music is intended to “narrate” the sonnets or vice versa. Additionally, Vivaldi separated each sonnet into three sections to match each movement of each concerti.[[2]](#footnote-1) This piece is also quite complex in structure.

First, looking at *Spring*, this piece is mainly a joyful and exuberant piece. Birds are chirping and gentle winds are blowing, indicating a gentle and serene setting. There comes a thunderstorm, but it passes over and the chirping birds and gentle winds return. This piece is mainly played Allegro, and keeps this tempo throughout the thunderstorm. The concerti begins at a moderate dynamic level, and increases as the piece progresses into the thunderstorm, and decreases again after the storm fades. Secondly, *Summer* begins right after *Spring* ends. This concerti is less joyful, but it is not sad or angry either; it is more a mix of all three. The heat is intense, and there are still storms, but there are also calm breezes at times.[[3]](#footnote-2) The piece begins fast, slows down, and speeds up, even faster than the first movement. Most of this piece is played mezzo piano or mezzo forte. However, during the storm, the dynamics increase. Next, *Autumn* arrives. This next concerto is also very happy and joyful, as the first was, while also having its somber moments. The piece begins and ends in Allegro, but does slow down to Adagio in the second movement. The dynamics of this concerto do not typically vary as much, but there are a few crescendos and decrescendos as well as some quiet moments. Finally, there is *Winter*. Since this piece is representative of *Winter*, it is definitely going to be more sad or angry compared to the other pieces. Once again, the tempo goes from Allegro to Largo to Allegro again. This trend of fast-slow-fast is present in each of these concertos. There are numerous crescendos and decrescendos in this piece. So, the dynamics are constantly fluctuating. Altogether, these come together to balance each other like a masterpiece. Not only that, but the ebb and flow of the speed and the volume of the sections of this composition demonstrate the depth of Vivaldi.

Antonio Lucio Vivaldi was a prevalent figure in the late Baroque period, and he was best known for his concerti. When he was younger, his father, who was a violinist, was Vivaldi’s teacher. He was taught not only in the ways of music, but also in the ways of the clergy. Vivaldi was ordained and given the nickname Il Prete Rosso (The Red Priest) because of his flaming red hair.[[4]](#footnote-3) Vivaldi’s violin skills continued to grow, and eventually he became a teacher at the Seminario Musicale dell’Ospidale della Pietà, which was an orphanage for girls. A number of Vivaldi’s pieces were composed for the school, since it was required that he compose music for the school. Vivaldi was allowed leave of absence often, so he took that opportunity to tour.[[5]](#footnote-4) He also composed a number of sacred music pieces for which he received a lot of commissions, acting as an impresario. From many of his letters to his patrons, it is obvious that he tried his best to flatter them, and he did his absolute best at something before bringing an issue or accomplishment up to one of his patrons.[[6]](#footnote-5) Eventually, around 1740, Vivaldi was told that his music was out of style, and he spent the rest of his life most likely in poverty. However, his legacy lived on, and there was a “revival” of interest in Vivaldi in the early 20th century.

Vivaldi’s piece *The Four Seasons* was written during the late Baroque period, and it can be difficult to infer this at first since the style is something much bolder than the usual late Baroque style. Vivaldi’s piece has more in common with the Romantic period than its own period in time, but that is what made this piece highly innovative, almost as if Vivaldi had had a glimpse into the future. This piece was moderately popular in his time, but eventually it went out of style, and Vivaldi’s name was lost as a famous composer. However, going into the 20th century, there was that “revival” of Vivaldi’s music, with genuine curiosity surrounding him personally rather than from a historical point of view.[[7]](#footnote-6) That revival has never really died away. Thus, Vivaldi still is widely known and appreciated today.

There was a great deal to be discovered about Vivaldi’s most famous piece The Four Seasons, including a great deal about his life, and the time in which it was written even though it was sometimes difficult to see. Vivaldi may not have been the most famous while he was alive, but he is known around the world today not only for The Four Seasons, but many of his other works as well. He is considered one of the most influential composers of the late Baroque period. At that time, his music was considered “thin and flashy” with “cheap effects”, but his music continues to live on and always be appreciated.

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1. “Antonio Vivaldi’s Four Seasons,” Aaron Green, accessed March 1, 2021, https://www.liveabout.com/antonio-vivaldis-four-seasons-profile-723773 [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. “The Four Seasons,” Betsy Schwarm, accessed February 28, 2021, https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Four-Seasons-by-Vivaldi [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Schwarm, “The Four Seasons.” [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. ”Antonio Vivaldi.” Raymond L. Knapp, accessed February 2, 2021, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Antonio-Vivaldi [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. Joseph Kerman and Gary Tomlinson, *Listen: Ninth Edition* (W.W. Norton and Company, 2019), 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
6. ”Selected Letters by and to Vivaldi.” Karl Heller, accessed March 1, 2021, http://anima-veneziana.narod.ru/Heller/H10\_Appendix\_Notes\_Index\_etc.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
7. Karl Heller, *Antonio Vivaldi: The Red Priest of Venice* (Amadeus Press, 1997), 11-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)