

Friday 9th July

Celebrity Concert

Red Priest  
Piers Adams, recorders  
Julia Bishop, violin  
Angela East, cello  
Howard Beach, harpsichord

8pm  
St Peter’s Church

Carnival of the Seasons

Spring  
*Concerto in E major: La Primavera*  
Antonio Vivaldi (1676-1741)  
*Allegro* (Spring has arrived - Birdsong - A Bubbling Stream - Thunder - Birdsong)  
*Largo* (The Sleeping Goatherd - Murmuring Fronds and Grasses - A Barking Dog)  
*Allegro* (Pastoral Dance)

Easter Sonata: The Crucifixion  
Heinrich Biber (1644-1704)

Summer  
  
What Shall We Do This Evening?  
Jacob Van Eyck (1590-1657)

A Midsummer Night’s Dream Suite  
Henry Purcell (1659-1695)  
  
Prelude  
Fairy Dance  
Dance for the Followers of Night  
Chaconne

Concerto in G minor: L'Estate Antonio Vivaldi  
*Allegro non molto* (Languishing in the heat - The Cuckoo - The Turtle-dove - The Goldfinch - Balmy winds - The North Wind - The Lamenting Peasant)  
*Adagio/Presto* (Uneasy Rest in Fear of a Storm - Flies and Gnats - Thunder)  
*Presto* (Impetuous Summer Storm)

INTERVAL

Autumn  
  
Prelude in D minor for solo cello  
Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Concerto in F major: L'Autunno Antonio Vivaldi  
*Allegro* (Dancing, Singing Peasants - The Drunkard - Dozing Drunkards)  
*Adagio molto* (Sleeping Drunkards)  
*Allegro* (The Hunt - The Fleeing Stag - Rifle-shots and Hounds - The Stag Dies)

The Furies Nicholas le Strange (17th c.)

The Witches’ Dance Robert Johnson (1583-1633)

Winter  
*Concerto Grosso in G minor per la Notte de Natale*  
Arcangelo Corelli (1653-1713)  
*Vivace; Grave; Allegro; Adagio/Allegro/Adagio; Vivace; Allegro; Pastorale*

Concerto in F minor: L'Inverno Antonio Vivaldi  
*Allegro non molto* (Bitter frostbite - Cruel winds - Stamping feet in the cold - Winds - Chattering teeth)  
*Largo* (Peaceful and content by the fire - Rain outside)  
*Allegro* (Walking cautiously on ice - Falling down - Running swiftly - The ice breaks - The Sirocco wind - All the winds at war)

All musical arrangements by Red Priest.

To create a piece of music which achieves unprecedented, household-name popularity throughout the world, continues to live on for centuries after one's death, and indeed becomes the defining work for a particular country and epoch, must be the dream of every composer. Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* clearly falls into this elite category. And yet there's a price to pay for such immortality: the masterpiece becomes, in the eyes of the general public, the only worthwhile work in the composer's entire output; everything else is pre-judged as inferior. Thus Sir Thomas Beecham famously dismissed Vivaldi's remaining 400 (and more) concertos, with a single slice of his razor-sharp wit, as “the same concerto composed 400 times.”

Certainly it is true that Vivaldi wrote, as did all composers, his fair share of pot-boilers, and he had a tendency to over-use a particular compositional technique (the so-called ‘*ritornello* principle’). He also frequently relied on the dazzling effects of his virtuosity on the violin to create the desired reaction from his audiences, a fact which led one particular musicologist at the time to dismiss him as a man with “too much mercury in his constitution”. But his enduring reputation for composing only simplistic, endlessly repetitive harmonies and figurations simply does not bear close scrutiny, and the *Four Seasons*, recognized among the most colourful and inventive instrumental works of the entire baroque period, is far from atypical of the Red Priest's imagination.

It is hoped that these brand-new arrangements will show the work in a fresh light. Perhaps the principal key to the *Seasons'* popularity lies in its overtly programmatic nature, which encourages performers to look beyond the notes themselves to the dramatic possibilities behind them, as spelled out in vivid detail in Vivaldi's accompanying sonnets. In this way Vivaldi ensured that performances would have the full variety, interest and intent that all composers naturally wish for their works. Indeed, all music instructional manuals from the time stress the importance of adding drama to music, telling stories with the notes, painting a canvas of richly varied colours and emotions. So, far from being the exception to the rule in terms of dramatic possibility, the *Seasons* was simply one of the very few instrumental compositions of their day which gave in-built instructions for effective performance.

