Friday 22 October / 7.30pm
Vivaldi's Four Seasons

Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber (1644–1704)
Sonata Representativa

Georg Muffat (1653-1704)
Concerto Grosso No. 4 (Dulce somnium)

Georg Phillip Telemann (1681-1767)
Overture-Suite, Burlesque de Quixotte

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)
The Four Seasons, Op. 8 Nos 1 - 4

The courts and cities of baroque Europe rejoiced in pomp and ceremony. But they also celebrated Carnival: a period of misrule when everyone, from the lowest to the mightiest, was licensed to indulge their sillier side. And what could be more amusing than the musical imitation of nature? Pedants disapproved: "The imitating of the cockerel, cuckoo, owl and other birds…or the drum, french horn and the like…rather belong to dancing-masters than to the Art of Musick" snorted one Italian scholar.

But the job of the baroque composer was to please, and tonight we hear four masters going all-out to amuse and delight. Two of them even worked together: the much-travelled, French-born Georg Muffat was a colleague of the Bohemian violin virtuoso Heinrich Biber in Salzburg in the 1670s, where (as one traveller noted) the locals revelled in a "Punch and Judy sense of humour".

Today, Muffat's Italian-inspired *Concerto Grosso* No.4 (1682), entitled *Dulce somnium* (Sweet Dream) converses with movements from Biber's *Sonata Representativa* (1673) – a regular musical bestiary in which you'll hear a military march plus croaking frogs, birdsong of all kinds, and of course that most singular of songs: the cat's meow. In the lively port city of Hamburg, meanwhile, somewhere around 1761 the veteran Georg Philipp Telemann poured all his wit into an orchestral "burlesque suite" inspired by *Don Quixote*. He portrays everyone's favourite scenes from Cervantes: the mad knight's heroic assault on a row of windmills, his sighs of courtly love, and the less-than-formidable gallop of his decrepit warhorse Rosinante.

36 years earlier in late 1725 (and newly returned to his native Venice after seven years in Mantua and Rome) Antonio Vivaldi bundled up the manuscripts of twelve violin concertos and dispatched them to the publisher Le Cène, of Amsterdam. As was customary, he headed them with a florid dedication to one of his patrons – the Bohemian nobleman Count Morzin:

Pray do not be surprised if, among these few and feeble concertos, Your Most Illustrious Lordship finds the "Four Seasons" which have so long enjoyed the indulgence of Your Most Illustrious Lordship's generosity, but believe that I have printed them because, while they may be the same, I have added to them […] a very clear statement of all the things that unfold in them, so that I am sure that they will appear new to you…

So as well as enjoying the endless melody and virtuoso fireworks of these four brilliant Italian concertos, we need have no qualms about relishing Vivaldi's splashes of picturesque colour. If we hear "the birds hailing Spring with happy song" in *La primavera,* "The sky thundering and with hailstones laying low the waving crops" in *L'estate, L'autunno's* "Hunters setting out with horns, guns and dogs" and "The wind's chill breath" in *L'inverno*; that's exactly as Vivaldi intended.

His title for the whole Op.8 collection sums up his own opinion on the matter: *"Il cimento dell' armonia e dell' inventione"* – "The trial of harmony and invention", or, more precisely, "The testing of musical skill and imagination". Most of us would agree that he passed with flying colours.

Maria Włoszczowska

Polish violinist Maria Włoszczowska is recognised for her versatile musicianship, performing as a soloist, director and chamber musician worldwide. Now entering her third season as Artistic Partner of Royal Northern Sinfonia, Maria is also Director and Leader of the Chamber Orchestra of Europe, regularly touring with the ensemble across the globe.

Recent career highlights include an appearance at the BBC Proms directing the Royal Northern Sinfonia in a diverse and demanding programme including Mozart's Symphony No. 39 and Mendelssohn's Concerto for Violin, Piano & Strings; her debut with the London Philharmonic Orchestra performing Mozart's Violin Concerto No. 29 under the baton of Erina Yashima; directing the Slovenian Philharmonic in Beethoven's Violin Concerto; directing the Norwegian Chamber Orchestra in Bach's Violin Concerto in D Minor; Tapiola Sinfonietta; Camerata Bern with Maria's own curated programme "Albion" and making returns to Pforte, and the Lammermuir Festival with Royal Northern Sinfonia.

