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Mozart - Symphony No. 35 *Haffner*

Vivaldi - *The Four Season* with Philippe Quint, violin

Program Notes:

Brevard Symphony Orchestra (2011-12) Subscription Series 4:

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Music Director – WXXI-FM/NPR, Rochester, N.Y. (1980-1990)**

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart (1756-1791) – Symphony No. 35 in D Major, *Haffner*, K. 385:

- I. *Adagio – Allegro con spirito*
- II. *Andante*
- III. *Menuetto*
- IV. *Presto*

July of 1792 found Mozart exceptionally busy in Vienna with a multitude of activities – conducting performances of his new hit opera *The Abduction of the Seraglio*, preparing wind arrangements of the opera for publication, fulfilling commissions for new works, and making plans for his imminent marriage to Constanze. With all this going on, Mozart’s father sent him a letter *strongly* suggesting that something else must be done: he must write a new serenade for the Mayor of Salzburg, one Sigmund Haffner. It seems the Mayor was being elevated to nobility and so required a fresh composition from Mozart – Salzburg’s brightest son – something light and cheerful that could function as background music at a reception or banquet to be held in his honor. Mozart protested to his father that he felt overwhelmed and did not know where he would find the time to write such a work. But Mozart always did his best to accommodate his father’s wishes and so in a matter of only a few weeks composed a six-movement serenade finished in the nick of time for Haffner’s festivities. A “serenade” (*serenata* or *Nachtmusik*) was a broad term for a collection of small orchestra pieces, normally numbering six or more movements, lighter in mood and texture than were customary for a symphony and intended as entertainment music to be played during supper or for some prestigious social occasion.

A half-year later in February of 1793, Mozart was putting together a concert program in Vienna to be attended by His Majesty the Emperor himself and so needed to produce a new symphony in a hurry. Mozart had the idea to retrieve the aforementioned Serenade with the intention of refashioning it into a new symphony. He asked his father to send the score along as soon as possible from Salzburg. “The new Haffner Symphony was a complete surprise to me,” wrote Mozart to his father on February 15, 1783. “I had completely forgotten what it was like – this should really make a good effect.” Mozart then proceeded to do a masterful job of transforming the serenade into an authentic four-movement symphony, which eventually became known as the *Haffner* Symphony. The process was simple: discard two of the six movements (the march and one of the minuets) and augment the orchestra with flutes and clarinets in the outer movements.

The opening *Adagio – Allegro con spirito* begins dramatically with an upwardly leaping octave, which establishes the celebratory mood of the whole movement. The music is lively and rousing and the use of a plethora of racy scale passages and bolder and richer writing make for a grand effect. The inner two movements – the lyrical *Andante* and lively *Presto* – are lighter and more modestly constructed, reflecting their courtly origins in the party music of Salzburg. Mozart encourages the concluding *Presto* to be played “as fast as possible,” and it surely does proceed at a breakneck pace, barely allowing the performers – and the listeners – a chance to catch a breath. The principal theme of

the finale echoes the *buffo* triumph of the harem-keeper Osmin's aria, *Ha, wie will ich triumphieren* ("Ha! What triumph will be mine now?"), from the composer's new hit opera, *The Abduction from the Seraglio*, the work that preoccupied Mozart as he wrote the Haffner Serenade.

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741) – The Four Seasons:

Antonio Vivaldi's music is a curious phenomenon. Mention the name and reaction is bound to fall into one of two widely different camps: The largest group holds, "I can never get enough of Vivaldi because his music is so fiery, joyful, poignant, and uplifting!" But, as always, there are the naysayers. Stravinsky once said, "Vivaldi is greatly overrated – a dull fellow who could compose the same form over and so many times over." According to harpsichordist Igor Kipnis, "A wag once observed that Vivaldi didn't write 400 concerti, but merely wrote one concerto 400 times." And I once heard an Eastman School of Music graduate student disparage Vivaldi as "sewing machine" music. Play Vivaldi on the radio and without fail someone will call and sigh, "Oh, not again!" But far more will call and exclaim: "Thanks, that music was wonderful! It made me feel so energetic and positive. I have to have that recording!"

Perhaps Vivaldi's prodigious output seems excessive: he is credited with over 750 works including 400-500 concerti, nearly 100 sonatas, 46 operas, and some 37 liturgical choral works (the *Gloria* being the best known). But Baroque composers were frequently required to rework their own material, as well as that of other composers, not out of a lack of creativity but as a commonly understood compositional practice of the period necessary to keep pace with the demands of patrons and the public. And while Stravinsky's dig may own a bit of truth, it is interesting to take note of Bach's estimation of Vivaldi. Bach so admired Vivaldi's music that he transcribed over a dozen of his works for various instruments. In fact, Bach's Concerto for Four Harpsichords is a reworking of Vivaldi's Concerto for Four Violins and Strings. Bach was not a man to concern himself with the mediocre.

