

Meridian Music of the Week!

Issue No. 206 (based on previous Newsletter No.168 – October 2024)

Each week ALL our children will be listening to a piece of music as part of our music lessons. We'll be talking about it in class and discussing what we like, what we don't like and what it makes us think about. Parents/carers/family - why not join in and listen for yourself at home! All music is available **free** on YouTube as well as paid services such as iTunes and Spotify.



This week's music...

'Winter' (1st movement) from 'The Four Seasons' by Antonio Vivaldi (1718)

Excellent version by Nigel Kennedy [HERE](#) (9:21mins)

Cool, French modern jazz version [HERE](#)!

Extraordinary arrangement for traditional Chinese instruments [HERE](#)

1982 Lincoln car advert [HERE](#)

Alfa Romeo car advert [HERE](#)

Dance version for the video game 'Pump It Up' [HERE](#)

A singing version from the Accentus Choir [HERE](#)

Hip-Hop/reggae style version from Daisy Jopling [HERE](#)

Electro version by Wez Bolton [HERE](#)

Winter is on the way!...

...the days are getting chilly, it'll soon be harvest festival, Halloween, Bonfire Night, and then, before you know it, Brrrrr! So, I guess it's time to enjoy a classic piece of wintry music – from Vivaldi's '**Four Seasons**'.

Antonio Vivaldi was an Italian composer who wrote this music sometime around 1718 – 1720 (nobody's exactly sure). 'The Four Seasons' is a set of four violin **concertos** (a piece of music for an orchestra and a solo instrument) – based on the four seasons of the year, Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter. Each of the four concertos has three separate sections – and this week's music is the first section (or **movement**) of the final concerto – 'Winter'.

'The Four Seasons' is a very popular piece of music amongst violinists because it allows them to **improvise** around the music and perform it in their own unique way. Sometimes they speed up or slow down different sections (changing the **tempo**) – or they change the **dynamics** (how loudly or quietly they play). No matter which violinist you listen to playing it, there'll always be something different in the music.

The version I've chosen this week (in the link above) is by the well-known violinist Nigel Kennedy. He was famous for being a little 'rebellious' when he was younger. He looked and dressed very differently from most classical musicians – and he was a keen football fan (of Aston Villa!) He recorded a CD of 'The Four Seasons' in 1989 which sold over 2 million copies across the world. It made it one of the biggest selling classical recordings of all time.

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Antonio Vivaldi

Who was Antonio Vivaldi?...

Vivaldi was born in 1678 in Venice (which, at the time, was a country of its own). The moment he was born his family realised that he had very poor health (he had a form of asthma for the rest of life). They made sure he was given an emergency baptism immediately, just in case he died in infancy. Some people think this quick baptism might also be because there was an earthquake that shook the city of Venice on the day he was born and the family were scared that worse might be on the way.

As a young man, Vivaldi was taught to play the violin by his father Giovanni (who, before he was a professional violin player, had been a barber!) He used to take young Antonio along with him on violin concert tours all over the Venetian Republic. Experts aren't completely sure (it was a long time ago!) but they believe Vivaldi started writing music himself at around the age of 13.

But Vivaldi's main career wasn't actually in music – it was in the church. At the age of 15 he began to study to be a priest and became one at the age of 25. It was at this time that he got the nickname 'il Prete Rosso' or 'The Red Priest'. This was because he had very noticeable ginger/red hair – which he shared with the rest of his family.

Although, later in his life, he wrote financially successful operas, as well as music for Kings, Queens and Emperors, Vivaldi spent most of his life writing music for orphans in an orphanage! 'The Devout Hospital of Mercy' in Venice hired him as a master of violin to teach the children there. Actually, it was mostly only the girls that he taught. At the orphanage, boys were taught a trade so that they would leave the orphanage at the age of 15 and get a job. However, the girls weren't expected to work – so they were given a musical education – by Vivaldi! And if they were good, they were invited to stay after the age of 15 to play and perform in the orphanage's orchestra and choir.

