



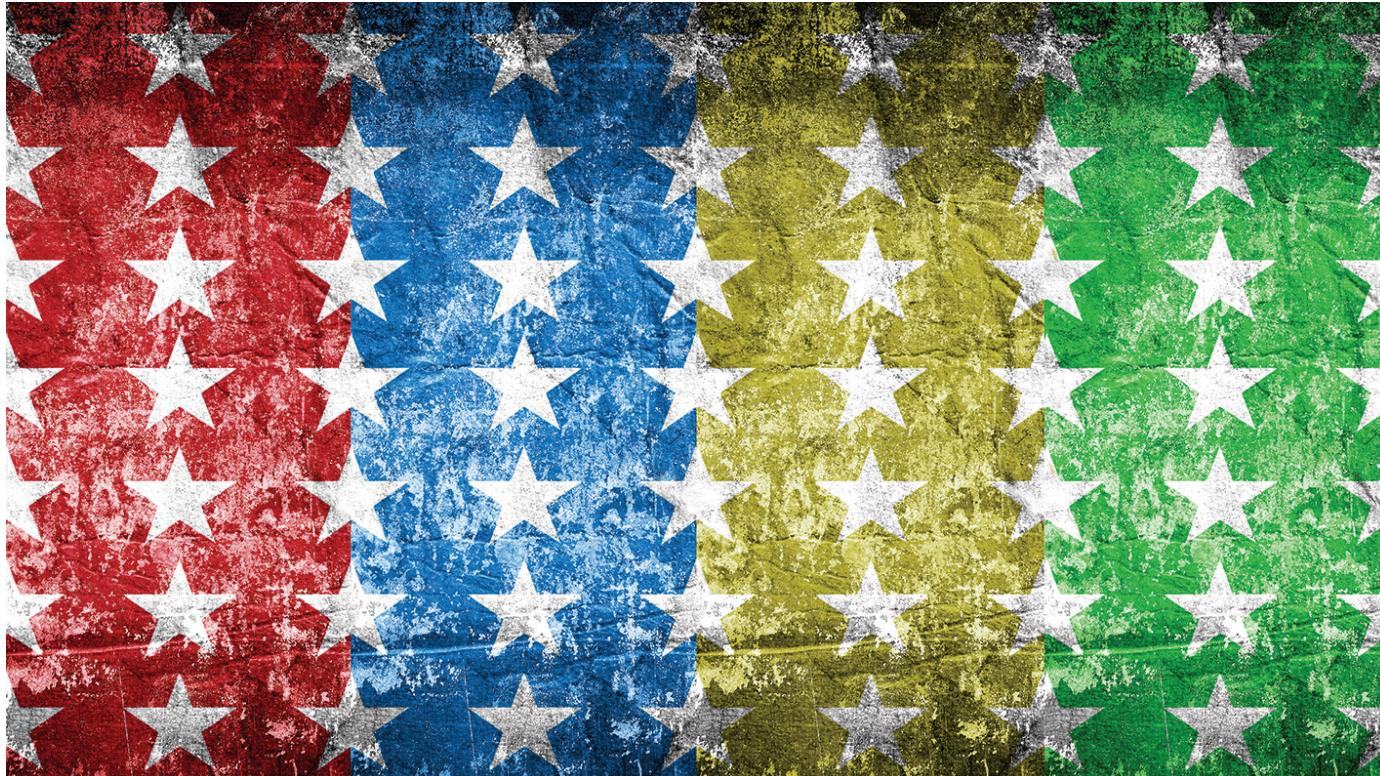
AMERICAN CLASSICS



PHILIP GLASS

Violin Concerto No. 2 'American Four Seasons' **Violin Sonata**

Piotr Plawner, Violin • Gerardo Vila, Piano
Berner Kammerorchester • Philippe Bach



Philip Glass (b. 1937)

Violin Concerto No. 2 'American Four Seasons' • Sonata for Violin and Piano

Philip Glass, now in his eighties, has become an *éminence grise* in American music. From his earliest days as an acknowledged master of minimalism (a label he emphatically rejects), he has continued to be a powerful yet controversial figure, with admirers and detractors equally passionate in their feelings about his music. But two things stand out in his decades-long career, and both are well represented by the works on this recording: he has always been inspired by collaborative work, and he continues to build on the past even while seeking new paths. To the extent that a concerto or sonata is collaborative – both in the sense of a composer working with a virtuoso and of a soloist working “in concert” with an orchestra or piano – Glass has a natural affinity for both forms.

