

THE FOUR

Seasons



September 26, 2020

Photo: Arthur Moeller

The Four Seasons

Saturday, September 26, 2020 • 8:00PM

Grace Presbyterian Church

Broadcast on WTVF Create 47.4

Peoria Symphony Orchestra

George Stelluto • conductor

Charles Yang • violin

Sinfonia No. 2 in D Major

Allegro – Andante – Allegro vivace

Felix Mendelssohn-Bartholdy

(1809-1847)

Brandenburg Concerto No. 3

Allegro – Adagio – Allegro

Johann Sebastian Bach

(1685-1750)

Le Quattro Stagioni (The Four Seasons)

La Prima Vera (Spring)

Allegro – Largo e pianissimo – Allegro

L' Estate (Summer)

Allegro ma non molto – Adagio – Presto

L' Autunno (Autumn)

Allegro – Adagio molto – Allegro

L' Inverno (Winter)

Allegro non molto – Largo – Allegro

Antonio Vivaldi

(1685-1750)

Charles Yang • violin

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This program is partially supported by a grant from the Illinois Arts Council Agency.



Photo: SY

Charles Yang • Violin

Recipient of the 2018 Leonard Bernstein Award and described by the *Boston Globe* as one who “plays classical violin with the charisma of a rock star,” Juilliard graduate Charles Yang began his violin studies with his mother in Austin, Texas, and has since studied with world-renowned pedagogues Kurt Sassmanshaus, Paul Kantor, Brian Lewis, and Glenn Dicterow. He has performed as a soloist with orchestras and in concert in the United States, Europe, Brazil, Russia, China, and Taiwan, and is the recipient of numerous awards and honors. On June 9, 2005, the Mayor of Austin presented Mr. Yang with his own “Charles Yang Day.” In 2016 Mr. Yang joined the crossover string band, Time for Three.

Not only confined to classical violin, Mr. Yang's improvisational crossover abilities as a violinist, electric violinist, and vocalist have led him to featured performances with a variety of artists in such festivals as the Aspen Music Festival, Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival, Crested Butte Music Festival, Cayman Arts Festival, YouTube Music Awards, Moab Music Festival, TED, Caramoor, EG Conference, Oncue Conference, Google Zeitgeist, YouTube Space Los Angeles, Interlochen, and onstage at venues such

as Carnegie Hall, Alice Tully Hall, Lincoln Center's Metropolitan Opera House, David H. Koch Theater, Dizzy's and David Rubinstein Atrium, The Long Center, The Royal Danish Theatre, Le Poisson Rouge, Highline Ballroom, Ars Nova, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, and The Forbidden City in Beijing, among many others. He has performed in the presence of two former U.S. Presidents and the Queen of Denmark, and has recently shared the stage in collaborations with artists including Peter Dugan, CDZA, Steve Miller, Jesse Colin Young, Jake Shimabukuro, Ray Benson, Michael Gordon, Bang on a Can All-Stars, Marcelo Gomes, Twyla Tharp, Misty Copeland, and Jon Batiste. His career has been followed by various news media including *The New York Times*, *The New York Post*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The Huffington Post*, *Playbill*, *The Boston Globe*, *Fortissimo*, *The Financial Times*, *The Austin-American Statesman*, *The Austin Chronicle*, *Shenzhen Daily*, *The Strad*, *Dallas Daily*, *Cincinnati Enquirer*, and *Juilliard Journal*. Mr. Yang is featured in Nick Romeo's book, *Driven*, as well as Discovery Channel's “Curiosity.”

As *The Texas Observer* has noted, “Mr. Yang is a true crossover artist, a pioneer who can hop between classical and popular music and bring fresh ideas to fans of both genres. Rather than maintaining an insular focus and simply assuming that an audience for classical music will always exist, he wants to actively create that audience, to persuade and seduce others into enjoying a type of music as passionately as he does.”

