

## **The Four Seasons: Reimagined**

*Piano performed by Luke de la Port, with accompaniment by the Seattle Symphony Orchestra*

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**Maurice Ravel** (1875-1937)

“À La Manière de Borodine”, M. 63/1

**Béla Bartók** (1881-1945)

Piano Concerto No. 3 in E Major, Sz. 119  
ii. Adagio Reglioso

**Bongani Ndodana-Breen** (1975-present)

Flowers in the Sand, pts. 1 and 2

— *Intermission* —

**Nikolai Kapustin** (1937-2020)

Prelude in F Major, Op. 53, No. 23

**Johannes Brahms** (1833-1897)

Intermezzo in B-Flat Minor, Op. 117, No. 2

**Akira Nishimura** (1953-2023)

Heterophony of Two Pianos and Orchestra, pt. 2

**Alexander Scriabin** (1872-1915)

Prelude in D-Flat Major, Op. 11, No. 15

You've all probably heard of Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*: the group of violin concertos depicting all seasons of the year in classic Baroque fashion. But while Vivaldi's concertos may be the most well-known, there's countless other works from all over the world that illustrate the complexity and beauty of nature in all its seasonal stages. And that's what this program, "The Four Seasons: Reimagined", is about to highlight (Baroque-free!)

The program begins with Ravel's "À La Manière de Borodine", a homage to the Russian Romantic composer Alexander Borodin. The piece's gentle, flowing rhythm is reminiscent of wind brushing across a rolling hillside, and the sweet melody paints the first flowers of spring onto the canvas. You can especially hear hints of inspiration from Borodin's passionate style in the minor parts of the song, like a sprinkling of rainfall before the spring sun reappears.

To usher in the warm summer, we're followed by Bartók's Piano Concerto No. 3. This concerto – a notable departure from his harsher earlier works – was Bartók's final composition before his death in 1945, intended as a final present to his wife. We hear the warmth and care Bartók had throughout this concerto, especially in the second movement. The sweeping violins resemble the constant color of bright-green leaves, and the tenseness near the middle almost sounds like a swarm of bees. Altogether, it creates a multi-layered, passionate image of nature at its most colorful.

Next, for a shift into contemporary music, I'll perform South African composer Bongani Ndodana-Breen's "Flowers in the Sand". This two-part composition also reminded me of summer; but unlike Bartók's grand concerto, it depicts summer's melancholy side, like a gentle rainstorm. The first part weaves through cyclical rhythms that sound like ripples on a pond, both tranquil and somber. Part 2 features fluttery melodies and moments of quiet, like the eye of the storm, but you hear the rain return as the piece progresses heavier. The melancholy of these two pieces felt very reminiscent of the unpredictable, darker period between summer and fall, and they serve as a peaceful conclusion to the first section of the program.

After a short intermission, where the audience can socialize over plenty of season-themed foods – like fall muffins or some cozy hot chocolate – we begin section 2 of the program. We start with one of Kapustin's jazz-esque 24 Preludes, a playful fall piece that, for some reason, reminded me of mushrooms, or perhaps the earthy forest floor. This prelude marks a notable shift into the later half of the year; it's warmer, cozier, and a lot richer than the pieces in section 1.

But just like summer, fall's more introspective and melancholy side appears in Brahms' Op. 117, No. 2: one of three intermezzos he called the "three lullabies of his grief". This piece still has the rolling fall texture of Kapustin's prelude, but with far more longing and sadness, making Brahms' description exceptionally clear. To me, this piece felt like the colors of fall beginning to dull, encapsulating the sadness of such a vivid season slowly transforming into cold, lonely winter.

Part II of Akira Nishimura's "Heterophony for Two Pianos and Orchestra" starts with an eerie, icy fluttering of piano, and we're instantly reminded of a frigid snowstorm. Much of Nishimura's work, including this piece, was influenced by traditional Asian music devices, especially heterophony: a texture created by slight variations in the same melody, which fully illuminates the complex winter imagery in this piece. Throughout the piece, gentle snowfall from the piano contrasts with the barren, hostile forest sketched by the orchestra. The strong piano jolts at the end sound like a wild animal, maybe a wolf, bursting onto the white winter scene.

To conclude our program, we have Scriabin's "Prelude in D-flat Major", a lot calmer after Nishimura's intense winter storm. The prelude has a twinge of melancholy, but it's also hopeful, with speckles of colorful notes sprinkled across the underlying sadness. To me, it felt like the moments of winter ice dethawing and plants finally emerging from the easing cold, the perfect ending to our program that situates us closer to spring once again – right where we started.