

2025
YORK
EARLY
MUSIC
FESTIVAL

Le Consort

The Four Seasons

Sir Jack Lyons Concert Hall
Sunday 6 July 7.30pm

Le Consort

Théotime Langlois de Swarte *director, violin*

with

Catherine Bott *reader*

The Four Seasons

Aria: Occhi miei si dormire
(from *La Divisione del Mondo*)

Giovanni Legrenzi 1626-90

Sinfonia in B minor, RV168
Allegro

Antonio Vivaldi 1678-1741

Violin concerto in D minor, RV813
*Allegro – Adagio – Allegro – Andante – Largo –
Allegro Vivace*

Vivaldi

La Primavera, op. 8 no. 1, RV269
Allegro – Largo – Allegro

Vivaldi

Concerto in B flat major, RV583
Andante

Vivaldi

L'Estate, op. 8 no. 2 RV315
Allegro non molto – Adagio – Presto

Interval

Sinfonia
(from *La Fida Ninfa Tempesta di Mare*, RV714: Act 3, Scene 2)
Allegro molto

Vivaldi

L'Autunno, op. 8 no. 3, RV293
Allegro – Adagio molto – Allegro

Vivaldi

Il Ciaconna in G minor, RV370

Vivaldi

L'Inverno, op. 8 no. 4, RV297
Allegro non molto – Largo – Allegro

Vivaldi



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Antonio Vivaldi: A Vibrant Voice in Baroque Venice

A flamboyant and unforgettable character in the vibrant tapestry of Baroque Venice, Antonio Vivaldi stands as one of the most influential and innovative composers of the eighteenth century. With his fiery temperament, magnetic personality and extraordinary virtuosity on the violin, Vivaldi captivated audiences throughout Europe. He was not only a prolific composer and gifted performer but also a visionary teacher and musical pioneer whose influence continues to shape the world of classical music today.

Born in Venice in 1678, Vivaldi was introduced to music early in life. His father, Giovanni Battista Vivaldi, was a professional violinist and passed on both technical skills and a passion for music to his son. Though Antonio was ordained as a priest in 1703 and became known as *Il Prete Rosso* – the Red Priest, due to his distinctive hair colour – his religious career was short-lived. Health issues – likely asthma – made it difficult for him to perform Mass regularly. Instead, Vivaldi found his true calling in music, which would become the driving force of his life.

In that same year, 1703, Vivaldi began his long association with the Ospedale della Pietà, a Venetian institution for orphaned and abandoned girls. Far more than a charitable home, the Pietà was famed throughout Europe for the excellence of its musical training. Vivaldi served in several roles over the years – violin master, choir director, and eventually *maestro de' concerti* – and composed hundreds of works for the school's extraordinary all-female orchestra. These performances drew visitors from across the continent, captivated by the talent of the musicians and the brilliance of Vivaldi's compositions.

Within this remarkable institution, Vivaldi was given the freedom to experiment. He composed prolifically, creating over 500 concertos, numerous operas, sacred choral works and sonatas. Among his most groundbreaking achievements was the development of the solo concerto as a central form in Western music. Vivaldi refined its structure into three contrasting movements – fast, slow, fast – highlighting the virtuosity of the soloist, usually the violin. His dynamic approach, characterised by rhythmic drive, lyrical melodies and harmonic boldness, laid the foundation for the classical concerto and deeply influenced later composers such as Mozart and Beethoven.

While Venice remained his home base, Vivaldi's career spanned much of Europe. He traveled to Mantua, Rome and Vienna, producing operas and receiving commissions from noble patrons. His operatic output – ranging from comic to serious – demonstrated his dramatic flair and understanding of theatrical storytelling. Operas

such as *Orlando finto pazzo*, *La verità in cimento* and *Griselda* solidified his reputation as a composer of emotional depth and narrative sophistication.

Despite his popularity, Vivaldi's fortunes declined in the later years of his life. Changing tastes and political shifts made it more difficult for him to find support. He moved to Vienna in 1740, possibly in search of patronage from the imperial court. Sadly, he died there in 1741, in relative obscurity and financial hardship. Buried in a modest grave, his music faded from the spotlight for over a century.

It wasn't until the early twentieth century that Vivaldi's genius was rediscovered. A new generation of musicologists and performers began to unearth his manuscripts, revealing the scope of his talent to a modern audience. Central to this revival was a single, spectacular work: *The Four Seasons*.