This orphan orchestra and choir started to become famous – even outside of Venice. Vivaldi wrote loads of new music for them (at least 60 different pieces) and he eventually became their overall musical director. Records from the orphanage show that Vivaldi was paid to direct 140 concerts between 1723 and 1733.

The odd thing about Vivaldi's orphan girl orchestra was that, although they were brilliant performers, no-one was allowed to see them! In those days, people didn't think it was 'appropriate' to see young women playing musical instruments, so they used to perform behind curtains or sheets while Vivaldi conducted them from the other side! You can see this happening in [this clip](#) from an Italian movie about the life of the composer.



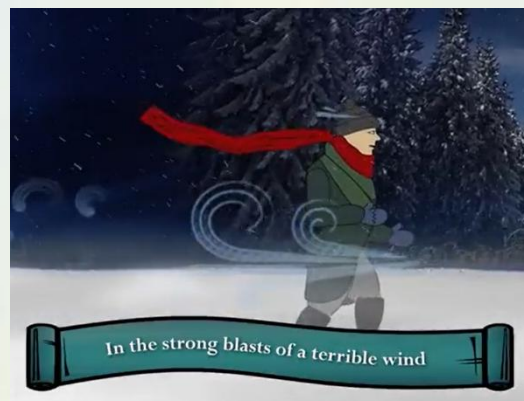
Vivaldi's orphanage 'Ospedale della Pietà' in Venice as it is today.

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What's special about 'The Four Seasons'...

Last week we listened to the 'Sea Interludes' from Benjamin Britten's opera 'Peter Grimes'. This was a good example of what is called '**programme music**' – or **descriptive** music. In our music lessons at Meridian we listen to a lot of descriptive music – music that creates 'pictures' in the listeners' minds. For example, this term, as well as the 'Sea Interludes', we've had cowboy rodeos (Copeland's 'Hoedown'), battles (Tchaikovsky's '1812 Overture'), and moonlight on water (Beethoven's 'Moonlight Sonata'). But before Vivaldi came along, the idea of writing descriptive music simply didn't exist!

In Vivaldi's time, music didn't really describe anything. It was played in churches for religious purposes, or played simply because it had a nice tune – but no-one ever thought that music could make you **imagine** something in the real world. Vivaldi changed all that. 'The Four Seasons' was one of the first ever pieces of music that tried to create pictures in the listener's mind. Vivaldi used musical 'tricks' to create help the listeners' imagination. Across the whole of 'The Four Seasons' the music sometimes represents flowing rivers, singing birds, a barking dog, buzzing flies, storms, frozen landscapes and warm winter fires.



A cartoon explaining the different musical 'tricks' used in the music.

At the beginning of this week's music, the orchestra violins make you imagine shivering and walking through snow. When the solo violin starts, it brings to mind the icy blasts of a swirling wind. When the main musical theme begins, you can imagine running through the snow and stamping your feet from the cold. Towards the end, the music even makes you imagine chattering teeth!

This was all a new idea in music – and it was Antonio Vivaldi, the orphans' composer, who first invented it.

Where have I heard this before?...



A BMW advert featuring the music of 'Summer' from 'The Four Seasons'.

As with much of the famous classical music we listen to, different movements of 'The Four Seasons' crop up in lots of different places – and in lots of different styles. You can check out the links at the top of this newsletter for just some examples of the 'Winter' movement.

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Nigel Kennedy playing Vivaldi's 'The Four Seasons' live.

Perhaps the most used part of 'The Four Seasons' is actually from the 'Summer' movement. It's been played in possibly more adverts than any other piece of music! Here's just a few examples:

HP TouchSmart computers [HERE](#)

New Zealand National Bank [HERE](#)

IKEA [HERE](#)

Versace [HERE](#)

BMW cars [HERE](#)

But never mind the adverts, if you really want to hear it played properly – check out [THIS](#) version played live by Nigel Kennedy. He plays it super-fast, stamps his feet a lot and his performance is more like that of a rock star than a classical violinist!

I like to think that **this** is how Vivaldi would have liked it to be played...

Listen & enjoy

Mr. Mole

Music Teacher

Brrrrr!

