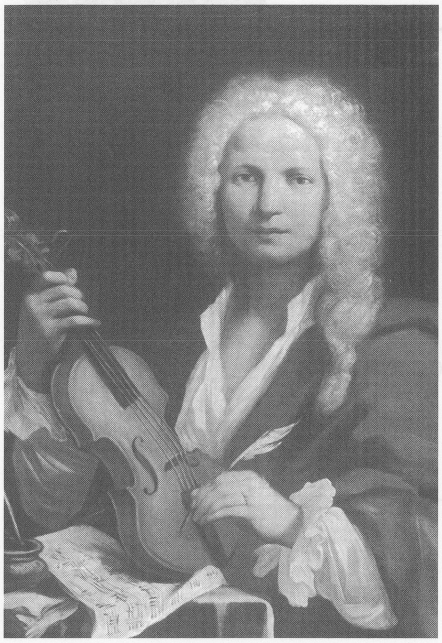
Antonio Vivaldi



born
March 4, 1678
Venice, Italy

died
July 28, 1741
Vienna, Austria

“Igor Stravinsky did not enjoy Vivaldi’s music. He called Vivaldi “a dull fellow who would compose the same music over and over.”

An-tohn´-ee-oh Vee-vahl´-dee

A composer of the Baroque era.

Antonio Vivaldi learned the craft of music from his father, a violinist in a church orchestra in Venice, Italy. Young Antonio served in church orchestras and eventually studied for the priesthood. He was ordained as a priest in 1703 at the age of 25 but never served the church in a religious capacity. However, he remained active in music, and served the church as a musician.

Vivaldi began composing **sonatas** for keyboard instruments around 1705. He also played violin in **opera** orchestras, developed a love of opera and composed several operas. This was unusual and controversial; priests were not supposed to compose music for non-church related activities. His first opera was performed in 1713 (age 35).

From 1709 through 1714, Vivaldi had the financial backing of an Italian prince in the city of Mantua, and he continued composing operas in addition to keyboard, vocal, and orchestral works. When the prince ended his support, Vivaldi accepted a position as orchestral conductor at St. Mark’s Cathedral in Venice, Italy, the same church and orchestra in which his father had played violin. He held this position for 27 years. He also served as the director of a musical **conservatory** in Venice.

By 1719 (age 41), another wealthy **patron** had begun to provide financial support for Vivaldi. For the next several years he composed operas for **opera companies** throughout Italy, including Rome and Milan, where audiences were the most discriminating. By 1725 his compositions, including his operas, were well known throughout Europe. His music was more popular in Holland, France, and England than in Italy; many Italians were uncomfortable with an ordained priest composing operas. In fact, in 1734, one of his operas was banned in Italy because he was a priest.

Vivaldi traveled throughout Europe in the late 1730s and early 1740s and lived briefly in Holland, where his music was very popular. Despite occasional disagreements with the church over his operas, Vivaldi remained as orchestral conductor at St. Mark’s in Venice. In 1741 (age 63), he moved to Vienna, Austria, hoping to receive an offer as a **court musician** or composer. However, he received no offers and died in Vienna.

After Vivaldi’s death, his music was rarely performed until the twentieth century, when musicians and audiences rediscovered it. During his lifetime, he was known as an opera composer. Today, while his operas are again being performed, his orchestral works are most popular. Vivaldi claimed to have written 94 operas but musical scholars have found scores for only 50.

Antonio Vivaldi was a pleasant man with a full head of bright red hair. For this he was sometimes referred to as “the red priest.” He was comfortable writing music for both religious and concert performances.

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Antonio Vivaldi

What I composed	Orchestra	Concerto	Chamber Music	Keyboard	Opera	Theater/Film	Ballet	Band	Choral	Vocal Solos
Antonio Vivaldi	>	>		>	>				>	

Vivaldi Factoids:

- Vivaldi wrote more than 500 **concertos**, of which over 230 are for violin and string orchestra.
- He also composed concertos for many unusual instruments, including mandolin, recorder, and viola d'amore (a stringed instrument with as many as 14 strings).
- Vivaldi popularized the cello and string bass as solo instruments by composing concertos for both. Until that time neither instrument was considered suitable as a solo instrument.
- **Johann Sebastian Bach** transcribed many of Vivaldi's violin compositions for harpsichord.

