



Vivaldi revived at Sommetts Musicaux

bachtrack

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Par David Karlin, 01 février 2014

Let's be brutally honest, concertgoers: Vivaldi's Four Seasons has been played to death - recorded by everybody who's anybody, including Daniel Hope, the soloist of last night's opening concert of Sommetts Musicaux de Gstaad. The Four Seasons has been a wonderful old warhorse over the years, but it has been flogged once too often. Can it really be possible, then, to bring this animal back from the dead and rekindle our enthusiasm?



The answer in this concert from Hope and David Greilsammer, leading his newly founded Geneva Camerata, was a resounding yes. What they did was to play two movements (summer and winter) of Max Richter's "Recomposed" version of The Four Seasons (written for Hope in 2012), and use them to sandwich a less played original Vivaldi concerto (the RV522 double concerto from L'estro armonico).

The Richter "recomposition" is unlike anything I've ever heard. The melodies are those of Vivaldi's original, as are the harmonies (well, most of them, anyway). But aside from some direct quotes in the really famous bits, the textures and many of

the string playing techniques are very definitely 20th/21st century, with a myriad of styles applied to turn Vivaldi's work into something fresh and exciting while being totally identifiable as the original work. To name but a few: much of Summer sounded straight out of a Hans Zimmer film score; there were insistent, repeated figures straight out of the minimalists, and a descending scale reminiscent of Arvo Pärt. I was most struck by the slow movement of Winter, in which the well loved theme is backed by harmonics which sound like the veritable music of the spheres.

In between these, the Vivaldi RV522 concerto for two violins: not a work with which I was familiar. Greilsammer, Hope, Simos Papanas and the Geneva Camerata gave it such a high level of energy as to remove any incongruity of it being played straight, interposed between two such modern pieces. It gave me a sense (in my imagination, at least) of how it might have been for an 18th century audience to hear Vivaldi's music for the first time.

Watching the players made it clear to me that we were seeing something special. There were big grins on their faces - not all the time, but when one of them had finished a particularly well turned phrase. You could see each player really excited at having just produced a sound that was fresh and intense.

The concert was opened by Greilsammer telling us about the programme, after which all the works were played without a break - to take us on a journey, we were told, through different eras. The format worked well, but the first half of the concert didn't hit the same heights as the Vivaldi. Rameau's overture to Castor et Pollux was competently executed but failed to thrill; Mozart's K246 piano concerto was elegantly played by Greilsammer, but isn't going to make into my top 50 favourite works of his. Martin Jaggi's Uruk was the sort of piece that, to my ears, gives contemporary music a bad name, with too much focus on clever ways of getting novel sounds from

the instruments. I found most of the piece simply unpleasant to listen too, and I gained little sense of the supposed theme of an ancient city.

Hope and the Geneva Camerata treated us to a long encore: Bach's Air on a G String. In contrast to modern liberties taken with the Vivaldi, this was played with utter reverence. It sent us off into the winter air with our hearts at peace, and capped a truly eye-opening concert.