



*Antonio Vivaldi*  
*«The Four Seasons»*  
*The Contest Between*  
*Harmony and Invention*



**First violins:**

*Federico Cardilli\**, *Azusa Onishi*, *Eleonora Minerva*, *Sabina Morelli*

**Second violins:**

*Leonardo Spinedi\**, *Francesco Peverini*, *Alessandro Marini*, *Vanessa Di Cintio*

**Violas:**

*Gianluca Saggini\**, *Riccardo Savinelli*, *Luana De Rubeis*

**Cellos:**

*Giulio Ferretti\**, *Chiara Burattini*

**Double bass:**

*Alessandro Schillaci*

**Harpsichord:**

*Ettore Maria del Romano*



*Nature and the culture of sound*

*The concerts that we've become accustomed to call **The Four Seasons**, are contained in a series of twelve and were published in Amsterdam in 1725 as Opera 8.*

*Vivaldi himself entitled the work, **Il cimento dell'armonia e dell'invenzione** (The Pursuit of Harmony and Invention).*

*The collection is dedicated to the Bohemian Count Wenzel von Morzin, who requested the composer as his "maestro of music in Italy", that is, as a non-resident Kappellmeister:*

*Vivaldi's fame was widespread in all of Europe.*

*There is no need to add a single word of comment to the title: **cimento** (pursuit, or test) / **armonia** (harmony) / **invenzione** (invention), the sense of composition, between rules and freedom, science and art, is perfectly contained there in.*

*The Seasons – the first four concert of the collection, in the sequence of Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter – are each accompanied by a sonnet by an anonymous poet. There is reason to believe that the author is Vivaldi himself.*



*The sonnets were neglected on the basis of their literary quality (in a critical review of the work from 1950, Gian Francesco Malipiero misjudges them, “captions of an extremely Baroque nature that define the character of the work as almost that of program music”).*



*The verses, which Vivaldi intends to flow along with the music, reveal themselves as essential to the comprehension of the dramaturgy of the entire work, which is centered upon the observation of Nature by an eighteenth century artist whose desire is to restore to Nature its power, its variety, its beauty, in its interaction with the activities of mankind.*

*Vivaldi doesn't adopt the attitude that Beethoven would choose in the future (1808) in his Sixth Symphony: “Pastoral Symphonie: mehr Ausdruck der Empfindung als Malerei” (Pastoral Symphony: more an expression of sentiment than of painting).*



*Vivaldi's outlook is not Illuminist or Romantic, that of Scientism or Escapist, like that of a wayfarer, in the immensity of Nature's vastness and abysses. Neither is it Leopardian, implacable in expressing the total indifference of Nature in the face of our demands and anxieties. Vivaldi, in his Sonnets and in his music, tells us that we can coexist with Nature. In the last verse of Winter, the last noun – gioia (joy) – appears, in this perspective, emblematic.*



*Michael Talbot, the composer's main scholar, writes that Vivaldi is "extraordinarily advanced in the wide range of dynamic marks".*

*In an era in which most composers used only the ordinary indications of "piano" and "forte", Vivaldi is much more generous and precise: he often indicates "pianissimo" and "fortissimo" and frequently he adds shadings such as forte e strappato (forte and broken off), più piano (softer) and più forte (louder), mezzo forte (half as loud), suonate non troppo forte (don't play too loud), un poco forte (somewhat loud), mezza voce (half voice), piano molto (very soft)...*

*In the 2011 edition of The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, under the heading "Tempo and expression marks", reads the following: "The famous crescendo of the Mannheim orchestra in the mid-eighteenth century may have seemed astonishing to its contemporaries, but there is very little in the scores that cannot also be found in those of Vivaldi".*



*The expressive effects of the Mannheim orchestra which so fascinated Mozart in the seventies of the eighteenth century are already alive, much earlier, in Vivaldi's writing. As noted by Federico Maria Sardelli, a collaborator with the Institute Vivaldi of the Venetian Foundation Giorgio Cini, "he explores every lexical path in order to relate in detail the exact speed and character of his music.*



*He gives the single term “Allegro” no fewer than 18 different shadings.*



*A playfulness and the interaction between soloist and orchestra create a dialogue full of questions and answers, at times in agreement, at others in contrast.*

*Born in the sixteen hundreds (Venice, 1678) and educated in the Venetian violin tradition, Vivaldi let burst into his music the dynamism of the following century, never neglecting the theatrical aspect of his writing, even in his instrumental works. Vivaldi is a man of the theater: his sound always evokes the theater. The whole of this awareness is translated into the admirable outcome of this recording of the Seasons.*

*In the exhausted sensual embrace of the heat in the Summer Concerto (already Claude Debussy’s faun?), the drunkenness of the Adagio molto in the Autumn Concerto, in the domestic happiness of the pizzicato of the Largo in the Winter Concerto.*

*To read the Sonnets while listening is definitely not a useless task. The mastery of the control and of the play of the dynamics shows up in the most particular aspect of this recording: the mobility of the tempo, it’s breath, calm or anxious, pressing or relaxed, profound or light. Time for man is never objective, as his vision of Nature is non-objective. In his observation of Nature, man trembles with happiness and with fear, he suffers the heat and the cold, he enjoys the breeze, he harvests wheat, he drinks wine, he sleeps, hunts, loves and kills animals, he dances, sings, shoots. Here every emotion prescribed by Vivaldi is interiorized, with a sentiment of respect towards the organicity of Nature which, in our limited vocabulary, we usually call ecological.*

*Fateful is the thought that the violin and the entire string family are pieces of wood, created by Nature, masterfully reinvented by man’s culture, transformed into instruments which the hands and the intellect of musicians, with precision and soul, are made to play.*



*This new version of the Stagioni looks to the original source of the music, it plunges its awareness into historical performance practice, it lives – today – by its own organic necessity.*

*It invites us, with resonance, to a renewed respect for that Nature which supports us and which for much too long we have senselessly devastated.*