It was American violinist Robert McDuffie who proposed to Glass the notion of an “American Four Seasons” – a work that could be programmed with the classic Vivaldi warhorse to provide a study in contrasts as well as back-to-back virtuoso vehicles for the soloist. McDuffie had fallen in love with Glass’s *Violin Concerto No. 1* (1987) after hearing Gidon Kremer’s premiere recording of the piece, and he recorded it himself in 1998. He began talking to the composer about a sequel in 2002, but Glass, flush with other commissions, was not able to begin writing until the summer of 2009. The commission for the *Concerto* came from a consortium of arts organizations and two orchestras, the Toronto Symphony Orchestra and the London Philharmonic Orchestra. It premiered in Toronto, Canada, on December 9 2009, with McDuffie as soloist and Peter Oundjian conducting the Toronto Symphony Orchestra.

Although there is no mistaking Glass for Vivaldi, there are certain Baroque characteristics that link the two works. Glass’s orchestration, for strings and synthesizer, could have resulted in new, modernistic timbres, but by designating a harpsichord-like sound for the synth, the composer places the work firmly in the early 18th-century tradition. (Let it be noted that the synthesizer does not act

as a traditional continuo instrument. For the most part, it merely doubles things that are happening in the strings and does not come much into its own until the third movement.) And by substituting separate movements for solo violin (interspersed between concertante movements) for traditional cadenzas, he clearly evokes the spirit of Bach’s solo works for the instrument. Even his titles for these sections bear a Baroque stamp: replace *Prologue* and *Song* with *Prelude* and *Aria* and the Bach connection is clear. Interestingly, Glass composed these intervening movements with the idea that they could be separated from the *Concerto* to make a free-standing work for solo violin.

Even some of Glass’s most identifying thumbprints – use of arpeggio figures and frequent repetitions – evoke the Baroque masters. But he leaves the period far behind in his harmonies that, while triad-based and mostly consonant, emphatically do not function in any way that Vivaldi (and especially Bach) would have recognized or approved. Absent as well is any sense of the counterpoint that was so important in Baroque composition. But what remains is a sense of palpable energy and momentum that outpaces most Baroque *Allegros*.

Another difference between the two works is that, while Vivaldi prefaced each movement with a poem identifying the season in question, Glass has chosen not to label the movements and allow each listener to decide for themselves which season the music evokes. As the composer has written, “When the music was completed, I sent it on to Bobby, who seemed to have quickly seen how the movements of my *Concerto No. 2* related to the ‘Seasons.’ Of course, Bobby’s interpretation, although similar to my own, proved to be also somewhat different. This struck me as an opportunity then, for the listener to make his/her own interpretation. Therefore, there will be no instructions for the audience, no clues as to where Spring, Summer, Winter and Fall might appear in the new concerto – an interesting, though not worrisome, problem for the listener. After all, if Bobby and I are not in complete

agreement, an independent interpretation can be tolerated and even welcomed.”

After a virtuosic *Prelude* grounded firmly in D minor, the first movement moves into G minor – a shift from dominant to tonic that further ties the piece to tradition. Throughout the course of the movement, Glass veers freely between G minor and A minor, and flirts with the conflict between rhythms in two and rhythms in three that will be a feature of each movement. The conclusion in A minor segues naturally to the first *Song*, fittingly in E minor, which leads in turn to the second movement, *Calm*, that never strays from A minor. This begins and ends as a cantilena, although more agitated rhythms stir up the placid waters from time to time. The following *Song* is likewise in A minor.

The third movement is stormy, tempestuous – make of that what you will, seasons-wise. It opens in D minor but soon moves to A minor (again note the traditional progression). Eventually, the storm seems to spend itself, and the soloist drops out for the last 32 bars, returning for the final *Song*, which employs double stops to enrich the texture and, at last, provide at least a hint of Bachian counterpoint. The concluding movement calls to mind the words of composer Lukas Foss, in describing his *Baroque Variations*: “torrents of Baroque sixteenth-notes, washed ashore by ocean waves...” The torrent is mostly unrelenting, and the rhythmic pull of two against three comes to the fore more strikingly than before. It is like a fever-dream of Baroque passion, insisting on A minor and never letting go until the final chord.