Vivaldi was born in 1678 in Venice into a musical family. His father, Gianbattista, operated a barbershop that featured musical entertainment (entrepreneurs take note – *there* is an idea that if implemented today may get you seen as being on the "cutting edge")! No record on whether Vivaldi's dad was much of a hair stylist, but it is known that his father was a highly respected violinist who eventually gave up the shop in favor of a position as a violinist at the great St. Mark's in Venice. Son Antonio became Gianbattista's most prominent pupil and became so accomplished early on that he made his first appearance at the Cathedral at the age of only ten.

However, Antonio was apparently seen as destined for the priesthood from the age of fifteen and ten years later received his ordination. But as accomplished and facile as Vivaldi had become as a violinist, he did not similarly excel in the clergy. His first attempt to say Mass brought on an attack involving chest pains thought to be the result of either angina or asthma. Vivaldi claimed that the affliction would not go away and so never again tried to officiate Mass. What did stick, though, was the nickname *Il prete rosso* ("The red priest") because of his flaming red hair, the Italian fire of his music, and the fiery temperament of some of his family members (two brothers were arrested by the police for brawling and one was even exiled).

The Red Priest, therefore, followed his true calling into music and in 1704 accepted a position as violin teacher at the Ospedale della Pieta, a charitable institution in Venice that functioned both as a home for orphaned girls and as a highly respected music conservatory. Vivaldi taught there for the next 35 years, rising in the ranks and taking on more and more responsibilities. The conservatory was renowned throughout all of Europe for its remarkably high level of musicianship and for its weekly concerts; many of Vivaldi's works we hear today were composed for those very concerts. He served as soloist for these performances and because of his exceptional brilliance and virtuosity became known throughout Europe as one of the age's premier violinists. He was even touted by Venice as something of a tourist attraction. Many visitors wrote enthusiastically about the concerts at *Pieta*, including the likes of Goethe and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. As a result, Vivaldi's compositions and his services as a dazzling violinist were in demand all over Europe. In addition, wanting to position himself primarily as an opera composer – benefiting from Venice's identification as being one of *the* flourishing operatic centers of the day and opera being the most prestigious music forms of the time – Vivaldi was often drawn away from Venice. He frequently traveled across the continent to perform and to attend productions of one of his various operas. Finally, the school authorities at the *Pieta* had enough and voted the composer out, forcing him into the life of an itinerant composer living on the proceeds of his operas and selling his concerti to anyone who would buy. After an illustrious career, Vivaldi ended up in Vienna in 1740, hoping to win favor at the court of Charles VI as a composer. But his hopes

proved fruitless and he ended up dying the following year, apparently in poverty and buried in a grave now vanished under the pavements of Vienna.

Following Vivaldi's death, just about all of his music lapsed into obscurity, lost in libraries and various archives until the Baroque revival of the past half-century. That is over two centuries of virtual neglect! Fortunately a turnaround occurred through the efforts of musicologists who worked to make available many of Vivaldi's scores. And the "discovery" and performance of *The Four Seasons* concerti around 1950 caused music lovers to stand up and take notice. The advent of the long-playing record (remember those?) didn't hurt either: Vivaldi's music ended up on many of the earliest LP's and became familiar to and loved by countless listeners. Even now in 2011, Vivaldi continues to be recorded and enjoyed. Charged and innovative ensembles like Collegium Aureum, Collegium Musicum, I Musici, I Solisti Veneti, *Red Priest*, and the Venice Baroque Orchestra to name just a few, continually expand our knowledge and joy of Vivaldi's music.

Vivaldi's greatest contribution to music history is the essential role he played in bringing the form of the Late-Baroque concerto form to its highest peak of brilliance. The form most often consisted of three movements (fast, slow, fast). The outer two fast movements were cast in *ritornello* form. This form takes its name from the refrain, or ritornello, stated at outset of a movement, recalled briefly at intervals throughout, and restated at the conclusion. Between reappearances of the *ritornello*, a solo or a light, small group of instruments played episodes, which originally contrasted with the *ritornello*. The concerti we will enjoy on today's program are largely from this mold. But Vivaldi also must be given his due for what he himself brought to the Baroque concerto form. All one need do is to marvel at the ferocity, originality, and technical brilliance that he provided to the soloist(s) in particular and to the orchestra in general. And the simple but profound pathos flowing through his slow movements are often gem-like in quality and leave indelible impressions.

