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ASO's 'Seasons' offered a treat for ears, souls

FEBRUARY 5, 2010

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As an English teacher, one of my favorite aspects of understanding literature is the concept of point of view.

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Simply put, POV is the way in which a plot is presented. In a conflict between two people, the point of view changes the complexion of the story, depending upon whether the speaker is the puncher or the punchee.

Music has the same sort of shift, depending upon a) the period in which the composer wrote or writes, b) the interpretation of the performance's conductor and even c) the nationality of the composer.

Such a tickle-me-pink scenario took place at UL's Angelle Hall with the Acadiana Symphony Orchestra's latest presentation, Four Seasons.

Featuring the towering talent of violinist Lara St. John, the ASO Chamber Orchestra presented a musical Venn diagram comparing and contrasting the quite familiar Four Seasons, written by the Italian Baroque composer Antonio Vivaldi, with the less familiar but equally intriguing compositions of Astor Piazzolla. As interpreted by the ASO's director Mariusz Smolij, young Canadian soloist Lara St. John and the 19 ASO chamber musicians, the afternoon was ripe with music that moved the audience to a lengthy standing ovation.

The Four Seasons of Vivaldi, il Prete Rosso, is at home in a handful of venues, from concert halls to television advertising.

The quartet of segments celebrate the objective mood prompted by the four seasons of the year: what musical images do spring, summer, autumn and winter conjure?

Like when you sit on the lap of a favorite uncle come to visit, from the first note, Vivaldi's classic prompts a snuggleability that reaches deep into the marrow of your musical bones.

On the other hand, Piazzolla, who made a compositional nod to his Venetian mentor with some Baroque-inspired licks, took the theme from the concert hall to a smoke-filled Buenos Aires nightclub, dripping with the

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passions of his native tango.

In the 1990s, the Russian composer Leonid Desyatnikov rearranged Piazzolla's music, which was originally written to be performed by a folk ensemble, into a violin virtuoso celebration, as played by a chamber

orchestra.

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As a result of the Russian's work, the marriage was consummated, spanning a 200 year gap and a notable stylistic span. The obvious benefactors of this union are the countless music lovers who have heard a performance celebrating

The Eight Seasons and have responded with globe-circling bravos.

The program is set up to compare and contrast not only the stylistic idiosyncrasies of the two pieces, but also their meteorological comparisons. The presentation started with Vivaldi's Spring, but then St. John played The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires's Autumn, which because of the hemispheric differences, coincides with our spring, and so forth. Unlike Vivaldi, Piazzolla's view of the seasons is much more introspective, describing the inspired seasonal moods displayed by Argentinians as the seasons change.

Vivaldi inspires correct posture and a stately tapping of the toes; Piazzolla conjures up a dark-suited, double-dose of hair gelled, pencil-mustachioed gentleman sensuously twirling a lithe, beautiful senorita as the temperatures changes from balmy to hot to nippy to finally downright cold.

I think my favorite portion of the Argentinean's work was the pairing of the violin and cello, as presented by St. John and the ASO's Mark Pritchard. Their sensuous pairing was a tango in itself.

Smolij, St. John, and the 19 formidable musicians who played under the maestro's baton captured the disparate octet of moods and, in consequence presented a novel, technically glowing showcase of talent.

It amazes me that the musical accomplishment that we enjoy here does not receive a wider national or even international recognition, a recognition that shares in equal measure with the performance level that we enjoy with each concert.

If you enjoy a virtuoso violin performance, I would recommend St. John's CD, Vivaldi, The Four Seasons and Piazzolla, The Four Seasons of Buenos

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and carry positive messages to their peers. And they have a great time doing it.

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Aires.

The only defect I can think of about that particular collection is that it does not include the inspired musicianship of 19 Acadiana instrumentalists.

Ray Blum is a freelance writer who covers theater and performance in Acadiana.

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