

**Max Richter VIVALDI THE FOUR SEASONS RECOMPOSED**

The phenomena of remixing, sampling, and covering of music are so prevalent in contemporary popular music that it would be easy to assume they are modern inventions, of use only in a world where recording is cheap, and parody is a more impactful cultural statement than earnestness. In fact, many of the great works of the past that we consider to be self-contained were living and evolving entities. J.S. Bach re-used his own melodies repeatedly, and Handel remixed the work of other composers with a zeal that by today's standards would probably be considered a violation of intellectual property rights. Vivaldi, too, was perfectly comfortable with the process of recomposing old works for new occasions-- and he had plenty of occasions at the Ospedale della Pietà, the musical orphanage for whose students he would eventually write around five hundred concerti.

In 1717, however, he was on a relatively light schedule with the Pietà, and headed to Mantua in northern Italy. It was in that countryside, observing nature turn over in cycles, that he wrote *The Four Seasons*: a set of four violin concerti giving voice to the spirits of Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter. Each concerto evokes not just a feeling but a sonnet, possibly written by Vivaldi himself; making *The Four Seasons* one of the first examples of programmatic music that insisted on being taken seriously by the listener.

Today, those concerti are so present in popular culture that their revolutionary nature is easy to forget. "When I was a young child," explained composer Max Richter, "I fell in love with Vivaldi's original. But over the years, hearing it principally in shopping centres, advertising jingles, on telephone hold systems and similar places, I stopped being able to hear it as music. It had become an irritant...so I set out to try to find a new way to engage with this wonderful material, by writing through it anew."

Richter's *The Four Seasons Recomposed* treads a careful path: although Baroque composers were perfectly comfortable with the act of remixing music, today the genre of the classical remix is often viewed with suspicion. In a world where classical music is considered too cerebral for the public, the purpose of the classical remix is assumed to be to create something more "approachable"; a process which could uncharitably be viewed as a "dumbing-down."

Richter's Vivaldi is no such thing. Richter, who studied composition with experimental luminary Luciano Berio, is too entrenched in the traditions of 20th-century postmodernism and minimalism to leave Vivaldi's music less complex than he found it. Instead, Richter's looping, repeating material weaves in with Vivaldi's; not only are the instruments in conversation with each other, but the composers are too. "That sounds a bit crazy," Richter said, "but there are sections which are just Vivaldi, where I've left it alone. I've done sort of a production on 'Autumn,' but I've left the notes. And there other bits where there's basically only a homeopathic dose of Vivaldi in this completely new music. So I have to figure out how much Max and how much Vivaldi there was going on at every moment."

The result is a piece of music that speaks to the passage of time on several different levels. The first level, the turning over of the seasons throughout the year is preserved by the division of the piece into the same sections as Vivaldi's original. The passage of time on a small scale is given the intense reading that minimalist music demands; and the passage of time on a large scale is shown in the interplay between the listener's expectations of what *The Four Seasons* sounds like, compared with a version of the piece that cannot put away the knowledge of all that has happened in the world and in music in between Vivaldi's time and our own.

*Program Note by Anna Norris*

**Arvo Pärt CANTUS IN MEMORY OF BENJAMIN BRITTEN**

When Benjamin Britten died of heart failure in 1976, his abrupt absence left holes in the fabric of contemporary musical life. One of the holes was literal: he had been offered the honour of burial at Westminster Abbey, but refused in favour of a plot at his parish church in Suffolk, where his body waited ten years to be joined by that of his partner Peter Pears. The rest of them were metaphorical. "I took a long walk in total silence through gently falling snow across a frozen lake, which corresponded exactly to the inexpressible sense of numbness at such a loss," said Peter Maxwell Davies of his reaction to Britten's death.

In Soviet-occupied Estonia, Arvo Pärt heard of Britten's death on the radio, and grieved in his own way. For Pärt, it was the loss of potential that hit him: "Inexplicable feelings of guilt, more than that even, arose in me. I had just discovered Britten for myself. Just before his death I began to appreciate the unusual purity of his music...for a long time I had wanted to meet Britten personally, and now it would not come to that."

Pärt's response to Britten's death was a work exemplifying that purity. The Cantus begins and ends with scored silence; instead of simply trusting the conductor and musicians to hold still and silent for a time, as is usual in performance, he actually writes it down. When the sound is finally allowed to start, it begins with the tolling of bells. The strings enter, one group at a time, all playing the same material: a descending A minor scale, but with each subsequent iteration starting lower and going slower. The music falls, seemingly creating the possibility of it going on forever; but like human life it must end somewhere, and the final few moments of the work's six-minute runtime have all the instruments converging, finally, on a single A minor chord. However, at the moment the strings stop playing, the bell tolls one more time: and because the overtones of the tubular bell suggest a major chord, not a minor one, the final shift of the work is one from dark to light.

*Program Note by Anna Norris*