

Antonio Vivaldi - Four Seasons (Janine Jansen) [2004]

Written by bluesever

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- * 1. Allegro-Concerto No. 1 in E Major for solo violin "La Primavera
- * 2. Largo-Concerto No. 1 in E Major for solo violin "La Primavera
- * 3. Allegro-Concerto No. 1 in E Major for solo violin "La Primavera
- * 4. Allegro non molto-Concerto No. 2 in G minor for solo violin, "L`Estate"
- * 5. Adagio - Presto-Concerto No. 2 in G minor for solo violin, "L`Estate"
- * 6. Presto-Concerto No. 2 in G minor for solo violin, "L`Estate"
- * 7. Allegro-Concerto No. 3 in F Major for solo violin, "L`Autunno"
- * 8. Adagio molto-Concerto No. 3 in F Major for solo violin, "L`Autunno"
- * 9. Allegro-Concerto No. 3 in F Major for solo violin, "L`Autunno"
- * 10. Allegro non molto-Concerto No. 4 in F minor for solo violin, "L`Inverno"
- * 11. Largo-Concerto No. 4 in F minor for solo violin, "L`Inverno"
- * 12. Allegro-Concerto No. 4 in F minor for solo violin, "L`Inverno"

Janine Jansen with

Candida Thompson, Henk Rubingh, Elizabeth Kenny, Julian Rachlin, Maarten Jansen, Jan Jansen, Stacey Watton

The young Dutch violinist Janine Jansen has attracted attention, to say the least, with the cover artwork on her recording of Vivaldi's Four Seasons violin concertos; it could have come straight out of the European edition of Vogue in a year when necklines plunged off the bottom of the chart. But the real surprises come on the disc itself. Jansen runs wild with Vivaldi's music, guided by little more than her own imagination. From historically informed performers she borrows the license to improvise. From the old-fashioned big-name violinists who played Vivaldi she borrows a full Romantic repertoire of violin sounds. And the radical conception of her backing ensemble (unnamed, but featuring several family members) she borrows from nobody at all: she uses solo (modern, except for her own Stradivarius) strings, plus a continuo that shifts as the mood strikes between harpsichord, organ, and theorbo. "I began playing the Bach concertos with reduced orchestra, to see what it would sound like -- and I found it worked extremely well," writes Jansen in the notes. "So I decided to give it a go with Vivaldi as well." All

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in all, the terms "extreme" and even "over the top" can safely be applied to Jansen's recording. A gleefully unidiomatic application of tempo rubato is the most striking feature of her performance -- or the most glaring, depending on your point of view -- and dynamics are explosive. She certainly responds with maximum vividness to the detailed program Vivaldi attached to his four concertos.

One may feel that Jansen's untrammelled, ultra-Romantic interpretive freedom clashes with the essentially terraced quality of Vivaldi's music -- that his programmatic effects succeed so well exactly because they are confined within the rigidities of Baroque concerto structure, not in spite of that confinement. Potential buyers should sample this disc as far as possible before clicking the "buy" button, and it's not a good choice for the newcomer. Reactions will necessarily be personal. Yet strangely enough, even for this leaner in the direction of historically authentic performances, Jansen's recording works. The Four Seasons are so familiar by now that they're almost like one of the modal instructional compositions of Near Eastern classical musical systems -- any young violinist must realize them anew, demonstrating both technical competence and fresh ideas. Everyone is trying to make an impression; Jansen just goes further than most, and she has the chops to pull off anything she can think of. You may laugh out loud at the audacity of some of her moves -- not a bad thing, really --and though you may have heard the Four Seasons hundreds of times, there will be points where you're not sure what you're listening to. The Red Priest, himself an extremist, might have applauded Jansen's work if he could somehow have seen a hundred years into the musical future. As for the décolletage, it may be historically relevant to a doubtless highly charged situation in which a defrocked priest wrote music for an orchestra composed of teenage girls. This performance was recorded with microphones right in the middle of the group, picking up every musical detail and also breathing, bowing, and other noises. Like the disc as a whole, that's sometimes annoying. But it's conceptually consistent with the rest of what's happening.--- James Manheim, Rovi

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