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***The Four Seasons in flux: Interpreting Nigel Kennedy through a hybrid biography***

Abstract:

Vivaldi's concertos commonly referred to as *The Four Seasons* have played a key part in the career of British violinist Nigel Kennedy. Paul Munden has followed many of Kennedy's projects and performances, and is writing a book that is part biography, part critical study, musing on the nature of individual talent and its unorthodox tendencies, and with the prose chapters linked by poetic *transitoires* – Kennedy's own term for the newly composed sections that link the movements of his *New Four Seasons* recording. The concept underlying the book is that a maverick subject needs a maverick literary form to do it justice. At the heart of the project is a new translation of the Italian sonnets, often attributed to Vivaldi himself, which are written in the original *Four Seasons* score, making clear the music's programmatic intent. The new translations, which this paper presents, take that intersemiotic origin as their cue, their interpretation refracted through the music – specifically as reconceived in Kennedy's latest performances, with a wilfully contemporary idiom brought into play.

Biographical notes:

Paul Munden is Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the University of Canberra, where he is also Program Manager for the International Poetry Studies Institute (IPSI). He is General Editor of *Writing in Education* and *Writing in Practice*, both published by the UK's National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE), of which he was Director from 1994 to 2018. He has worked as conference poet for the British Council and edited *Feeling the Pressure: Poetry and science of climate change* (British Council, 2008). He has published five collections including *Analogue/Digital* (Smith|Doorstop, 2015), *The Bulmer Murder* (Recent Work Press, 2017) and *Chromatic* (UWA Publishing, 2017). He is co-editor of the new Recent Work Press anthology, *Metamorphic*, in which 100 contemporary poets respond to Ovid in the 2000th anniversary of his death.

Anouska Zummo is a PhD student at the University of Durham. She is translating the Sicilian dialect poetry of Ignazio Buttitta, considering the ways in which dialect poetry responded to Fascist censorship of regional language in Italy and how such complexities might be represented in English translations.

Keywords:

creative writing – translation – Nigel Kennedy – Vivaldi – poetry – biography

## Introduction

In January 2017, 28 years after releasing his first recording of Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*, which broke the Guinness world record for sales of a classical album, British violinist Nigel Kennedy toured Australia with a radically new version of the concertos. Paul Munden, who was present at the Sydney Opera House concert, has followed many of Kennedy's projects and performances, and is writing a book that is part biography and part critical study, musing on the nature of individual talent and its unorthodox tendencies: how exceptional creativity is nurtured or repressed; how knowledge and self-discipline underpin departures from artistic convention; and how, when art of the 'past' is newly inhabited, *lived* – with anything from politics to football in the mix – the effect is transportive, and in defiance of traditional classification.

Classification, whether as 'child prodigy' or 'the bad boy of classical music', is something that Kennedy continues to resist. Some of the labels were born of marketing campaigns, and while Kennedy may be seen to have embraced them in broadening classical music's popular appeal, they were not always to his liking – or his longer-term benefit. A further resistance is to labelling itself, particularly the way musical genres are pigeonholed. Kennedy has never wanted to be viewed merely as a classical musician, and his latest *Four Seasons* recording would suggest that he doesn't think Vivaldi should be categorised either. In his own memoir, *Always Playing* (1991), he refuses to give us details of where his parents were born and so on, offering 'none of that autobiographical shit' that might be seen to reinforce the gratuitously rebellious image his critics accuse him of peddling. It represents, rather, a genuine quest for something different and more meaningful – both to Kennedy himself and his readers; 'autobiography' is yet another confining label to be dismissed.

How, then, is a 'biographical' writer to approach their subject in the face of such attitude? The challenge is considerable, but Munden is approaching the writing not as a traditional biographer but as a poet. The concept underlying the projected book, *MONSTER! An interpretation of Nigel Kennedy*, is that a maverick subject needs a maverick literary form to do it any kind of justice.

