

THE FOUR SEASONS: SPRING

by: Ed Lettner of The Music Studio



“Joyful spring has arrived...” So begins the poem that accompanies Antonio Vivaldi’s famous spring concerto from his composition *The Four Seasons*. The poem and the music triumphantly announce the emergence of nature from its winter cocoon.

Each line of the poem, likely written by Vivaldi, is printed above the section of music that portrays the mood and actions of the words. The singing of birds, flowing of streams, and thunder and lightning are each presented musically through the use of instrument sounds and techniques such as the playing of scale passages, short or staccato notes, and repeated notes. In the second movement, Vivaldi wrote “The dog who barks” above one section of notes played by the violas to mark the part of the poem where the goatherd sleeps “in a pleasant field of flowers” with his dog by his side.

This concept of musical imagery based on the ideas and actions conveyed through words is known as program music. This imagery is explained by way of the title of a piece of music or by notes made by the composer, known as “the program.” Program music became increasingly important in the nineteenth century when orchestral overtures were performed to introduce operas. The overture evolved to become a concert piece in its own right, an example of which is Tchaikovsky’s *Romeo and Juliet*. The popularity of this musical form led to the program symphony which is an orchestral piece consisting of many movements such as *Symphonie Fantastique* by Berlioz. This developed into the symphonic poem which features one extended movement with contrasting sections that focus on a poetic idea or mood. *Prelude to “The Afternoon of a Faun”* by Debussy is an example of this. Program music became the perfect form for Romantic era composers to express their desire to relate their music to the world around them. Today, film and television soundtracks are examples of program music.

So, spring from Vivaldi’s *The Four Seasons* not only reflects on the re-birth of nature, but also foreshadowed the growth of program music into an important musical form.

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