Among all Baroque instrumental works, Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* is hands-down the most popular. Probably more copies of this work have been sold than any other piece in the entire classical recording catalogue. Some tend to look down their noses at *The Four Seasons* because of its phenomenal success, as if success is *necessarily* a strike against it. But even though there are obviously other compositions of greater gravity and scope, these concertos should not be looked upon with condescension. They are inspired and full of beauty, fire, humor, energy, virtuosity, poignancy, and imagination. As such, they deserve their due.

The Four Seasons is the first four of a set of twelve celebrated violin concertos Vivaldi published in 1725 under the enigmatic Italian title, *Il Cimento dell'Armonia e dell'Invenzione*, translated as "The Rivalry between Harmony and Invention." Look into the other eight concerti of the set; you will be glad you did! You would also be pleased and perhaps surprised at the mastery found in three other Vivaldi concerti twelve packs: *L'estro Armonico* (Harmonious Spirit); *La Stravaganza* (Extravagant Fancy); and *La Cetra* (The Lyre).

What sets *The Four Seasons* apart from Vivaldi's other concerti and the probable reason for their immense popularity is the programmatic nature of the music. Such music was not the order of Vivaldi's day, but several early 18th century philosophers cheered composers on to make music more "natural" and less "absolute." Imitating the sounds of nature was not a 'no-no' to their way of thinking. Possibly striving towards that aesthetic, Vivaldi attached to these concerti a *sonnetto dimostrativo*, or a "demonstration sonnet." Probably penned by Vivaldi himself, the poems are not on the same level as the music, but they do provide effective and sometimes amusing pathways into the music.

Given that Vivaldi's score is actually sprinkled with terms clearly designed to set a pictorial or aural mood for specific sections, there is no doubt that a symbiotic relationship exists between the poetry and the music. For example, appearing over the beginning bars of the "Summer" concerto is the phrase *languidezza per il caldo*, or "languidness because of the heat." However, one can still simply sit back and take in the concerti as simply a quartet of violin concertos. In other words, so strong is the music that it can be listened to as absolute music if you so chose.

But for many of us the poetry adds an additional dimension to the listening experience. Provided below is a translation of Vivaldi's sonnets.

The Spring, Concerto No. 1 in E Major

I. *Allegro*

Spring has come,
The birds greet spring with happy singing,
The streams flow in sweet murmurings, caressed by spring breezes.
The sky is veiled in black,
Lightning flashes and thunderstorms roar.
Soon it becomes quiet again; the birds return,
And again birds sing their delightful songs.

II. *Largo e pianissimo sempre*

Soon the lovely meadows are covered with flowers,
Beneath the whispering tree leaves,
The goatherd sleeps with his faithful dog at his side.

III. *Danza pastorale: Allegro*

The shepherd and nymphs dance,
To the sounds of the shepherd's pipe,
As spring enters in full resplendent beauty.

The Summer, Concerto No. 2 in G minor

I. *Allegro non molto*

The man and his flock languish beneath the burning summer sun,
The pine tree is seared,
The cuckoo bird is calling,
And the turtledove and goldfinch are singing,
The soft zephyr winds blow.
The north wind wakes from its slumber and stirs the air,
The shepherd boy weeps in fear of the wind and its power.

II. *Adagio; Presto*

The tired sheperd cannot rest his tired limbs,
In fear of the lightning flashes and thunder roar,
And the torment of the buzzing flies and insects.

III. *Presto*

Alas, his fears are well founded,
Thunder and lightning fill the sky,
And huge hailstones pound away at the fields of grain.

The Autumn, Concerto No. 3 in F Major

I. *Allegro*

With song and dance the peasants celebrate the harvest,
They are drunk with the nectars of Bacchus.
The festivities end as the celebrants fall asleep.

II. *Adagio*

The singing and dancing ends,
The soft, sweet breezes fan the celebrants,
Lulling everyone into peaceful slumber.

III. Allegro

At dawn, to the sound of horns, the hunters ride out,
They chase their fleeing prey,
In mounting fear, the wounded animal tries to escape,
Terrified, the hunted beast finally succumbs.

The Winter, Concerto No. in 4 F minor

I. Allegro non molto

Frozen, shivering, in the snowy cold
In the sharp, biting winds
You stamp your feet as your teeth chatter from the cold.

II. Largo

The cheer and warmth of indoors offers haven,
Against the drenching rain outside.

III. Allegro

With slow, cautious steps they wend their way over the ice,
Many are slipping and falling,
Once again on their feet, they move with caution,
Until the ice breaks under them,
As the winds battle in the heavens.
Such is winter – but what joy it brings!

Conductor's CD Recommendations for this performance:

Mozart – Symphony No. 35 *Haffner*
Prague Chamber Orchestra/Sir Charles Mackerras, conductor
TELARC 80203

Vivaldi – *The Four Seasons*
Joshua Bell, violin
Academy of St, Martin in the Fields
SONY CLASSICS 711013

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