Peoria Symphony Orchestra

September 26, 2020

Violin 1

Marcia Henry Liebenow, concertmaster
Courtney Silver, assistant concertmaster
Margaret FioRito
Katie Cousins

Violin 2

Alexander Subev, guest principal
The Frederick Family Endowment
Leslie Koons
Rosemary Ardner
Molly Wilson

Viola

Rebecca Boelzner, acting principal
Sharon and John Amdall Endowment
Lowell Koons
Sharon Chung
Mark Wirbisky

Cello

Adriana Ransom, principal
Parker Endowment in memory of H. H. Block
Kathleen Long, assistant principal
Francisco Malespin

Bass

Austin Vawter, principal
Peoria Symphony Guild and Friends Endowment in
memory of Norbert Cieslewicz
Patrick Aubryn, assistant principal

Piano

Pei-yeh Tsai, principal
Warren Webber Endowment

Maestro's Message

The three masterpieces on this program counter the fear, anger, and ambiguity of our present time with hope, civility, and familiarity. Mendelssohn's *Sinfonia No. 2*'s ebullient, refined outer movements bubble with good cheer, balancing the *Quo Vadis* (Latin for "Where are you going?") meanderings of the darker inner movement. Bach's famous *Brandenburg Concerto No. 3* brings us a familiar Baroque joy that is perfect for enjoying at home—as if you were the Margrave of Brandenburg himself. Both the Mendelssohn and Bach take a mere 23 minutes between them. But what a ride! This blithe jaunt from the early Romantic period back to the Baroque finishes with Bach's take on the Italian *concerto grosso*, preparing us nicely for the poetry of Vivaldi's famous four concerti, *Le Quattro Stagioni* — *The Four Seasons*. Both literary and musical poetry are to be enjoyed, as Vivaldi published four sonnets to accompany the four concerti: Spring, Summer, Fall, and Winter. Our solo poet and orchestral bards bring the sonnets' words alive with sound, regaling you with images of calling shepherds, winter storms, barking dogs, swarming flies, plastered partiers, reveling hunters, and more. So, after the refined goings on at the Brandenburg estate, we are whisked away for a colorful, multi-seasonal stroll through the Italian countryside. — *G. Stelluto*

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Written by J. Michael Allsen, edited by Mae Gilliland Wright © 2020

In this opening program, the Peoria Symphony Orchestra presents three works for string orchestra, beginning with a lively *sinfonia* that was written by a 12-year-old Felix Mendelssohn. Next is Bach's intense *Brandenburg Concerto No. 3*. We end with a set of violin concertos by Vivaldi—his ever-popular *The Four Seasons*. These are witty musical depictions of each season, from the gentle breezes and chirping birds of Spring to the ice and howling wind of Winter. Charles Yang returns to Peoria to play the challenging solo violin part.

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)

Sinfonia No. 2 in D minor

Mendelssohn composed this string orchestra work in late summer or

fall of 1821. The first performance was almost certainly at a private musicale in the Mendelssohn home. Duration 11:00

Background

Like Mozart and Beethoven, Felix Mendelssohn was recognized early in life as a prodigy. And like Mozart, young Felix also had a phenomenally talented older sister, Fanny. Most families could not afford to support the musical education of their children, but the Mendelssohns were a prosperous banking family. Felix's father was initially hesitant about his desire to pursue a musical career. Unfortunately, it was out of the question for Fanny—as an upper-class woman, a career was unacceptable. Still, she continued to compose (some 466 works in all!) and played a significant background role in her brother Felix's career.

One of the most important musical influences on the Mendelssohn children was Carl Friedrich Zelter, a composer and teacher who began private tutoring sessions in 1819, when Felix was only ten years old. Zelter was devoted to the music of Mozart and C.P.E. Bach, and also introduced them to the music of C.P.E.'s father, Johann Sebastian Bach—a composer Felix would later take a lead role in reviving.

The Mendelssohns hosted a series of *musicales* (musical performances) in their Berlin home, inviting the city's cultural and musical elite and many of Germany's most prominent musicians as they visited Berlin on tour. Felix and Fanny were featured in many of their own works. Based on accounts of their performances, we know these two children were astonishingly talented. Young Felix composed no less than five piano concertos that were performed at these private concerts, including a pair of two-piano concertos for himself and his sister. The concerts often featured short string symphonies by Felix, which are today called *sinfonias* to distinguish them from his mature symphonies. Mendelssohn composed twelve of these vivacious works between 1821 and 1823. The last, an incomplete *Sinfonia No. 13*, was written when he was still a few months shy of his 14th birthday! Possibly completed as a part of his lessons for Zelter, they are works that clearly look back to Mozart, and even to C.P.E. and J.S. Bach. Mendelssohn later withdrew these youthful works, and they remained largely unplayed until they were published in the 1970s.





