

## “Spring” from The Four Seasons



### Teacher info about...

#### Antonio Vivaldi: The Red Priest

Born: March 4, 1678 Venice

Died: July 28, 1741 Vienna

#### Lesson Plan Prepared by Jerri Gradert

Antonio Vivaldi was born at a time when Venice was the music capital of Europe. His father Giovanni was a barber and part-time violinist at the famous St. Mark's Cathedral. Antonio, the oldest of nine children, showed exceptional promise on the violin at an early age, and soon father and son were playing duets on the violin together all over Venice, much like Mozart would do later.

In 1693, however, at the age of 15, Antonio entered the seminary to begin his studies toward the priesthood. Evidently he did this with much reluctance, for it was known that he had musical aspirations instead; however, he submitted to probably parental authority, as at that time if there was a priest in the family the education of the younger siblings was free of charge. It was during this time at the seminary that he acquired his nickname the "Red Priest" because of his flaming red hair. It was known that he often excused himself during the middle of a Mass to write down his musical ideas in the back of the sacristy!

Ordained into the priesthood in 1703, he was soon thereafter excused from saying Mass because of asthma caused by the incense. Although he remained a priest on record, he never again said Mass. Instead, he was assigned as superintendent and teacher of the Conservatorio dell'Ospedale della Pietà in Venice, founded for the care and music education of orphan girls and famous for its high musical standards. (Although known as "orphans", in reality most of the young girls there were the illegitimate daughters of Italian noblemen, who donated most generously to the Conservatory.) Thus relieved of his priestly duties, Vivaldi was free to concentrate on his music once again.



He was evidently a wonderful teacher. He insisted on the girls playing all the instruments in the orchestra, even those considered less than feminine, which raised some Venetian eyebrows initially but won the hearts of his students. Soon, though, his older students were doing all the daily teaching for him, leaving him to concentrate on composing and performing. He was a prolific composer, as he was obligated to provide the Conservatory with new music for the girls each year, as well as a new opera. His presence was not even required. He thus built his European reputation from this base, and was soon traveling and performing all over Europe.

Known for his fiery temper and a total lack of regard for finances and manners, the Red Priest soon earned the respect and admiration of nobility and other composers. The common people liked his music as well, for there was a joy in his music that was uncommon for the time, and a memorable melody which could be hummed afterward. His compositions were especially popular in France, where it was said that King Louis XV would order Vivaldi's "Spring" (from *The Four Seasons*) to be performed at the most unexpected moments. Vivaldi received many commissions for further compositions from the court at Versailles.

Many of Vivaldi's compositions reflect a flamboyant, almost playful, exuberance. His music was innovative for the time, giving a brightness and rhythmic structure to the concerto and helping to transform Baroque music into a classical style. Johann Sebastian Bach was deeply influenced by Vivaldi's concertos and arias, and transcribed a number of his compositions. His most famous work, *The Four Seasons*, is a tone poem written to accompany four sonnets ("Spring", "Summer", "Fall", and "Winter") also written by Vivaldi. His allusions are colorful and perfect for sonic description: Spring greets us with a profusion of birds, gentle breezes; Summer brings terrible heat, buzzing insects and a violent storm; Fall a harvest celebration and a hunt; and Winter chattering teeth, stamping feet, slipping on ice, a warm inside fire and, for a zesty conclusion, a howling windstorm. This was incredibly avant-garde and unknown at the time. Vivaldi clearly poured his heart and soul into this work.

In 1720 Vivaldi made the acquaintance of a young singer, Anna Giraud (or Giro) and her sister, Paolina, both of whom soon moved in with him. Still officially a priest, he maintained that Anna was no more than a housekeeper and good friend. However, the rumors persisted and led to action against him by Church authorities in the 1730s. She remained with him until his death.



After this Vivaldi's popularity in Venice began to wane, and in 1740 he left for Vienna, accompanied as always by the Giro sisters. Ill and poverty-stricken, he died the next year from asthma complications.

This incredibly prolific composer was almost unheard of until the 1950s, when his recently discovered works began to gain publicity. A film inspired by his life is supposedly due out at the end of 2008.

# Spring Lesson Plan

## Define Concerto

*Concerto*: An instrumental composition written for one or more solo performers accompanied by an orchestra.

### *Concerto activities:*

Start an improvised warm-up exercise by setting up a background pulse:

stamp, tap, tap, tap.

Then lead with a rhythmically chanted statement in the first person, to which the class must respond in the third person.

Example:

Soloist: *I am wearing brightly colored socks.*

Class: *You are wearing brightly colored socks.*

Move from elementary responses as shown in the *sock* example to more complex phrases that challenge pupils' musical memory.