On the whole, the larger the group of musicians the harder it becomes to employ the rhetorical devices which can bring the musical effects to life, as these must involve many subtle changes of tempo, attack and mood which can so easily

become ‘smoothed over’. In this evening’s version the number of musicians has been paired down to the minimum in order to amplify these effects, and thereby bring out to the full the sights and sounds of a year in the Italian countryside. For added interest the lead line has been transferred onto the recorder, a practice which was adopted by some musicians in Vivaldi's lifetime (the French composer Nicholas Chedeville even published an arrangement of the *Seasons* for the obscure combination of recorder, violin, viola da gamba, harpsichord and hurdy-gurdy!).

The remaining works expand on the seasonal theme, bringing in a few key dates which Vivaldi neglected.

The fifteen ‘Rosary Sonatas’ by the eccentric Austrian violin virtuoso Heinrich Biber depict the Christian story in allegorical fashion, taking the listener through the entire pagan/gnostic cycle of death and rebirth. *The Crucifixion Sonata* is understandably the most intense and dramatic, making full use of the violin’s technical and expressive range, enhanced further by use of *scordatura* tuning, whereby the top string is tuned to a D, a tone lower than normal.

The lengthening evenings of early summer are captured playfully with a short set of variations for solo recorder by the blind Dutch musician, Jacob Van Eyck, the greatest recorder virtuoso of his day. Van Eyck would undoubtedly have performed this work in the open air to the visitors of St John’s Church in Utrecht, where he was a city-sponsored busker and a major tourist attraction.

As we pass the summer solstice, what better way to celebrate than with Henry Purcell’s magical opera, the *Fairy Queen*, based on that most popular of Shakespearean fantasies, ‘A Midsummer Night's Dream’?

Another key date in the pagan calendar is the autumn festival of Hallowe’en when, according to ancient lore, the disembodied spirits of all who have died throughout the preceding year come back in search of living bodies to possess for the next year.

Arcangelo Corelli was, in effect, the founder of the baroque concerto, and his music was to have a profound influence on later composers, from Vivaldi to Handel and Bach. His famous *Christmas Concerto* is scored for a *concertino* group of two violins and cello, with a larger *concerto grosso* ensemble of strings and continuo, whose function is largely a supportive one, thus allowing an effective reduction for smaller forces. Indeed an anonymous 18th century transcription exists for two recorders and continuo and another, by Domenico Rossi, for harpsichord alone. Although there are no specifically descriptive elements to the work, its final movement is a gentle *Pastorale*, a common feature in baroque Christmas music, representative of the biblical shepherds in their fields.

Red Priest  
Formed in 1997, and named after the flame-haired priest, Antonio Vivaldi, Red Priest gives over 60 concerts a year in some of the most prestigious venues in Europe and the USA. International music critics have been full of praise for Red Priest’s style, but the group's extravagantly baroque ethos is

perhaps best summed up in the words of English musicologist and broadcaster George Pratt: "If nobody goes over the top, how will we know what lies on the other side?"

Piers Adams was recently heralded in the Washington Post as ‘the reigning recorder virtuoso in the world today’. He has performed in numerous festivals and at premier concert halls throughout the world, including London’s Royal Festival, Wigmore and Queen Elizabeth Halls, as soloist with orchestras including the Philharmonia, the English Sinfonia, the Academy of Ancient Music, the Singapore Symphony and the BBC Symphony. Piers has made several solo CDs reflecting an eclectic taste, ranging from his award-winning Vivaldi debut disc to David Bedford’s Recorder Concerto - one of many major works written for him.

Julia Bishop is one of the outstanding baroque violin specialists of her generation. She has toured the world with most of the UK's leading period instrument orchestras, including the English Concert, of which she was a member for six years. She is now in great demand as an orchestral



leader and soloist, in particular with the celebrated Gabrieli Consort, with which she performs internationally. She has also appeared as concerto soloist with Florilegium, the Brandenburg Consort and the Hanover Band, and regularly coaches and directs the baroque orchestra of the Royal Academy of Music.

Angela East is widely respected as one of the most brilliant and dynamic performers in the period instrument world. She has given numerous concerto performances in London's Queen Elizabeth and Wigmore Halls, and has performed as soloist and continuo cellist with many of Europe's leading baroque orchestras. Among her impressive list of concert credits are La Scala Milan, Sydney Opera House, Versailles and Glyndebourne. In 1991 Angela formed The Revolutionary Drawing Room which performs chamber works from the revolutionary period in Europe on original instruments, and whose first eight CDs have received glowing reviews worldwide. In May 2001 she recorded the complete Bach Cello Suites for Dorian.