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## Hi-Res Reviews



### VIVALDI: Four Seasons; PIAZZOLLA: Four Seasons of Buenos Aires – Lara St. John, violin/ Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra of Venezuela/ Eduardo Marturet, conductor – Ancalagon

*Do we need another Four Seasons? With playing and sound like this, yes we do!*



Published on March 19, 2009



### VIVALDI: Four Seasons; PIAZZOLLA: Four Seasons of Buenos Aires – Lara St. John, violin/ Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra of Venezuela/ Eduardo Marturet, conductor – Ancalagon multichannel SACD ANC134, 64:19 \*\*\*\*\* [Release date: Apr. 14, 09]:

Do we need another *Four Seasons*? Archivmusic.com lists 218 currently available releases, but there are in fact more than that available internationally. So what is the attraction of this [music](#)? I remember about 10 years ago when Pinchas Zukerman was to play the work with the Atlanta Symphony (and his is one of the best on the market, especially the remaining concertos of Op. 8) and his absolute dismissal of the work as completely trivial. He hated it, yet found himself forced to play it. Audiences in the last century came to a different conclusion however, and Vivaldi's chirpy melodies and quite suggestive and pointed tone painting have won people over for years. Violinists like it because it gets a grand reaction and is quite frankly not as difficult to play as it sounds, though it still poses challenges for any but the less-than-fully-professional.

Knowing Lara St. John, I cannot for one moment believe that she decided to record this simply because she was looking for a cash cow or had a bad itch to enter into the Seasons Sweeps; this is one artist that only does music that she believes in. And why should she not believe in the *Four Seasons*? Everyone loves it, and it does offer an artist a chance to do some things a



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little differently. And on top of it all, with a dearth of SACD offerings of this piece (as I mentioned [in my review of the Telarc/Martinson recording](#)) it fills a real need. [According to [sa-cd.net](http://sa-cd.net) there are 20 SACD versions out, not including this one...Ed.]


It is not as radically crazed as some of the period instrument offerings I have heard, and uses the young, enthusiastic, and very fine players from the Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra of Buenos Aires (in their first non-DGG outing), so expect a nicely rounded orchestral compliment. St. John does interact with Vivaldi's tempting poetical descriptions in ways that might make more traditional listeners raise their eyebrows a bit—her slight penchant for the expressive device of bending some of the notes in the slower movements, which seems to have become di rigueur in everything that Anne Sophie Mutter records these days, comes close to crossing the line of how much of this we really want to hear, but in fact does not cross it, so remains valiantly meaningful.

There is energy aplenty, as in all of St. John's recordings, and these seasons contain no days of tepidity, but are instead endowed with cold chills and hot spots. Rereading Vivaldi's poems, so thoughtfully included in the booklet notes, does in fact lead one to the impression that this is exactly how he perceived the quarterly change of weather, dramatic, profound, and full of impact. St. John's belies the notion that these concertos have seen it all—they have not, and her interpretation is at once compelling and rigorously viable.

And there is more! Though only Vivaldi alone would have been able to sell this disc, we get a wonderful coupling of four pieces by Astor Piazzolla arranged into its own version of the seasons called *Four Seasons of Buenos Aires*. I will confess that Piazzolla is a mixed bag to me; he is not, as so often stated, to the tango what Sousa is to the march or Strauss to the waltz. But he is often original, and at his best quite alluring. He started "summer" in 1965, and in 1970 added the remaining movements, not to compete with or even suggest Vivaldi, but as pieces for his own quintet, consisting of bandoneon, violin, electric guitar, piano, and string bass. What we are given here is an arrangement by Leonid Desyatnikov for violin and string orchestra that not only corrals these works into a coherent whole, but even adds references to Vivaldi's work in an unbelievably clever and ingenious way. This piece should find a wide and diverse audience if other violinists have the sense to take it up, and it works wonderfully as a foil to the baroque priest on this disc.

The production values here are simply outstanding—no major label does it better, with three-sided folded packaging that includes many multi-colored pictures, and notes in four languages. This joins the best of Vivaldi's *Seasons* recordings, along with Jan Tomasow's fabulous and groundbreaking effort on the old Bach Guild label (Vanguard—you can still get it), Anne Sophie Mutter's naïve and innocently devilish reading on EMI with Karajan for modern instruments, the aforementioned Martinson recording in SACD just released, and Christopher Hogwood's striking 1983 version using four separate soloists on L'Oiseau-lyre, still a wonderful reading with all sorts of varied continuo. But for Super Audio, this new one stands alone for those wanting modern instruments, and the surround sound is balanced to perfection. A thrilling reading that all should enjoy.

-- Steven Ritter

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