The prose chapters are being linked by poetic *transitoires* – Kennedy's own term for the newly composed sections that link the movements of his *New Four Seasons* recording. He first introduced the *transitoire* in his collaboration with Stephen Duffy on *Music in Colors* (1992, released 2004), and used it extensively on the first of the Nigel Kennedy Quintet recordings, *A Very Nice Album* (2008) [1]. Part of its effect is to work against the sense of individual movements or tracks being

'compartmentalised', and in this respect the 'device' can be identified in Vivaldi's own compositions, where the traditional three-movement demarcations within a concerto are sometimes remarkably blended. 'Summer' from *The Four Seasons* provides an apt example. Kennedy's addition of *transitoires* should perhaps be viewed as an entirely logical extension of the original music's fluidity. Kennedy was already moving in this direction with his very first (1989) *Seasons* recording, making small, improvised links between some movements. More will be said later about the prevalence of improvisation in Vivaldi's own time.

Munden has been influenced by a number of other prose works that incorporate poems, notably two books by Paul Hyland, *Purbeck: The Ingrained Island* (1978) and *Wight: Biography of an Island* (1984), both of which include poems as preludes to the chapters. That is an unusual literary combination, and one that appeals to Munden, who has a particular interest in presenting readers with poetry unexpectedly, believing that many people have an automatic resistance to poetry but appreciate it more when their guard is down. His own work as a poet at British Council conferences on scientific themes has explored this potential for poetry to work in a guerrilla fashion, finding new audiences while at the same time communicating complex notions that may be elusive to those without specialist knowledge (Munden 2014). Kennedy's determination to make classical music communicate to those without specialist musical knowledge (or, he might say, 'preconceptions') is not dissimilar.

Hyland's subtitle, *Biography of an Island*, is revealing. Quite apart from the inclusion of poems, the book makes clear its hybrid intent, going beyond a classic topographical study towards something more *personal*. As Homi Bhabha has stated:

hybridity is precisely about the fact that when a new situation, a new alliance formulates itself, it may demand that you should translate your principles, rethink them, extend them [...] [as against] a timid traditionalism – always trying to read a new situation in terms of some pre-given model or paradigm, which is a reactionary reflex, a conservative 'mindset'. (Bhabha 1990: 216)

As readers, faced with the term 'biography' applied to an island, and with poems in the mix, we are asked to abandon our expectations – firstly of the literary form presented, and consequently of the subject itself. It is a high-risk strategy in a largely conservative literary environment [2]. When Jessica Wilkinson refers to her books – on actress Marion Davies (2012) and composer Percy Grainger (2014) – as 'poetic biographies', she unsettles the readership of two literary genres at one fell swoop. The content, with its highly experimental layout and use of visual collage, is equally challenging, but Wilkinson clearly believes that the nature of her subject demands nothing less.

A hybrid form, then, may be seen as a useful development in capturing an exceptional subject. Since both Hyland and Wilkinson are poets, it is perhaps unsurprising that they should bring poetry to the task. The same may be said of Munden but there is another, compelling reason why poetry should feature in his Kennedy project.

### **Music, poetry and transcreation**

Vivaldi's concertos commonly referred to as *The Four Seasons* have played a key part in Kennedy's career, and continue to do so. They are part of *Il cimento dell'armonia e dell'invenzione (The contest between harmony and invention)*, a set of twelve concertos published in 1725. They are distinguished, musically, above the other works, but also on account of the sonnets included in the score:

These sonnets were published along with the music for The Four Seasons (which Vivaldi composed based on four paintings of the seasons by Marco Ricci). The poems are generally thought to be written by Vivaldi himself – based on comments he made in the margins of his sheet music, but there is some question over the attribution. (Spanoudis 2009: 1)

2  
*Violino Principale*  
*La Primavera*  
**CONCERTO I**  
*A giunta e' la Primavera*  
*Allegro*  
*Piano*  
*Forte* **B** *Canto de gl' Vecelli* *Piano*  
*La salutari gli Angeli con lieto canto*  
*E folti allo spiraz de Zeffiretti*  
*Scorrono i Fonti*  
*Con dolce mormorio scorrono in tanto* *Piano*  
**D** *Tuoni vengono coprendo*  
*Forte* *L'acer di nero amante e Campi e Tuoni ad annuntiarla olette*  
*Solo*

Figure 1

The inclusion of the poems – as individual lines at specific points within the score (see Figure 1) – make clear the music's deliberate depiction of particular scenes. If attributed to Vivaldi, the inclusion of the poetry alongside the music would mark a significant, early instance of intersemiotic translation (the act of re-creation across

different sign systems), a notion that is further enriched by the work's ekphrastic origins.