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What You'll Hear

The *Sinfonia No. 2* is in three movements. The brisk opening *Allegro* is very much in the style of C.P.E. Bach, though the 12-year-old composer clearly shows off some of the contrapuntal skill he was learning from Zelter. Young Felix also shows a bit of musical individuality with a surprising harmonic twist at the very end. The minor-key *Andante* focuses on a *dolce* melody traded back and forth between the violins. The music takes on a serious fugal style at the end. The lively concluding *Allegro vivace* is a Baroque-style *gigue*. Though the style is rather old-fashioned, there are also hints of the spirit of later works like Mendelssohn's *Overture to A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the "Italian" Symphony.

Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Brandenburg Concerto No. 3 in G Major, BWV 1048

Bach composed this concerto sometime between 1714 and 1720.

It was probably first performed either at Weimar or at Cöthen.

Duration 10:00



Background

We generally think of Bach's six "Brandenburg" concertos as a set. In 1720, Bach copied these works into a presentation manuscript as part of a job application for a position in the musical establishment of Christian Ludwig, Margrave of Brandenburg. The Margrave did not offer Bach a job, but he did have the historical good fortune to save the manuscript!

For that reason alone, his name has

been applied to some of the finest orchestral music of the Baroque era. Bach's manuscript of "concertos for various instruments" is a collection of works written over a period of nearly a decade, for a wide variety of situations. It is not surprising that the range of musical styles contained in this set is so wide. The "Brandenburgs" contain both fine ensemble writing (as in No. 6) and awesome virtuoso passages (as in the famous harpsichord solo of No. 5 or the trumpet part of No. 2). The group also contains both dance music (No. 1) and masterful contrapuntal writing (as in the finales of No. 3 and No. 5). A few of the concertos are primarily chamber works that have been arranged for performance by a small orchestra.

The dating of *Concerto No. 3* is uncertain. Most of the Brandenburgs were composed after 1717, when Bach took a position as *Kapellmeister* (music director) to the provincial, but musically rich court of Cöthen. However, No. 3 may have been written even earlier, for the court of Weimar, where Bach served as organist, and eventually as concertmaster, from 1708 to 1717.

What You'll Hear

The Duke of Weimar's court favored Italian music, and this concerto has a distinctly Italian sound. The scoring is unusual, however: parts for three violins, three violas, and three cellos, with basso continuo. The usual form of a Baroque concerto calls for a small group of soloists to play in alternation with the full ensemble which plays repeating passages known as *ritornellos*. In the opening *Allegro*, Bach turns this on its head. The *ritornellos* are played in relatively simple three-part texture—but in the intervening sections, Bach writes a dazzling nine-part counterpoint. In effect, he calls on the entire orchestra as soloists. (Never one to avoid reusing good music, Bach recycled this movement as the overture to his *Cantata No. 174* in 1729.) In place of the usual slow movement, there is

just a pair of chords. Bach's intention here is unclear, though it may have been that these chords gave a violinist or the harpsichord continuo player space to improvise. They may also be used as a simple bridge between the two fast movements. The final *Allegro* is mostly a grand fugue, in which each line develops a dance-inspired subject at breakneck speed.

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)

Le Quattro Stagioni (The Four Seasons) - Concertos Op. 8, Nos. 1-4

Vivaldi published his Op. 8 concertos in 1725, though they were probably written a decade or more earlier. Duration 37:00

Background

Antonio Vivaldi, born in Venice and nicknamed the "Red Priest," was the most prominent and influential Italian composer of his generation. He composed in nearly every genre: over 500 concertos, some two dozen operas, nearly 100 chamber works, and dozens of Latin sacred pieces. He spent most of his life in Venice, but maintained connections with patrons and business partners throughout Europe. Aside from the operas, the vast majority of his works were written for use at the Pio Ospedale della Pietà, the girl's orphanage in Venice where he spent most of his career. All four of Venice's *ospedali* (charitable hospices) had large musical establishments in the early 18th century, but the chorus and orchestra he directed at the Pietà must have been particularly good, to judge by Vivaldi's virtuoso concertos and fine sacred pieces. Many of his concertos were written to feature either the students themselves (as in a series of bassoon concertos written for one particularly talented young woman) or the other professional musicians associated with the school. His solo violin concertos—over 230 in all—were probably intended to feature Vivaldi himself, a virtuoso violinist with a high reputation among his contemporaries.