Composed around 1720 and published in 1725 as part of *Il cimento dell'armonia e dell'invenzione* ('The Contest Between Harmony and Invention'), *The Four Seasons* consists of four violin concertos: Spring, Summer, Autumn, Winter. Each is accompanied by a sonnet, probably written by Vivaldi himself, describing scenes from nature: birdsong, thunderstorms, harvest dances, icy winds. This makes *The Four Seasons* one of the earliest examples of programme music – music intended to evoke a specific narrative or imagery.

What makes this work so enduring is not just its technical brilliance or melodic beauty, but its emotional immediacy. Vivaldi transports listeners directly into the heart of the natural world. Each note tells a story. Each movement reflects a moment in time. His descriptive writing style foreshadowed later composers such as Berlioz and Liszt, who expanded programmatic music into full-blown symphonic poems in the Romantic era.

Now, as we celebrate the 300th anniversary of *The Four Seasons*, this work resonates more deeply than ever. Vivaldi's evocation of the cycles of nature – of renewal, growth, decline, and rest – feels poignantly relevant in an age of climate uncertainty. The seasons he depicted so vividly are no longer as predictable as they once were. His music, once a joyful homage to the harmony of the natural world, now carries an added dimension: it reminds us of the fragility of the ecosystems that inspired him.

And yet, the magic of Vivaldi endures. His music, full of joy, colour, and vitality, continues to inspire audiences and musicians across the globe. A perfect example of this ongoing inspiration is the work of the ensemble *Le Consort*, led by the brilliant violinist Théotime Langlois de Swarte. Their performance of *The Four Seasons* not only honours Vivaldi's legacy but also breathes new life into his music.

As Langlois de Swarte himself remarks: 'For one of the most well-known composers in Western music, it's astonishing to realise that there are still so many facets left to explore'. This statement captures the essence of Vivaldi's enduring appeal. His music invites not only performance but also discovery – each interpretation revealing new colours, emotions, and nuances hidden in the score.

The singular genius of Vivaldi lies in his ability to transcend time. Though he lived three centuries ago, his voice still speaks with immediacy and passion. His works continue to challenge performers, delight audiences, and inspire creativity in artists of all kinds. Whether heard in grand concert halls or intimate chamber settings, his music retains the power to move us – to stir the imagination, awaken emotions, and connect us to something larger than ourselves.

As we mark this milestone anniversary, *The Four Seasons* is not just a celebration of Vivaldi's legacy: it is a living testament to music's ability to evolve, endure, and inspire. Through the hands of gifted interpreters like Théotime Langlois de Swarte and ensembles like *Le Consort*, Vivaldi's vision continues to flourish, reminding us that great art never grows old. It only deepens with time.

© Tom García

Le Consort

Théotime Langlois de Swarte *solo violin, direction*

Le Consort Orchestra

Sophie de Bardonnèche *violin*

Roxana Rastegar *violin*

Yaoré Talibart *violin*

Léa Roeckel *violin*

Juliette Leroux *violin*

Rebecca Gormezano *violin*

Yannis Roger *violin*

Corinne Raymond Jarczyk *violin*

Marta Paramo *viola*

Anna Sypniewsky *viola*

Hanna Salzenstein *cello*

Suzanne Wolff *cello*

Alexandre Teyssonière de Gramont *bass*

Yoann Moulin *harpsichord*

Le Consort, one of today's leading Baroque chamber ensembles, brings together four gifted young musicians who breathe new life into the trio sonata repertoire with energy, authenticity, and modern sensibility. Founded in 2016, the ensemble's mission is to unite strong and expressive musical personalities in the service of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century chamber music. Their playing is marked by a balance of vitality and refinement, revealing the expressive range and emotional depth of the Baroque tradition.

From the elegant lines of Couperin to the bold invention of Vivaldi, from Purcell's lyricism to Corelli's structural clarity, Le Consort explores the full richness of Baroque music. At the heart of their performances is the dynamic interplay between two violins and basso continuo – dialogue that weaves together vocal expressiveness, sensual textures, and moments of dazzling virtuosity. In their hands, the trio sonata becomes not just a form, but a vivid and personal storytelling medium.

What sets Le Consort apart is not only their stylistic integrity but their shared musical intuition. With a core group that has remained unchanged since their founding, they perform with the deep cohesion typically found in long-standing string quartets. Their close artistic relationship enables performances of extraordinary unity, spontaneity, and character.