Retired architect Martin Murray commissioned Glass’s *Sonata for Violin and Piano* in honor of his wife’s seventieth birthday. Violinist Maria Bachmann and pianist Jon Klibanoff worked closely with the composer in developing the three-movement work, which they premiered on 28 February 2009, at the Whitaker Center in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Although the piece uses rhythm as a structural building block in a way that is typical of the composer, it uses harmony in a manner that,

for Glass, is almost daringly traditional – as if he were unashamedly evoking past masters. The explanation lies in the composer’s past. As he explains, “Among my earliest memories of enjoying music are the many hours spent listening to the great masterpieces of 19th-century chamber music with my father, Benjamin Glass. He had a small record shop in downtown Baltimore and he regularly would bring home 78-rpm albums. Among his favorites were the violin/piano sonatas of Brahms, Fauré and the great masterpiece of Franck. I spent many, many hours with my father listening to these works.” So, when Maria Bachmann approached him about a new work for herself and Klibanoff, “these musical memories immediately came to mind.”

The influences are clear, especially in the lyrical second movement where the ghost of Fauré haunts Glass’s melodic and harmonic language. There are hints of modal flavoring in the first movement, and the final movement is a dazzling example of virtuoso display that can leave the audience – not to mention the performers – exhausted.

The two works on this recording exemplify the existential Glass question: if these are bold, modernistic works, why are they so enjoyable? The composer himself suggested the answer in Joseph Roddy’s article *Listening to Glass*, published in 1981. “It’s not that I’m returning to an earlier harmonic language,” he said. “Harmony, or the crisis of harmony, is not really an issue. Whether music is dissonant or consonant has become irrelevant. We can no longer say, ‘Well, if it’s consonant it is old-fashioned and if it’s dissonant it is modern.’ That’s what we could say back in the ‘30s. There is plenty of consonant music around now. ... But what seems to appeal to my audiences is something else, the focus on structure rather than on theme. What’s focus? It’s the way some music has now of drawing people into a different world without time. And without boredom.”

Frank K. DeWald

Piotr Plawner



Photo: Joël Schweizer

Piotr Plawner is one of the most creative and talented violinists of our time, and is renowned for his virtuosity. He has been awarded First Prize at five international violin competitions, including the 1995 ARD International Music Competition in Munich. He has performed at many prestigious venues, including in Châtelet, Paris, at the Schauspielhaus, Berlin, the Elbphilharmonie, Hamburg, the Teatro Monumental, Madrid, and the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam. He has been a guest of major European orchestras, and he has worked with eminent conductors. Plawner's broad repertoire spans from the Baroque to contemporary music. In addition to his solo career, Plawner regularly appears with the renowned pianist Bruno Canino and several chamber music ensembles. In 2015 he was awarded the Gloria Artis medal by the Polish Minister of Culture for his outstanding contribution to Polish culture. Piotr Plawner plays a Tomasso Balestrieri violin.

www.piotrplawner.com

Gerardo Vila



Born in Buenos Aires, Gerardo Vila studied at the Conservatorio Nacional Superior de Música with Maria Teresa Criscuolo. Further studies followed with Maria Tipo in Geneva and with Karl Engel in Bern. He also participated in masterclasses with Maurizio Pollini, György Sándor, Luiz de Moura Castro and Tatiana Nikolayeva. In 1987, he received the Premier Prix de Virtuosité avec Distinction at the Geneva Conservatory and won numerous prizes at international piano competitions, including First Prize at the Maria Canals International Music Competition in Barcelona. As a soloist Vila has performed with renowned orchestras such as the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande, the Orquestra Ciutat de Barcelona, the Dresden Philharmonic, the Orchestre de Chambre de Lausanne and the Berner Symphonieorchester.

Since 2012 he has been a member of the ensemble I Salonisti. Vila teaches chamber music at the Haute École de Musique Genève, Neuchâtel, and performs worldwide as a soloist and chamber musician.