Example:

Soloist: *I saw a dog on my way to school and it ran across the road right in front of my car.*

Class: *You saw a dog... etc.*

Create phrases which overlap, and encourage confident pupils to invent their own responses.

## Expand the activity:

- 1.) Make a transparency of the Burger Concerto Script.
- 2.) Appoint a soloist.
- 3.) Class and soloist read through the Script.
- 4.) At reading conclusion, discuss the concerto concept -- solo performers accompanied by an orchestra.

## Burger Concerto Script

**Soloist:** I like a burger, I like a burger fine.  
**Group:** YES, YOU LIKE A BURGER, YOU LIKE A BURGER FINE.

**Soloist:** I eat one every evening, I eat them all the time.  
**Group:** YOU EAT ONE EVERY EVENING, YOU EAT THEM ALL THE TIME.

**Soloist:** A burger is so yummy, so beautiful with fries,  
It's pleasant on the tummy, and really satisfies.

(repeat)

**Group:** YOU LIKE THEM VERY MUCH, THAT'S OBVIOUS TO US,  
BUT THERE ARE DISADVANTAGES, NOW PLEASE DON'T MAKE A FUSS...

**Soloist:** Well what?

**Group:** BUYING FAST FOOD ROBBS YOUR WEALTH.  
**Soloist:** So what?  
**Group:** BURGERS ARE NOT GOOD FOR HEALTH.  
**Soloist:** So what?  
**Group:** FULL OF FAT AND FULL OF GREASE...  
**Soloist:** So what?  
**Group:** OVER TIME YOU GET OBESE.

**Soloist:** {-----They're good!-----They're good!  
**Group:** {THEY'RE BAD!-----THEY'RE BAD!-----

**Soloist:** {-----They're good!-----They're good!  
**Group:** {THEY'RE BAD!-----THEY'RE BAD!-----

**Soloist:** {-----Oh-----no-----they're  
**Group:** {THEY'RE BAD, THEY'RE BAD, THEY'RE BAD, THEY'RE BAD,

**Soloist:** {-----not,-----they're-----real-----ly  
**Group:** {THEY'RE BAD, THEY'RE BAD, THEY'RE BAD, THEY'RE BAD,

**Soloist:** {-----good I tell you!  
**Group:** {THEY'RE BAD!

**Soloist:** I don't particu'ly care what you think about burgers.  
I happen to like them. And as far as I'm concerned:

**Soloist:** {That is that!-----  
**Group:** {-----YOU LIKE A BURGER, YOU LIKE A BURGER FINE,

**Soloist:** Yes, I—like a burger, I—like a burger fine.

**Soloist:** {-----Get lost.  
**Group:** {YOU'RE MAD.-----

## Introduce Vivaldi's bio:

### a. Students listen to:

[http://www.classicsforkids.com/shows/showplayer\\_frame.asp?ID=040508](http://www.classicsforkids.com/shows/showplayer_frame.asp?ID=040508)

### b. Students listen for answers to the following questions:

- When and where was Vivaldi born? (Venice, 1678)
- What was his family's musical background? (father was a violinist)
- What instrument did Vivaldi play? (violin)
- Did Vivaldi have a nickname? If yes, what was it? (Yes; The Red Priest)
- What kind of job did Vivaldi have before becoming a composer? (Priest for 3 years)
- What kind of work did he have as a composer? (worked at an orphanage as teacher; composer)
- "Spring" came from what set of violin concertos? (The Four Seasons)
- On what setting was Vivaldi's concerto based? (Poem)

### Vivaldi's Sonnet:

#### a. Vivaldi based his concerto on a special poetry form known as the *Italian sonnet*.

An *Italian sonnet* has a special form: the first part has 8 lines; the second part has 6.

#### b. The class reads Vivaldi's sonnet, "Spring".

### *Spring*

Spring has arrived.

Birds welcome it with their happy songs.  
And flowing brooks murmur sweetly  
touched by the breath of gentle breezes.

Dark clouds blanket the sky.  
Thunder and lightning announce a storm.  
When they die away, the little birds  
return to fill the air with their sweet song.

In a meadow full of flowers with leaves rustling overhead  
the goatherd sleeps  
his faithful dog by his side,

To the festive sounds of the bagpipe,  
nymphs and shepherds dance in their favorite spot  
as spring appears in all its brilliance.

