

Vivaldi: Sacred and Secular

Start times: 2pm and 7.30pm

Approximate end times: 3.30pm and 8.55pm

There will be a 20-minute interval in both concerts. Please note all timings are approximate and subject to change.

Programme

2pm, Concert 1

Antonio Vivaldi 'La primavera' from *Le quattro stagioni*

1. Allegro
 2. Largo e pianissimo sempre
 3. Allegro pastorale
- Stabat Mater
1. Stabat mater dolorosa
 2. Cujus animam gementem
 3. O quam tristis et afflicta
 4. Quis est homo
 5. Quis non posset contristari
 6. Pro peccatis suae gentis
 7. Eia mater, fons amoris
 8. Fac ut ardeat cor meum
 9. Amen

Concerto No 10 from *L'Estro Armonico*

1. Allegro
2. Largo – Larghetto
3. Allegro

Concerto No 11 from *L'Estro Armonico*

1. Allegro – Adagio e spiccato – Allegro
2. Largo e spiccato
3. Allegro

'L'estate' from *Le quattro stagioni*

1. Allegro non molto
2. Adagio e piano – Presto e forte
3. Presto

7.30pm, Concert 2

Antonio Vivaldi 'L'autunno' from *Le quattro stagioni*

1. Allegro
 2. Adagio molto
 3. Allegro
- Nisi Dominus
1. Nisi Dominus
 2. Vanum est vobis ante lucem surgere
 3. Surgitis sederitis postquam
 4. Cum dederit dilectis am
 5. Sicut sagittae in manu potentis
 6. Beatus vir who implevit
 7. Gloria Patri and Filio
 8. Sicut era in principio
 9. Amen

Concerto No 5 from *L'Estro Armonico*

1. Allegro
2. Largo
3. Allegro

Concerto No 8 from *L'Estro Armonico*

1. Allegro
2. Larghetto e spiritoso
3. Allegro

'L'inverno' from *Le quattro stagioni*

1. Allegro non molto
2. Largo
3. Allegro

barbican

Antonio Vivaldi was a man of contradictions: author of one of the most famous works ever – *The Four Seasons* – yet his sacred music is far less familiar, writes Harriet Smith.

This is our loss, for to every genre he brings the qualities of innovation, of outlandish virtuosity offset by slower music of profound beauty.

In today's exploration of sacred and secular, American countertenor John Holiday joins forces with Baroque orchestra Accademia Bizantina under Ottavio Dantone; this can be no more than a glimpse into the world of this prodigious composer, but it's no less potent for that.

We travel to early 18th-century Venice, and to the Ospedala della Pietà (an institution founded to give shelter to orphans and abandoned girls) where Vivaldi was music director and under whose aegis its all-female ensembles had become ever more famous. For all Vivaldi's fame locally, publication of music was vital to spread the word. So in 1711 he'd published his first set of violin concertos, Op 3. He titled them *L'estro armonico* ('The genius of harmony'). It was a good title and caught the imagination of connoisseurs even before they looked within its pages.

Concertos at this time had the intimacy of chamber music, and they'd often feature more than one soloist: accordingly, Op 3 has concertos for one, two and four violins. Among the four we hear today the 10th (for four violins) has a gnawing energy, with the soloists trying to outdo one another, before giving way to a magically lit slow movement with ever-shifting harmonies, crowned by a galumphing finale. Anyone who believes the cheap jibe that Vivaldi wrote the same concerto hundreds of times only need spend time with Op 3 to see how wrong that is. Take the 11th Concerto, which begins with the two solo violins in vivid conversation before being disturbed by a cello that leads off on an unexpected fugue. Or the A major Fifth Concerto, which sets off with real grandeur before the two violin soloists spoil the mood with their competitive jousting. The sorrowful A minor No 8 takes elements from the Fifth and extends them, the interplay between the soloists now more extended. And in the Larghetto the first violin enters with a moving plaintiveness but here, rather than being alone, it is joined by the second in an imitative ecstasy that foreshadows Bach's Double Violin Concerto and even Mozart's *Sinfonia concertante* for violin and viola. The final movement crowns the concerto with a fierce energy that would be just as at home as an opera overture.

On the subject of opera, it's striking that even in a work as famous as *The Four Seasons* Vivaldi was doing a bit of self-borrowing (something to be found in the music of every self-respecting Baroque composer): 'Spring' takes elements from his opera *Il Giustino*. Time had passed since his Op 3, but he'd lost none of his sense of a good title when *The Four Seasons* appeared within a collection of 12 concertos in 1725 as *Il cimento dell'armonia e dell'invenzione* ('The contest between harmony and invention'), Op 8. But what sets his *Seasons* apart is their direct inspiration from a set of sonnets that might or might not be the work of the composer himself. From these he conjures the most vivid musical effects, from animals and birds (the barking dog in the slow movement of 'Spring' or the calls of the cuckoo, turtledove and goldfinch in the opening of 'Summer') to more large-scale landscapes, such as frozen plains depicted in the first movement of 'Winter'.

Equally striking is the way that *The Four Seasons* entirely break free from the past – the collegiate concerti grossi of Corelli and Torelli now overtaken by a fierce virtuosity and drama that will then go on to create the Classical and (even more) Romantic notion of the concerto, in which lone soloist does battle with epic forces.