Berner Kammerorchester



Photo: Christian Henking

Since 1938 the Berner Kammerorchester (BKO) has performed for more than 150,000 people. As a professional chamber orchestra, the BKO is aware of the tradition it represents, performing both well-known and unknown works from the Baroque to contemporary pieces, and also commissioning original compositions. The ensemble has performed with eminent artists such as Patricia Kopatchinskaja, Patrick and Thomas Demenga and Mirjam Contzen, among others. The orchestra has given 75 world premieres and over 200 Bernese or Swiss premieres. Since 2013 the BKO has been led by Philippe Bach.

www.bko.ch

First Violin

Sibylla Leuenberger
(concertmaster)
Annemarie Jöhr Jaccard
Irene Arametti-Pastorello
Gina Maria McGuinness
Jérôme Fallier
Janina Müller

Second Violin

Simone Roggen
Daniela Bertschinger
Patricia Kuonen
Talita Karnusian
Anja Martin-Glatthard

Viola

Dorothee Schmid
Claudia Marino
Ruggero Pucci
Tonino Giuliano

Double Bass

Ivan Nestic
Sandor Török
Elisabeth Büttner

Keyboard

Annika Guy

Cello

Domitille Jordan
Claudia Eigenmann
Beatrice Wenger
Eric Abeijon

Philippe Bach



Photo: Sebastian Stolz

Philippe Bach studied French horn at the Musikhochschule Bern and the Conservatoire de Genève, as well as orchestral conducting at the Musikhochschule Zürich with Johannes Schlaefli. In 2005 he was the recipient of a fellowship from the prestigious American Academy of Conducting at the Aspen Music Festival and was Junior Fellow in Conducting at the Royal Northern College of Music in Manchester. A winner of the 2006 Jesús López-Cobos Conducting Competition, he subsequently became assistant to López-Cobos at the Teatro Real in Madrid from 2006 to 2008 and First Kapellmeister and deputy music director at Theater Lübeck from 2008 to 2011. Since 2011 Philippe Bach has been music director (GMD) at Das Meininger Theater. At the same time he also holds the positions of chief conductor and artistic director of the Kammerphilharmonie Graubünden in Chur, Switzerland and chief conductor of the Berner Kammerorchester. A regular guest with Orchestra della Svizzera Italiana, the Szczecin Philharmonic and the Bern Symphony Orchestra, Philippe Bach has also conducted many major European Orchestras such as the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic, the BBC Philharmonic, the Royal Scottish National Orchestra, the RTÉ National Symphony Orchestra, the Helsinki Philharmonic, the Tonhalle Orchester, the Basel Symphony, the Kammerorchester Basel, the Orchestre de Chambre de Lausanne and the Orquesta Sinfónica de Madrid. www.philippebach.ch

PHILIP GLASS

(b. 1937)

Violin Concerto No. 2

'American Four Seasons' (2009)

42:29

- | | | |
|---|------------|-------|
| 1 | Prologue | 1:16 |
| 2 | Movement 1 | 6:09 |
| 3 | Song No. 1 | 3:53 |
| 4 | Movement 2 | 11:32 |
| 5 | Song No. 2 | 2:24 |
| 6 | Movement 3 | 6:16 |
| 7 | Song No. 3 | 3:39 |
| 8 | Movement 4 | 7:12 |

Sonata for Violin and Piano (2008)

19:49

- | | | |
|----|------------|------|
| 9 | Movement 1 | 5:57 |
| 10 | Movement 2 | 7:22 |
| 11 | Movement 3 | 6:19 |

Piotr Plawner, Violin

Gerardo Vila, Piano 9–11

Berner Kammerorchester 1–8

Philippe Bach, Conductor 1–8

FORUM
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Philip Glass has become an iconic figure in American music. His works are often inspired by collaborations with other leading musicians, and the proposal of an “American Four Seasons” by the violinist Robert McDuffie to reflect Vivaldi’s famous masterpiece resulted in a concerto which evokes the Baroque spirit of early 18th-century violin tradition. With the *Concerto*’s range of moods, listeners are invited to decide for themselves which season the music evokes. The *Violin Sonata* sees Glass’s melodic and harmonic language haunted by the ghosts of Brahms, Fauré and Franck, “the meditativeness of this piece bringing a unique energy” for award-winning violinist Piotr Plawner.

www.naxos.com

Playing
Time:
62:27