Vivaldi's concertos were widely circulated and imitated in his day, and it was he who set many of the standard operating procedures followed by his contemporaries Bach, Handel, and Telemann in their concerto writing. Though his works were passed around Europe in



ANTONIO VIVALDI, BORN IN VENICE AND NICKNAMED THE "RED PRIEST," WAS THE MOST PROMINENT AND INFLUENTIAL ITALIAN COMPOSER OF HIS GENERATION.



handwritten copies, they were also well known in a series of printed collections, mostly published by his business partners in Amsterdam. Vivaldi's Opus 8 collection of 1725 was given the fanciful title *Il cimento dell'armonia e dell'invenzione* ("The contest between harmony and invention"), and dedicated to a Bohemian patron named Wenzel von Morzin. The first four concertos of *Il cimento* are collectively known as *The Four Seasons*. Each is given a descriptive title: *La Primavera* (Spring), *L'Estate* (Summer), *L'Autunno* (Autumn), and *L'Inverno* (Winter). Programmatic titles like this were not unusual for Vivaldi, but here he goes a step further, publishing sonnets with each concerto that describe the action of each season. And, as if you could miss the point, the sonnets also provide cues to specific measures in the music. Vivaldi himself may have been responsible for these poems. The sonnets appear at the end of these notes.

Though they were published in 1725, it is likely that the concertos of *The Four Seasons* were as much as ten years older than that. According to author Paul Everett, Vivaldi was interested in the idea of "programmatic" concertos in the middle 1710s, when he probably composed *The Four Seasons* and the other titled concertos that appear in *Il cimento*. Though he had obviously shared them with his Bohemian patron, he also wished to publish them for a wider audience, and assembled *The Four Seasons* and twenty other concertos in about 1720. Due to unforeseen problems that still remain a mystery, they were not published until five years later.

The concertos of *The Four Seasons* were international hits even in Vivaldi's lifetime. They were well-known in Germany, and there are copies of the concertos in England and in France, where King Louis XV and other members of the royal court heard a performance of *Spring* in 1730. *The Four Seasons* is an even bigger hit today—arguably the single most familiar piece of Baroque music, and it remains Vivaldi's most popular work. Since the first complete 78-RPM records of the concertos in 1942, there have been—by conservative estimate—well over 300 recordings.

What You'll Hear

Aside from the striking musical images suggested by the sonnets, the music of the concertos is fairly typical, matching the style of the many other solo violin concertos by Vivaldi: they place a solo violin part in

contrast to a small string orchestra. Typically, he sets the concertos in three movements, fast-slow-fast. The outer fast movements have the typical alteration of *ritornellos*—passages for the entire ensemble—and flashier solo sections. Slow movements are generally more vocal in style, emulating the showy arias of contemporary Italian opera. But it is the wonderfully programmatic aspects of the concertos of *The Four Seasons* that make them so attractive.

Concerto in E Major, "Spring," Op. 8, No. 1, RV 269

Undoubtedly the most familiar of this very familiar set, *Spring* begins with a *ritornello* that announces the arrival of the goddess Springtime. The first solo episode, for the birds, is an appropriately chirpy passage. There is a thunderstorm and murmuring brooks in subsequent solo episodes. The *Largo* has some of the most evocative music in the set, with the orchestra playing the role of gently shifting foliage, and the viola plays the role of the goatherd's dog throughout, insistently barking as the solo violin plays a lyrical melody. (One of my favorite memories from a long-ago Music History class is of my rather dignified professor playing a recording in class and solemnly intoning "bow-wow" along with the violas!) The final *Allegro* is clearly pastoral in nature, with long-held notes in the low strings filling in for bagpipes, and a rather serious peasant dance. Flashier episodes for two solo violins intrude, but the music always returns to the dance.

Concerto in G Minor, "Summer," Op. 8, No. 2, RV 315

The second concerto is a perfect picture of a blisteringly hot summer in northern Italy. Uncharacteristically, it begins with an uneasy slow *ritornello*, and the tempo quickens for a bit of turbulence from the solo violin. The birds chirp again here, but there is none of the happiness of *Spring*. In the end, violin takes the role of the weeping peasant as he sees the potentially destructive weather. The slow movement is a purely operatic aria—a lament set for a solo violin above strings playing a rather spooky background. In the *Presto*, the storm finally breaks, with lightning flashes and booming thunder throughout.

