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The Four Seasons

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The Four Seasons

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SPRING

Springtime has come around again and merrily
 Small birds salute the season as they sing;
 Now Zephyrs sigh across the waters airily
 Which answer back with their sweet murmuring.

Soon, though, the sky is cloaked in robes of black;
 Thunder and lightning come—Springtime's loud heralds.
 But once the storm subsides and calm comes back
 The birds, just as before, take up their carols.

Where the green meadow flowers all around,
 Amidst soft whisperings of leaves and plants
 The goatherd sleeps next to his faithful hound.

Now shepherds' bagpipes start the revelling;
 Under clear skies the nymphs and shepherds dance
 Decked out in the full radiance of the Spring.

The four sonnets by W.D. Snodgrass are his translations of the sonnets on which Antonio Vivaldi based his concerti, *The Four Seasons*. Professor Snodgrass notes: "[The sonnets] are not only printed separately at the beginning of the concerti but their lines are also scattered through the score so as to show even more pointedly what effects he was aiming at in the musical setting. It is my suspicion that he even meant these sonnets to be read aloud with the performance, so I have tried to translate them very literally phrase for phrase—then, at least, the English phrases could be inserted into the score at the same place as their Italian counterparts."

SUMMER

In the fierce season, scorched dry by the sun,
 Men languish, beasts languish, the pine trees singe;
 The cuckoo lifts his voice, joined one by one
 By calls of turtledove and of goldfinch.

Zephyr gently blows, but then suddenly
 Boreas rushes in, roughly contending.
 The shepherd boy weeps with anxiety
 About his fate and the wild storm impending.

Deprived of rest, worn out, his limbs grow weary;
 He fears the lightning's flashing, the loud thunder
 And all the wasps and flies, swarming in fury.

How soon it comes true, everything he dreads:
 The skies rumble and flash; tree trunks break under
 Lightning blasts; hail cuts off the ripe wheat's heads.

—Antonio Vivaldi (?) / W.D. Snodgrass

WINTER



To shiver, stiff with cold, in glittering snow
Under the breath of chill winds, roughly battering;
To rush, stamping both feet as you go
In tyrannous cold that keeps a man's teeth chattering;

To pass contented days by the fireside
While, outdoors, rain streams down bedrenching all;
To walk on the ice, but with a slow stride
Cautiously, fearing that you might fall;

To step out boldly, slip, fall to the ground,
But then step vigorously forth, once more
Till the ice breaks, dissolving all around;

To hear, bursting through iron gates, the noise
Of Boreas, Sirocco, the winds at war; —
This, then, is winter; it, too, has its joys.

AUTUMN

With songs and dance, the peasants celebrate
A happy harvest time. They drink too deep
Of Bacchus' liquors till, inebriate,
They end their joys sunk into heavy sleep.

Soon now the dancing and the song are done;
This season with its gentle, pleasant air
Seems to invite us, each and every one,
To the delights of slumber, free from care.

The hunters set out at the break of day
Joining the chase with guns, with horns and hounds;
The beast takes flight, but they still track their prey.

Despairing, panicked by enormous sounds
Of guns and dogs, wounded, confused, it tries
To flee; worn out though, finally, it dies.