

***Apollo's Fire: Four Seasons rediscovered*
at the Cleveland Museum of Art (Oct. 24)**

by Daniel Hathaway



At the top of their program at the Cleveland Museum of Art on Sunday afternoon, October 24, Apollo's Fire founder and artistic director Jeannette Sorrell told the full house that the Baroque orchestra was opening its 30th season with *Vivaldi's Four Seasons rediscovered*, returning to a piece that the ensemble has featured every year since 1991.

It might seem that there's not a lot left to discover after three decades of experience with the Red Priest's

charming and evocative score, but this performance boasted a secret weapon: the young Spanish violinist Francisco Fullana, now the Orchestra's artist-in-residence, whose affecting personality and easy virtuosity raised the solo part a quantum leap above the merely extraordinary.



Sorrell served up Vivaldi's four concerti in two episodes on either side of intermission, launching the program with Marco Uccellini's *La Bergamasca*, planting the g-minor double cello concerto between Summer and Autumn, and wrapping things up with another Apollo's Fire specialty, Vivaldi's *La Folia*.



Befitting the venue, Sunday's performance — like the one at the Museum last Thursday — was enhanced by projections devised by Florentine designer and musician Camilla Tassi. Although there was plenty of onstage movement to attract the eye, period images of drunken peasants and icy river crossings (above) were fun to watch as well. And Sorrell's spoken introductions to each concerto were brief, witty, and deftly illustrated with well-rehearsed snippets of music played by Fullana and his colleagues.

Throughout the performance, ensemble playing was tight and coordination flawless. Apollo's musicians have this score so much in their blood and fingers that they can be playful with Vivaldi's imitations of natural sounds. The birds chirp convincingly, the flies and wasps buzz threateningly, and only the barking of dogs doesn't quite come across (sorry, violas, not your fault). The movement depicting cautious steps on ice was lovely, the several stormy passages fiercely tempestuous.



Having memorized their solo parts, Sarah Stone and René Schiffer brought swagger and spontaneity to the double cello concerto. Those commodities were also abundant in *La Folia*, which in this iteration (it's always different) conjured up jealousy in a little pickup drama involving guitarist William Simms and violinists Alan Choo and Emi Tanabe.

Surely after all those repetitions, the audience went away with the *La Folia* bass line firmly planted in their ears, but also found themselves looking forward to many more episodes of Apollo's Fire to come. Keep an ear on Francisco Fullana as the season marches on. He's phenomenal.

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