

# program notes

BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

## ***If Falling Is a Leaf for Harpsichord and Strings (2019)***

*World Premiere*

*Commissioned by the Allentown Symphony Orchestra*

CHRISTOPHER THEOFANIDIS ■ BORN IN 1967

Christopher Theofanidis, one of America's most prominent composers, was born in Dallas on December 18, 1967, and studied at the University of Houston (B.M.), Eastman School of Music (M.M.) and Yale University (M.A. and D.M.A.). He has served on the faculty of the Yale University School of Music since September 2008; his previous teaching appointments include the Peabody Institute in Baltimore, Juilliard School, University of Houston, American Festival of the Arts and Texas Piano Institute. In summer 2014, he joined the faculties the Aspen Music Festival, Atlantic Center for the Arts and HighSCORE Festival in Italy. Theofanidis has held residencies with the Pittsburgh Symphony, California Symphony and Norfolk Chamber Music Festival, and has also served as a delegate to the United States–Japan Foundation's Leadership Program. His numerous awards include the Prix de Rome, a Guggenheim Fellowship, Barlow Prize, Charles Ives Fellowship from the American Academy of Arts and Letters, Bearn's Prize of Columbia University, Fulbright Fellowship for study in France, six ASCAP Morton Gould Prizes, and a 2007 Grammy nomination for *The Here and Now* for chorus and orchestra, based on the poetry of Rumi. In October 2003,

his *Rainbow Body* won the First Prize of £25,000 in the Masterprize Competition, a London-based, British-American partnership of EMI, the London Symphony Orchestra, Gramophone magazine, Classic FM and National Public Radio whose winner is chosen jointly by the public and a panel of experts; *Rainbow Body* has subsequently become one of the most frequently performed pieces by a living composer.

Theofanidis wrote of *If Falling Is a Leaf*, commissioned by the Allentown Symphony Orchestra, "The title of this work is from a poem that was written for this occasion by a friend of mine, called *If falling is a leaf*. Like the Vivaldi *Four Seasons*, it is inspired from a poem, but the poem itself is also responding to a David Hockney painting called *Autumn Leaves*. I decided that a single season seemed to be in order for this composition, and I love the vibrancy of fall — the colors, the wind, the air."

## ***The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires for Violin and Orchestra (1968)***

ASTOR PIAZZOLLA ■ 1921-1992

The greatest master of the modern tango was Astor Piazzolla, born in Mar Del Plata, Argentina, a resort town south of Buenos Aires, in 1921 and raised in New York City, where he lived with his father from 1924 to 1937. Before Astor was ten years old, his musical talents had been discovered by Carlos Gardel, then the most famous of all performers and composers of tangos and a cultural hero

in Argentina. At Gardel's urging, the young Astor returned to Buenos Aires in 1937 and joined the popular tango orchestra of Anibal Troilo as arranger and bandoneón player. Piazzolla studied classical composition with Alberto Ginastera in Buenos Aires, and in 1954, he wrote a symphony for the Buenos Aires Philharmonic that earned him a scholarship to study in Paris with Nadia Boulanger. When Piazzolla returned to Buenos Aires in 1956, he founded his own performing group, and began to create a modern style for the tango that combined elements of traditional tango, Argentinean folk music and contemporary classical, jazz and popular techniques into a "Nuevo Tango" that was as suitable for the concert hall as for the dance floor. Piazzolla toured widely, recorded frequently and composed incessantly until he suffered a stroke in Paris in August 1990. He died in Buenos Aires on July 5, 1992.

Piazzolla realized his electrifying blend of the fire and passion of the traditional tango with the vast expressive resources of modern harmony, texture and sonority in some 750 widely varied works that explore the genre's remarkable expressive range, from violent to sensual, from witty to melancholy, from intimate to theatrical.

Among Piazzolla's most ambitious concert works is *Las Cuatro Estaciones Porteñas* ("The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires"), published originally for piano solo in 1968 and later arranged for his own ensemble (he often used one of the movements to open his concerts) and for strings and piano. The four movements, beginning with *Spring*, are not specifically pictorial, as are Vivaldi's well-known precedents, but are instead general evocations of the changing seasons in Piazzolla's native Argentina.