Other notable highlights include performances with, among others, the Orchestre de Chambre de Paris directing and playing the solo violin part in Salieri's *26 Variations on La Folia di Spagna*; directing the Estonian National Symphony Orchestra in Mozart's Symphony No. 29 and Beethoven's Violin Concerto; a month-long tour directing the Amsterdam Sinfonietta; directing Vivaldi's *Four Seasons* on tour with Royal Northern Sinfonia; and leading the Chamber Orchestra of Europe on tour with Robin Ticciati and Golda Schultz.

In recognition of her outstanding work as Leader of Royal Northern Sinfonia since 2021, Maria was appointed Artistic Partner of the ensemble from autumn 2024 in a position that was created especially for her. In her inaugural season in the post, she directed a diverse selection of repertoire such as Schubert's Symphony No. 5, Tchaikovsky's *Serenade for Strings*, Schönberg's *Verklärte Nacht* and *Pierrot Lunaire*, Britten's *Les Illuminations*, as well as an all-Bach evening including the Violin Concertos No. 1 and 2, to name a few. In addition, she featured as soloist in Schumann's Violin Concerto, conducted by Dinis Sousa.

Maria appears frequently at Wigmore Hall and at international festivals such as Musikdorf Ernen, Lockenhaus Festival, Lammermuir Festival, Ebsjerg Festival, Lewes Festival, and IMS Prussia Cove. Distinguished artists such as Jeremy Denk, Alasdair Beatson, and Dinis Sousa regularly join Maria in recital and highlights include her New York recital debut presenting all six Bach Sonatas for violin and keyboard and performing Ives' complete cycle of Violin Sonatas at Wigmore Hall and Lammermuir Festival alongside Jeremy Denk.

Maria leads the Valo Quartet; they recently made their London debut appearance at Wigmore Hall with Angela Hewitt and regularly perform at Festival Resonances, Brussels, as well as Trasimeno Music Festival, Italy, Lammermuir Festival, Scotland, Musiq3 Festival, Belgium, and Kaustinen Chamber Music Festival, Finland.

A recipient of the Royal Philharmonic Society's Emily Anderson Prize, Maria bases herself in Oslo and the UK after completing her studies at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama with Hungarian violinist and conductor András Keller. In 2018 she won both First Prize and Audience Prize at the XXI Leipzig International Johann Sebastian Bach Competition.

Maria plays on a violin by Francesco Stradivari.

Royal Northern Sinfonia

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37 musicians at the top of their game. Electrifying music, old and new. All the talent, determination, and creativity of the North East on a worldwide stage. From their home at The Glasshouse International Centre for Music, Royal Northern Sinfonia share the joy and wonder of orchestral music with thousands of people across the North of England – and beyond – every year.

From symphonies to string quartets, film soundtracks to choral masses, and original performances with awesome artists from Sheku Kanneh-Mason and Víkingur Ólafsson to Sam Fender and Self Esteem, the orchestra's members have got one of the most varied jobs there is. They're always looking for fresh new sounds from up-and-coming composers, inviting local communities to share a stage, and doing everything they can to inspire and prepare the musicians of tomorrow to one day take their place.

They're also working hard to smash the barriers that can stop brilliant people getting into classical music. They've teamed up with national partners to support women conductors to develop their careers, to help global majority musicians get vital experience in the orchestra world, and to celebrate disabled and non-disabled musicians breaking new ground together in inclusive ensemble RNS Moves. And they bring new musical opportunities to the region, headlining the first-ever BBC Proms weekend outside London.

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With 65 years of success to build on, they've signed a dynamic artistic leadership – Music Director Dinis Sousa, Artistic Partner Maria Włoszczowska, Principal Guest Conductor Nil Venditti and Associate Conductor Ellie Slorach – to lead the way into a bold, bright future.

Wherever the orchestra play and whoever they share a stage with, every performance is a chance to see, hear and feel the music.