The literary merit of the sonnets is insubstantial compared to the fame of the music, and translations have tended to emphasise their archaic language, failing to be particularly memorable. Not even those translations appearing in the booklet accompanying Kennedy's new recording manage to rise above the banal. Here is the first stanza of 'Spring' together with the original Italian:

Giunt' è la Primavera e festosetti  
 La Salutan gl' Augei con lieto canto,  
 E i fonti allo Spirar de' Zeffiretti  
 Con dolce mormorio Scorrano intanto

Spring has arrived and festively  
 the birds greet it with happy song,  
 and the streams, blown by the West Wind,  
 flow past with gentle murmur. (Kennedy 2015)

There is little, poetically, to champion here, certainly in the English version. The original is at least prettified (and dignified) by the easy Italian rhymes, and some might claim that the Italian language is more intrinsically musical. The line 'Con dolce mormorio Scorrano intanto' has a rhythmic sonority that achieves a delightful onomatopoeic effect even for those with no grasp of Italian. The flow of soft, open vowel sounds corresponds to Vivaldi's groups of semi-quavers alternating between two notes (see C in Figure 1). As Rita Williams (2008) puts it:

Vivaldi attempted to convey in sound what was written on the page about birds, zephyr winds and storms that break with thunder and lightning. So engrossed in the challenge was Vivaldi that he included supplementary 'captions' throughout the music, directing the musician's attention to the barking dogs, chattering teeth and other striking effects. (Williams 2008: 5) [3]

We may never know if Williams' order of events here is correct. The term 'captions' is certainly interesting, akin to musical 'stage directions', but in suggesting a fragmented sequence of *effects*, rather than the harmonious whole of a poem (whatever its other failings), it distracts us from the core endeavour – the synchronous translation of word, image and music, each with structural form. The role of the original sonnets – let alone their authorship – may remain somewhat unclear, but they exist in perfect parallel to the music, seemingly an inspiration while also providing an explanation of programmatic intent – itself a relatively new development at the time.

Whatever their poetic merits, the place of the poems in the broader history of art is of considerable significance, yet translations that do Vivaldi's sonnets some justice are surprisingly few. Those by WD Snodgrass (1980) are notable exceptions, accomplished sonnets in their own right, and Snodgrass is at pains to match the original segmentation:

It is my suspicion that [Vivaldi] 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. (Snodgrass 1980: 70) [4]

By contrast, Munden and Zummo resisted such a linear approach, wanting the music to be present in the transaction; and for Munden, working on the Kennedy project, this was to include the violinist's particular interpretation – complicated by the fact that it varies from any one performance to the next. Even the physical attributes of performance were to be brought into play: Kennedy in his customary Aston Villa football shirt, bumping fists with his fellow musicians.

So although Zummo initially provided literal translations, following the exact Italian syntax, it was the notion of *The Four Seasons* as an existing work of intersemiotic translation that held sway in the further drafting. While attempting to capture plentiful detail of the original words, the new translation is refracted through Vivaldi's music – specifically as interpreted by Kennedy in his most recent performances; as with Kennedy, a wilfully contemporary idiom is brought into play. It is the overall, multidimensional quality of what we engage with, witnessing a Kennedy/Vivaldi performance, that mattered as much to Munden, translating the sonnets, as did the Italian words on the page. His approach is perhaps endorsed by Michael Edwards, who remarks of the translator:

he can and should be concerned for what we call, out of sad necessity, poetry's aesthetic element, for what the Anglo-Saxons called *songcraft*, a term which expresses the work and study of poetry more strikingly than *poetics* or *the art of poetry*, which underlines the relation between poetry and the voice, and which affirms jubilantly the poem's desire to be fully achieved in all dimensions (Edwards 2011: 17).