### c. Students listen to:

[http://www.classicsforkids.com/shows/showplayer\\_frame.asp?ID=041208](http://www.classicsforkids.com/shows/showplayer_frame.asp?ID=041208)

### d. Students listen for answers to the following questions:

- What is the form of all of Vivaldi's poems? (Sonnets)
- Explain the form of a sonnet.  
(14 lines long. First a group of 8 lines, then a group of 6 and the lines rhyme in a certain way.)
- In the first part of the sonnet what spring elements are represented?  
(Birds, breezes, brook, storm/thunder and lightning)
- In the second part of the sonnet what spring elements are represented?  
(rustling leaves, goatherd, barking dog, bag pipe, dancing)
- What is program music? (program music tells a story without words)

## INTERESTING VIVALDI FACTS

### SIR VIVALDI

Austrian Emperor Charles VI liked his music so much that he knighted Vivaldi.

### PLAY IT AGAIN, SAM

Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* especially appealed to the French. King Louis XV took a liking to "Spring" and ordered it to be performed at the most unexpected moments.

### A PROLIFIC WRITER

Although Vivaldi composed over 500 concertos (230 for the violin alone) and over 50 operas, during his life he was regarded as a mediocre composer, but a brilliant violinist. Most of these concertos were simply five finger exercises for his students.

### WHAT'S IN A NAME?

In the Pieta, where Vivaldi taught, it was common practice to be named after your instrument – "Lucy della violino," for example. If you play an instrument, what could your nickname be?

### DANGER OF DEATH

Antonio Vivaldi was born in Venice on March 4, 1678. He was baptized immediately at home by the midwife due to "danger of death." What did this mean? We're not sure, but it was probably either an earthquake that shook the city that day, or the infant's poor health. Vivaldi's official church baptism did not take place until two months later.

### THE RED PRIEST

It was known that Vivaldi often excused himself during the middle of a Mass to write down his musical ideas in the back of the sacristy! (A sacristy is a room where the clergy don their ceremonial attire. It is also used for the keeping of communion vessels, altar hangings, candlesticks, parish records, etc.)

Ordained into the priesthood in 1703, he was soon thereafter excused from saying Mass because of asthma caused by the incense.

## The Music:

Discuss the title of the piece, *The Four Seasons, Spring*.

- 1.) Why would the composer title a piece of music, "Spring"?
- 2.) What do you expect to hear?
- 3.) What kind of sounds do you hear in the spring ~ especially that you might not hear as much at other times of the year? (thunder, chirping birds)
- 4.) This piece was written long ago. Are there things we hear in the spring that would not be heard then because they had not yet been invented? (sprinklers, lawn mowers, road construction equipment)

Use the listening map to guide students as they listen to Vivaldi's "Spring".

### The Rondo Form:

#### Objectives:

- 1.) Students will learn to identify music by Antonio Vivaldi.
- 2.) Students will learn to listen for the "form" of the music

#### Materials needed:

- 1.) Recording of Antonio Vivaldi's "Spring" from "Four Seasons"
- 2.) Colorful scarves or ribbons streamers (6 greens, 6 purple, 6 blues, 6 red, 6 yellows, - you can do with less of each color if you have a small class).

#### Steps:

- 1.) Students listen to "Spring" and identify the signs of Spring in the song - with teacher's help, if needed.
- 2.) Ask students to find a "personal space." This is a space where you can move without touching anyone, or anything (such as furniture, the piano, etc.) Each student will get a scarf or streamer. Direct students to move to the music using the scarf or streamer. They should move "the way the music tells them to," or at the same tempo. **Move only on the "A" section.**

#### Expand the activity:

- 1.) Review the various rondo sections. Determine that Section "A" could possibly represent trees, Section "B" represents birds, Section "C" represents the brook, Section "D" represents the thunder storm, Section "E" represents the sun.
- 2.) Students will be grouped into 5 groups (approx. 4-6 to a group).
- 3.) Give each group a title: Group 1 is trees, group 2 is birds, group 3 is the brook, group 4 is the thunder storm, group 5 is the sun.
- 4.) Each student in group one (trees) receives green scarves or streamers, each person in group two (birds) will receive purple scarves/streamers, group three (brook) will receive blue, group four (thunder storm) will receive red, and group five (sun) will receive yellow.
- 5.) Remaining within their groups, students spread out in the room. Students discuss how their group will move their streamers/scarves to reflect their group name (trees, sun, etc.).
- 6.) Play the *Spring* recording and call out the music sections. Students move their streamers/scarves ONLY when they hear the music of their group.

#### Assessment:

Play the recording again. However, do not call out the group names. If a group moves their scarves at the incorrect time, they sit down. At the end of the song, the groups remaining on their feet are winners!