1678: Birth of Antonio Vivaldi; Robert de LaSalle explores the Great Lakes in America, then in 1682 claims the Louisiana territory for France.

1683: First German immigrants in North America.

1692: William and Mary College founded in Virginia.

1699: Czar Peter the Great decrees that the new year in Russia will begin January 1 instead of September 1.

1704: Young composer **Johann Sebastian Bach** walks 200 miles to hear a piece of music directed by the composer Dietrich Buxtehude.

1711: English trumpeter John Shore is said to have invented the tuning fork.

1729: North and South Carolina become crown colonies.

1735: Birth of Paul Revere, an American patriot.

1741: Death of Antonio Vivaldi; **George Friderick Handel** composes *Messiah*, an **oratorio**.

What in the world is happening?

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Listen!

Antonio Vivaldi 1678-1741)
Spring from *The Four Seasons*

Spring is from the *The Four Seasons*, the first four of a series of twelve **concertos** for solo violin and string orchestra written around 1725 by Antonio Vivaldi. The other movements are *Summer, Fall,* and *Winter.* They are one of the first examples of what has become known as program music: the musical representation of an idea, or the musical suggestion of a mood. In this case the music represents the seasons of the year. Some composers during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries actually included the imitation of sounds such as bird calls, thunder, or lightning in their music. For *The Four Seasons* Vivaldi wrote descriptive notes and sonnets which relate to the music in the margin of the musical score.

This is the first stanza of the sonnet *Spring* found in the margin of Vivaldi's score:

Joyful Spring has arrived,
The birds welcome it with their happy songs,
And the brooks in the gentle breezes
Flow with a sweet murmur.

- The full ensemble begins playing the melody, then only two violins play. Raise your hand when you hear just the two violins playing.
- Can you hear any sounds you might hear in the spring such as the imitation of birds, gentle breezes, a thunder storm or a barking dog?

TIMING

:01	This piece is performed by strings and harpsichord. The opening melody is played by the strings. Listen for the harpsichord playing steady quarter notes underneath the strings. This melody is repeated at :09, softer.
:16	A new melody. Like the first melody, this one is repeated, softer.
:33	An extended passage featuring two solo violins. Listen for the melodic embellishments played by both solo instruments.
1:08	The second melody is played again.
1:16	Listen for the moving string lines with the harpsichord playing steady chords.
1:40	The second melody is played again.
1:49	Listen for the low strings playing in an agitated manner. Then listen for a solo violin alternating with the agitated strings.

> **"The Italians exalt music!**
> ***–Johann Mattheson (1681-1764)***
> **"**

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Review!

Antonio Vivaldi **Name** _____

Place the letter of the correct answer in the space provided.
For True/False questions, print True or False in the space provided.

1. In addition to being a composer, Vivaldi was also active as _____.
   A. a singer C. a priest
   B. a mystic D. all of the above

2. True or False: Vivaldi's operas were popular throughout all of Europe. _____

3. After Vivaldi's death, his music was rarely performed until the _____.
   A. seventeenth century C. nineteenth century
   B. eighteenth century D. twentieth century

4. During his lifetime, Vivaldi was best known for his _____. A. operas
   Today, however, his _____ are more popular. B. orchestral works

5. Vivaldi composed _____.
   A. music for church services C. both A and B
   B. music for non-church activities D. neither A nor B

6. True or False: Vivaldi had several patrons who supported him. _____

7. Of Vivaldi's more than 500 concertos, over 200 are for what instrument and string orchestra? _____
   A. violin C. cello
   B. viola d'amore D. string bass

8. The Listening Example, *The Four Seasons*, is _____.
   A. an opera C. a concerto
   B. an oratorio D. an overture

9. Vivaldi popularized what two instruments as solo instruments? _____
   A. cello and string bass C. violin and viola
   B. organ and piano D. harpsichord and clavier

10. The musical representation of an idea or a mood is known as _____.
    A. an opera C. program music
    B. an oratorio D. plainsong chant

Bonus:

Vivaldi served as orchestral conductor at what famous cathedral in Venice, Italy?

_____

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