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### A Review of Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*

On July 26, 2016, I decided to venture out to the Symphony in the Gardens organized by the Toronto Concert Orchestra. The evening's main event was a performance of Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*. This violin quartet was originally composed by Antonio Vivaldi in 1723. Vivaldi's goal with this arrangement was to give a musical representation to each one of the four seasons. The concerti was also put together with poems that accompanied the music. This was one of the first examples of program music as most performances prior to this did not have any sort of narrative element. The violin concerti is broken down into four individual concertos, one for each season. The first is the spring concerto in E major. The second is the summer concerto in G minor. The third is the autumn concerto in F major, and the fourth and final concerto is winter in F minor.

The venue itself was perhaps one of the most beautiful and well-designed concert venues I have had the pleasure of visiting. It was no ordinary venue as it took place inside a medium-sized greenhouse-style building in a garden that was overshadowed by a massive castle. The garden itself was well-maintained as there was a running fountain, different colored arrangements of flowers, and a polite waitstaff that made sure the guests were provided with everything they needed to enjoy the show. The building that the concert was located in worked well for the performance as the smaller structure of the building helped to reverberate the sound of the performers' violins. There were only a couple hundred seats, so I was glad that I was able

to acquire a ticket to this sold out event. This smaller crowd created a more intimate environment as well, and I was lucky to be just three rows behind the main stage.

The conductor of the performance was Kerry Stratton, a world-class conductor right out of Ontario's backyard in Belleville. I felt he did an excellent job at directing the soloists through the forty-minute long performance. To me, he appeared more like one of the performers than a conductor of musicians based on how energetic and involved he was in directing some of the faster allegro measures. The four soloists included Sunny Choi, Marcus Sholtes, Alex Toskov, and Sharon Lee. Each soloist had a distinct role in dominating and taking the reigns over each concerto as the performers constantly passed the lead role back and forth like a hot potato. This was not because of fatigue or lack of desire to hold this role but felt more like the performers wanted each other to have an equal role in showcasing this wonderful piece of music.

Something I noticed about the symphony was that the spring and autumn concertos seemed similar to each other as did the summer and winter concertos. The spring and autumn concertos started out bold, loud, and very recognizable. This makes sense as both begin with an allegro, although they differ after this as the spring concerto delves into a *largo e pianissimo sempre* and the autumn allegro is followed by an *adagio molto*. The summer and winter concertos begin slower and sound more dark and dismal compared to their spring and autumn counterparts. This is because both begin with an *allegro non molto*, although they speed up after this. The winter concerto transitions into a faster allegro that steals the show and brings the intensity of an intense winter storm into the performance. This was perhaps my favorite moment of the performance, and I felt completely engaged and sucked into the emotions that Vivaldi was trying to convey through his music. It also took advantage of a wide melodic range as there were

quite a few different tones that made up this section of the performance. The same could be said of all four concertos as none maintained the same sorts of melodies throughout each concerto.

I had a chance to speak with Sharon Lee, leader of the Casa Loma series. I asked when she first started playing the violin, and she told me that she had been playing since she was six-years-old. She had dabbled in playing other instruments, but for her the violin was much more appealing because it allowed her to play certain notes that an instrument like a piano could not. I asked her how difficult it was to perform this lengthy piece, and she told me that she still views each concert as a challenge despite her status as a professional musician. She said that the moment you go into autopilot and stop getting nervous is when you stop caring about putting on the best possible show, and practice continues beyond the physical realm as she tends to imagine herself playing each of the concertos in her mind in the days leading up to a performance. Sharon also revealed that she had worked with Kerry Stratton before, and any chance to be featured in one of his shows was a real treat for her.

The Symphony in the Gardens concert was one of my first experiences with viewing live classical performances, and after enjoying the show as much as I did, I have to admit that it will not be my last. Everything went well from the location of the stage to the performance itself, and I was happy that I got the chance to speak with Sharon Lee. I also found myself in a state of surprise as soon as the show began because I realized I had heard the spring concerto of Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons* many times in my life, but I had never made the connection that this particular piece of music came from this violin concerti. I left the show feeling intellectually satisfied and yearning for more of Vivaldi's work.