Recognized early in their career, Le Consort won First Prize and the Audience Prize at the prestigious Loire Valley International Early Music Competition in 2017, chaired by William Christie. Since then, they have continued to garner international acclaim. Their most recent album, *The Four Seasons* by Vivaldi, received high praise from *BBC Music Magazine* for its 'transparency that allows hidden details to surface' and 'vaporous beauty that floats like a dream'. Their previous recording, *Philharmonica*, was hailed by *Gramophone* for its 'historically informed performance worn so naturally... it feels as though the music emerged from their very souls'.

Earlier albums such as *OPUS I* – featuring the unpublished sonatas of Jean-François Dandrieu – and *Specchio Veneziano*, which pairs Vivaldi with his lesser-known contemporary Giovanni Reali, have also been widely celebrated, earning numerous awards and critical distinction.

As their repertoire and ambitions have grown, so has the ensemble itself. While the quartet remains the ensemble's heart, Le Consort now expands its ranks to suit the creative visions of its soloists and to meet the demands of larger-scale projects. This flexible formation allows them to take on operatic productions, orchestral collaborations, and new explorations of Baroque and early classical works.

Their tenth anniversary season will be an international celebration: from their debut at the BBC Proms to a special anniversary concert at Paris's Salle Gaveau, their first opera (*Iphigénie en Tauride*) at the Opéra Comique, and international tours in Spain, South Korea, Japan and North America. In March 2026, they return to the U.S. and Canada for a nine-city tour including Boston, New York and Denver.

Le Consort is currently ensemble-in-residence at the Montpellier National Opera Orchestra, continuing to push the boundaries of historically informed performance while sharing the vitality of Baroque music with today's audiences.

Théotime Langlois de Swarte

Théotime Langlois de Swarte is rapidly emerging as a leading figure in both historical and modern performance. Whether performing on Baroque or modern violin, conducting from the podium, or playing in chamber settings, his dynamic, spontaneous style brings centuries-old music vividly to life. He has received numerous accolades, including the 2022 Diapason d'Or of the Year for his recording of Vivaldi, Locatelli, and Leclair, and was named Ambassador of the Year by REMA, Europe's Early Music Network. In 2022, *The Strad* featured him on its cover.

A frequent soloist in concertos by Baroque masters, as well as Haydn and Mozart, de Swarte has appeared with top ensembles such as Les Arts Florissants, Le Consort, Orchestra of the 18th Century, and the Australian Brandenburg Orchestra. He has performed at Carnegie Hall, Wigmore Hall, the Philharmonie de Paris, and the Musikverein.

He studied at the Paris Conservatory under Michael Hentz and joined Les Arts Florissants in 2014 at the invitation of William Christie. This year, he leads Les Arts Florissants in two North American tours.

As co-founder of Le Consort, he records and tours extensively, with acclaimed albums including *Specchio Veneziano* and *Philarmonica*. His chamber music partners include harpsichordist Justin Taylor and lutenist Thomas Dunford (*The Mad Lover*). He is also gaining recognition as a conductor, having recently led performances at Opéra Comique. He returns there in November 2025 to conduct Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride*.

He plays a 1733 Carlo Bergonzi violin on generous loan and is a laureate of the Banque Populaire Foundation.

Catherine Bott

Singer and broadcaster Catherine Bott studied at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London after which she spent two years singing everything from Bach to Berio with the Swingles before beginning a distinguished solo career specialising in Baroque music. Among her many recordings are Bach's *St John Passion* and Purcell's *Dido and Aeneas*. She has also premiered and recorded works by contemporary composers Craig Armstrong, Jonathan Dove and Michael Nyman. She is a Fellow of the Guildhall School and an Honorary Fellow of Trinity Laban Conservatoire of Music and Dance.

For 10 years from 2003 Catherine combined singing with regular presenting for BBC Radio, scripting and introducing more than 300 editions of the Early Music Show on BBC Radio 3 (the annual live show from YEMF always a highlight) as well as hosting many live evening concerts and Proms. For BBC Radio 4 she's made documentaries on subjects ranging from St Cecilia to the Brontë sisters, as well as presenting numerous editions of Pick of the Week.

In 2013, Classic FM invited her to make the move to a more informal style of music broadcasting: over the next decade she presented Everything you ever wanted to know about classical music, The Full Works Concert and a live Sunday lunchtime show. New ways of sharing her love of music continue to evolve: since 2020 she has introduced livestreamed recitals from London's Wigmore Hall and digital concerts with the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra, viewed by many thousands worldwide.

Throughout her career, Catherine has been involved with the York Early Music Festival, as a performer, jury member, presenter and artistic advisor: this year she makes her debut as a reader, declaiming the poems that accompany Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* concertos, in the invigorating company of Le Consort.

YORK EARLY MUSIC FESTIVAL

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