That idea of the soloist emerges in Vivaldi's sacred music too. If early sacred music featured choirs as the norm, by the 17th and 18th centuries things had shifted. Now, in the Catholic Church a single voice could be regarded as the equivalent of personal prayer. And while female voices were banned from ecclesiastical settings, they were allowed within all-female set-ups, which conveniently included the Venetian ospedali, including Vivaldi's Pietà. However, there wasn't the differentiation between male and female voices over which we obsess today – girls, castrati, boy trebles, countertenors: all were deemed suitable soloists for sacred works, not least because high voices were thought more angelic, and therefore closer to the divine.

The Stabat Mater was a much-set text exploring the anguish of Mary, Christ's mother, at the foot of the Cross and set magnificently by composers such as Pergolesi and Alessandro Scarlatti. Vivaldi's is a little different, not least in that it sets a shortened version of the text, which gives the drama a particular concision. It was commissioned in 1712, just a year after the publication of *L'estro armonico*. The unadorned pain of the protagonist is evocatively realised in the solo voice in Vivaldi's opening movement, contrasting with writing of stabbing immediacy in the second movement; it is only in the penultimate movement that matters become more consoling, before giving way to a closing 'Amen', a veritable vocal tour-de-force.

From around five years later, Vivaldi's *Nisi Dominus* is unusual in setting a psalm, but again what's extraordinary is the composer's sheer imagination in terms of colour and mood. The driving, dancing opening movement demands a singer of operatic range and agility; contrast this with the long-breathed tranquillity of the second movement; while the 'Gloria patri' (No 7) features the unusual colouring of a viola d'amore, an instrument on which the composer excelled; the congregation were guaranteed to be sent skipping out of the service, though with the brilliance of the last two movements, reminding us again that Vivaldi the concerto composer and Vivaldi the sacred composer were two sides of the same man.

Performers

Ottavio Dantone director & harpsichord

John Holiday countertenor

Alessandro Tampieri concertmaster

Accademia Bizantina

Lavinia Soncini violin I

Lisa Ferguson

Paolo Zinzani

Ana Liz Ojeda violin II

Sara Meloni

Gabriele Pro

Heriberto Delgado

Marco Massera viola

Alice Bisanti

Alessandro Palmeri cello

Paolo Ballanti

Nicola Dal Maso double bass

Tiziano Bagnati lute

Stefano Demicheli organ

Produced by the Barbican

Stabat Mater

Stabat Mater dolorosa
luxta crucem lacrimosa
Dum pendebat Filius.

Cuius animam gementem
Contristatam et dolentem
Pertransivit gladius.

O quam tristis et afflicta
Fuit illa benedicta
Mater unigeniti!
Quae moerebat et dolebat,
Pia Mater, dum videbat
Nati poenas incliti.

Quis est homo qui non fleret,
Matrem Christi si videret
In tanto supplicio?

Quis non posset contristari,
Christi Matrem contemplari
Dolentem cum Filio?

Pro peccatis suae gentis
Vidit Iesum in tormentis,
Et flagellis subditum.
Vidit suum dulcem natum
Moriendo desolatam
Dum emisit spiritum.

Eja Mater, fons amoris
Me sentire vim doloris
Fac, ut tecum lugeam.

Fac, ut ardeat cor meum
In amando Christum Deum
Ut sibi complaceam.

Amen

Nisi Dominus

Nisi Dominus aedificaverit domum,
in vanum laboraverunt qui aedificant eam.
Nisi Dominus custodierit civitatem,
frustra vigilat qui custodit eam.

Vanum est vobis ante lucem surgere.

Surgite postquam sederitis,
qui manducatis panem doloris.

Cum dederit dilectis suis somnum:
ecce haereditas Domini, filii:
merces, fructus ventris.

Sicut sagittae in manu potentis:
ita filii excussorum.

Beatus vir qui implevit desiderium suum ex
ipsis:
non confundetur cum loquetur
inimicis suis in porta.

Gloria Patri et Filio,
et Spiritui Sancto.

Sicut erat in principio, et nunc, et semper:
et in saecula saeculorum.

Amen

The mother was standing sorrowfully
next to the cross, tearful
as her Son was hanging.

Whose soul, groaning,
sad and sorrowful,
the sword has pierced through.

How miserable and afflicted
was that blessed
mother of an only son.
She lamented and grieved,
the Holy Mother, when she saw
the pains of her glorious Son.

Who is the man who would not weep
were he to see the Mother of Christ
in such distress?

Who would not be made sad
at the thought of Christ's Mother
grieving with her Son?

For the sins of his people
she saw Jesus subjected to
torments and lashes.
She saw her sweet Son
dying, deserted
as he gave up his spirit.

Accordingly, Mother, fountain of love,
make me feel the force of your grief
so that I may mourn with you.

Make my heart burn
with love for Christ the God
so that I may be reconciled with him.

Amen

Unless the Lord builds a house,
in vain do those who labour build it.
Unless the Lord guards a city,
futilely does he who watches guard it.

It is pointless for you to get up early.

You get up before you have gone to bed,
you who eat the bread of misery.

For he has granted to those he loves rest:
behold an inheritance from the Lord – sons:
a reward, the fruit of the womb.

Like arrows in the hand of powerful man:
such are sons born in your youth.

Blessed is the man who has filled his desire with
these:
he will not be confounded when he speaks
with his enemies at the gate.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit.

As it was in the beginning, both now and for ever:
and for an age of ages.

Amen



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