## **The Four Seasons (ca. 1720)**

ANTONIO VIVALDI ■ 1678-1741

The *Gazette d'Amsterdam* of December 14, 1725 announced the issuance by the local publisher Michele Carlo Le Cène of a collection of twelve concertos for solo violin and orchestra by Antonio Vivaldi — *Il Cimento dell'Armonia e dell'Inventione*, or "The Contest between Harmony and Invention," Op. 8. The works were printed with a flowery dedication typical of the time to the Bohemian Count Wenzel von Morzin, a distant cousin of Haydn's patron before he came into the employ of the Esterházy family in 1761. On the title page, Vivaldi described himself as the "maestro in Italy" to the Count, though there is no record of his having held a formal position with him. Vivaldi probably met Morzin when he worked in Mantua from 1718 to 1720 for the Habsburg governor of that city, Prince Philipp of Hessen-Darmstadt, and apparently provided the Bohemian Count with an occasional composition on demand. (A bassoon concerto, RV 496, is headed with Morzin's name. Vivaldi claimed that Morzin had been enjoying the concertos of the 1725 Op. 8 set "for some years," implying earlier composition dates and a certain circulation of this music in manuscript copies, and hoped that their appearance in print would please his patron.

## **Symphony No. 6 in F major, Op. 68, "Pastoral" (1807-1808)**

LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN ■ 1770 -1827

Beethoven gave each movement of his "Pastoral" Symphony a title. The first movement, filled with verdant sweetness and good humor, is headed *The Awakening of Cheerful Feelings at the Arrival in the Country*. The violins pres-

ent a simple theme that pauses briefly after only four measures, as though the composer were alighting from a coach and taking a deep breath of the fragrant air before beginning his walk along a shaded path. The melody grows more vigorous before it quiets to lead to the second theme, a descending motive played by violins. Again, the spirits swell and then relax before the main theme returns to occupy most of the development. The recapitulation returns the themes of the exposition in more richly orchestrated settings. *Scene at the Brook* exudes an air of tranquility amid gentle activity. The sonata-form movement starts with a fragmentary idea in the first violins sounded above a rich accompaniment. The second subject begins with a descending motion, like that of the first movement, but then turns back upward to form an inverted arch. A development section utilizing the main theme follows. The recapitulation recalls the earlier themes with enriched orchestration. In the closing pages of this movement, the rustling accompaniment ceases while all Nature seems to hold its breath to listen to the songs of three birds — nightingale, dove and cuckoo. Twice this tiny avian concert is heard before the movement closes. *Merry Gathering of the Peasants* is filled with a rustic bump-tiousness and simple humor that recall a hearty if somewhat ungainly country dance; the central trio is a stomping dance. The festivity is halted mid-step by distant thunder portending a *Storm*. As the tempest passes over the horizon, the silvery voice of the flute leads into the finale, *Shepherd's Song: Joyful, Thankful Feelings after the Storm*. The clarinet sings the unpretentious melody of a shepherd, which returns, rondo-fashion, to support the form of the movement.

# ALLENTOWN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

MARCH 7-8, 2020  
8:00 P.M., SYMPHONY HALL

P R O G R A M

**DIANE M. WITTRY** MUSIC DIRECTOR/CONDUCTOR

*If Falling Is a Leaf* CHRISTOPHER THEOFANIDIS  
for Harpsichord and Strings  
World Premiere  
Commissioned by the Allentown Symphony orchestra

Selections from:

*The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires* ASTOR PIAZZOLLA  
*The Four Seasons* ANTONIO VIVALDI

Violin Soloist: Lindsay Deutsch

*Spring* (Op. 8, No. 1, R. 269) VIVALDI

I. The spring has come: Allegro

*Spring in Buenos Aires* PIAZZOLLA

*Summer in Buenos Aires*

*Summer* (Op. 8, No. 2, R. 315) VIVALDI

III. Alas, fears of summer heat are borne out: Presto

*Autumn* (Op. 8, No. 3, R. 293)

III. At dawn the hunters set out: Allegro

*Winter in Buenos Aires* PIAZZOLLA

*Winter* (Op. 8, No. 4, R. 297) VIVALDI

II. Spending quiet and happy days by the fire: Largo

III. Walking on the ice with slow steps: Allegro

INTERMISSION

Symphony No. 6 in F major, LUDWIG VAN BEETHOVEN  
Op. 68, "Pastoral"

The Awakening of Cheerful Feelings at the Arrival

Scene at the Brook: Andante molto mosso

Merry Gathering of the Peasants: Allegro —

Storm: Allegro —

Shepherd's Song: Joyful, Thankful Feelings after the Storm: Allegretto