Concerto in F Major, "Autumn," Op. 8, No. 3, RV 293

After the natural disasters of *Summer*, *Autumn* is a return to optimism, and the first movement is a rustic harvest party. There are quick

and witty solo passages, perhaps representing the peasants who have had just a bit too much of “Bacchus’s liquor” and stumble around until they finally settle down to sleep—a quiet passage that sounds suspiciously like a lullaby. Their sleep is cut short by a final dancing *ritornello*. Vivaldi titled the slow movement “Sleeping Drunks”—a series of quiet and sometimes startlingly chromatic chords that allow the continuo part to create most of the melodic interest. In the third movement, which depicts a hunt, virtually everything in his poem—from hunting horns and barking dogs to the terrified quarry—shows up clearly in the music.

Concerto in F Minor, “Winter,” Op. 8, No. 4, RV 297

The shivering violin lines at the beginning of *Winter* set the tone for the entire movement. Vivaldi uses the imagery of wind and cold as the inspiration for the most virtuosic solo passages in the entire set. In contrast, the *Largo* is a cozy picture of a winter day spent inside in a warm room: a lovely solo melody set above a string background that suggests a gently crackling fire. The last movement is slapstick comedy: tiptoeing across the ice, falling down on your behind, and eventually scooting across the ice happily until it begins to crack and the wind starts to howl. The final line of his sonnet is fitting end to the set as a whole: “This is Winter, but it brings joy!” ♦

Vivaldi, *La Quattro Stagioni* (The Four Seasons) — accompanying sonnets

***La Primavera* (Spring)**

I. Allegro

Springtime has arrived, and merrily
the birds salute her with happy songs,
and at the same time, at the breath of Zephyrus,
the brooks flow with a gentle murmuring voice.

The sky is covered with a dark mantle and
thunder and lightning are elected to announce her;
when they are silenced, the little birds
take up their harmonious songs anew.

II. Largo

And so, in the meadow, strewn with flowers,
to the welcome murmuring of leaves and trees,
the goatherd sleeps, his faithful dog beside him.

III. Allegro

To a rustic bagpipe, making a festive sound,
nymphs and shepherds dance in their favorite
spot, when Springtime appears in her brilliance.

***L’Estate* (Summer)**

I. Allegro non molto

Beneath the relentless season heated by the sun,
languishes both man and flock,
and the pine tree are scorched;
we hear the cuckoo’s voice, and then
the turtle-dove and the goldfinch sing.

Sweet Zephyrus blows, but suddenly
Boreas joins battle with his neighbor;
and the shepherd weeps, because he fears
the dreaded storm overhead, and his destiny.

II. Adagio

His tired limbs are robbed of their rest
by fear of lightning and powerful thunder,
as gnats and flies swarm furiously around him.



Photo: NOTP

III. Presto

Alas, his fears are well-founded:
the sky is filled by dreadful thunder and lightning
and hail cuts down all of the tallest crops.

L'Autunno (Autumn)

I. Allegro

The peasants celebrate with song and dance
the sweet pleasure of a rich harvest,
and when they are fired by Bacchus's liquor,
they finish their celebration with sleep.

II. Adagio molto

The singing and dancing is now halted,
by the air, now mild, giving pleasure
and the season which invites everyone
to enjoy the sweetest slumber.

III. Allegro

At dawn the hunters begin the chase
leaving home with horns, guns, and dogs;
the wild beast flees and they track it.

Already terrified, fleeing the great noise
of guns and dogs, it is wounded, feebly
tries to escape, but finally dies, overwhelmed.

L'inverno (Winter)

I. Allegro non molto

To shiver, frozen in icy snow,
in the severe blasts of a horrible wind.
To run while stamping one's feet constantly,
with teeth chattering in the cold.

II. Largo

To spend quiet and happy days by the fire,
while rain soaks hundreds outside.

III. Allegro

To walk on ice, stepping very slowly,
moving carefully, in fear of falling.

To hurry, slip, and fall to the ground.
To go again over the ice and run energetically
until the ice cracks and breaks open.

To hear, as they leave their iron gates,
Scirocco, Boreas, and all the winds in battle.
This is Winter, but it brings joy.



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