

Listening Guide

Vivaldi: *Spring*, from *The Four Seasons* (*La primavera*, from *Le quattro stagioni*), Op. 8, No. 1

DATE OF WORK: Published 1725

GENRE: Programmatic concerto for solo violin, Op. 8 (*The Contest Between Harmony and Inspiration*), Nos. 1–4, each based on an Italian sonnet, with 3 movements each:

No. 1: <i>Spring</i> (<i>La primavera</i>)	No. 3: <i>Autumn</i> (<i>L'autunno</i>)
No. 2: <i>Summer</i> (<i>L'estate</i>)	No. 4: <i>Winter</i> (<i>L'inverno</i>)

I. Allegro

Joyful spring has arrived,
the birds greet it with their cheerful song,
and the brooks in the gentle breezes
flow with a sweet murmur.

The sky is covered with a black mantle,
and thunder and lightning announce a storm.
When they fall silent, the little birds
take up again their melodious song.

II. Largo

And in the pleasant, flowery meadow,
to the gentle murmur of bushes and trees,
the goatherd sleeps, his faithful dog at his side.

III. Allegro
(Rustic Dance)

To the festive sounds of a rustic bagpipe
nymphs and shepherds dance in their favorite spot
when spring appears in its brilliance.

First Movement: Allegro; in ritornello form, E major

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR: Distinctive timbre of Baroque-period string instruments.
Musical pictorialization of images of spring, based on the poem (birds, babbling brooks, gentle breezes, thunder and lightning).
Virtuosity of solo violin part, with fast-running scales and trills.
Recurring theme (ritornello, representing spring) that unifies the movement.

Ritornello theme:



DESCRIPTION

Ritornello 1, in E major.

Episode 1; solo violin with birdlike trills and high running scales, accompanied by violins

Ritornello 2.

Episode 2; whispering figures like water flowing, played by orchestra.

Ritornello 3.

Episode 3 modulates; solo violin with repeated notes, fast ascending minor-key scales, accompanied by orchestra.

Ritornello 4, in relative minor (C-sharp).

Episode 4; trills and repeated notes in solo violin.

Ritornello 5, returns to E major; brief solo passage interrupts.

Closing tutti.

PROGRAM

Spring

Birds

Spring

Murmuring brooks

Spring

Thunder, lightning

Spring

Birds

(Shorter recordings stop here.)

Second Movement: Largo; 3/4 meter, C-sharp minor, orchestration reduced—for solo violin, 2 violins, and viola

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR: Singing solo violin melody, with sparse accompaniment (no low strings).
Slow movement suggests images of a peaceful meadow and sleeping goatherd.
Repeated rhythmic pattern in bottom part (violas) represents the barking dog.

Opening of movement, with solo violin, slow and melodious, representing the sleeping goatherd (“Il capraro che dorme”) and viola, with insistent rhythm, the dog barking (“Il cane che grida”):

Largo e pianissimo sempre
Il capraro che dorme *etc.*

Violino solo
Violino I
Violino II
Viola

Il cane che grida

Third Movement: Danza Pastorale (Rustic Dance), Allegro; in ritornello form, E major

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR: Lively dance in compound meter (12/8)
Violins play over sustained lower strings, like a bagpipe.
Alternation of full orchestra (with ritornellos) and solo violin, as in first movement.

Opening of movement, with dance tune (ritornello) in upper strings; lilting, compound meter; sustained notes (like bagpipe drone) in lower strings:

Allegro

Violino solo
Violino I
Violino II
Viola
Basso Cont. (Violoncello e basso)

con sordino

tr tr etc.