

VIVALDI: FOUR SEASONS

Kinga Augustyn, violin

Susquehanna Symphony Orchestra, Sheldon Blair, conductor

Bel Air MD, March 26, 2022



I have heard these numerous times, both in live performance and on record, and Kinga has played them multiple times, yet she performed here with a freshness and spontaneity that made them seem new and exciting. Each of the concertos is in three movement, in fast-slow-fast tempos. These works are some of the earliest examples of Baroque program music, that is, music that describes extra-musical events. Vivaldi provided notes explaining what each section was expressing, and Kinga brought that out with great flair.

Her playing was spectacularly virtuosic throughout, but certain passages stood out as exceptionally brilliantly performed: bird songs in "Spring" and "Summer;" the gushing of waters in "Spring;" gentle summer breezes and especially the storm in the final movement of "Summer," done here with the requisite ferocity by both soloist and orchestra. It was the crowning glory of the whole concert. Also, depiction of dances at a folk harvest festival and a hunt in "Autumn;" icy blasts of wind in "Winter."

Ironically, despite the late-March time frame, the weather in northern Maryland was very wintry, so this piece felt especially appropriate.

Sheldon Bair, founder, music director and conductor of the SSO, did a terrific job on the podium. The concert took place in a church, with the orchestra scattered about the limited space around the altar, yet he managed to keep them all together, and never let the orchestral tutti drown out the soloist, using minimalist gestures to control the sound. After the performance, Sheldon hosted a party at his home, and we traded anecdotes about other conductors – I from what I had read, he from personal encounters with them.

It was a great artistic triumph for Kinga and all the performers.