A further principle underlying the level of invention – again true of Kennedy too – is one that was already prevalent during the baroque. It was common practice to treat scores as the basis for improvisation; Vivaldi would have expected no less.[5] Improvisation is Kennedy's own forte. He will slip jazz into his *Four Seasons* performances, and is rarely content to deliver a 'pre-written' cadenza. Liam Guilar, in his PhD thesis (2017), describes how his own use of original material 'varies from literal translation, via adaptation, to appropriation, to something more like a musical improvisation on a theme' (30), and the latter phrase seems particularly pertinent to a Kennedy-related translation. Guilar, writing about Old English poems, also makes interesting mention of Carol Braun Pasternack's (2006) claim that the poems are characterised by a 'movement structure' (63):

She argues that the Old English poems we know are made up of 'movements' and that these movements were interchangeable between poems, could be used separately, and their order rearranged as a user (scop, scribe or reader) saw fit. [...] Pasternack claims the movement structure means a text is open 'to a certain amount of play, giving the reader the choice of leaving the ambiguities open, at play, or resolving them through interpretation' (p. 23). She also claims that 'What the text does not do is dictate to its readers a single meaning, orthodox or otherwise' (p. 23). [...] Pasternack's point is that, in use, any Old English text could have been reassembled to produce a very different 'poem'. (Guilar 2017: 63) [6]

'The poem' is thus made manifest by performance – and with considerable scope for variety. Paul Muldoon takes this notion even further when he writes of translation that 'both original poem and poetic translation are manifestations of some ur-poem' (Muldoon 2006: 195). It is fascinating to relate such comment to *The Four Seasons*, of which we simply do not know whether the poems or the music came first.

At this point, one might wonder that Kennedy has not taken even greater liberties in presenting the multiple movements of *The Four Seasons*. In an era when climate

change seems to have run amok with our seasonal expectations, one might reasonably be confronted with some radical re-ordering.[7] Kennedy has indeed occasionally broken off mid-sequence, to perform something else, and his 1989 release also featured CD singles, 'Summer' with Gershwin's 'Summertime' as a bonus track. (The concertos were all sold in this additional way, in the manner of iTunes before it existed. The singles were also included as free gifts with Sunday newspapers.) 'Greatest Hits' compilations also present isolated seasons, though it is interesting that on Kennedy's own *Greatest Hits* CD 'Spring' and 'Summer' bookend the first disc – in the 'correct' order. Kennedy, who is a considerable music scholar (however much he might spurn such a description and his public persona seem to contradict it), has utmost regard for musical structure, and is remarkably faithful to structural imperatives, however much he stretches their compass. In the *New Four Seasons* recording, his introduction of jazz trumpet in 'Autumn' may seem radical, but it opens up the party atmosphere of the harvest celebrations – precisely in accordance with the accompanying poem – without distorting Vivaldi's musical progression. [8]

Kennedy's approach, from which Munden takes his cue, shares much with Walter Benjamin's concept of translation as a balancing act between capturing the original spirit and making it new. Kennedy is outspoken about so-called 'authentic', 'historical' performances, going so far as to accuse the classical musical establishment of turning 'philosophical masterpieces' into 'shallow showpieces' (Alberge 2011: n.p.). In his view, such performances are fundamentally misconceived, a view that chimes with Benjamin when he states:

no translation would be possible if in its ultimate essence it strove for likeness to the original. For in its afterlife – which could not be called that if it were not a transformation and a renewal of something living – the original undergoes a change. (Benjamin 1968 [1923]: 69-82)

A useful term for the 'transformation and renewal' involved in both literary translation and musical performance is 'transcreation', made popular by Brazilian poet Haroldo de Campos, who considered that 'every translation of a creative text will always be a "re-creation", a parallel and autonomous, although reciprocal, translation – "transcreation"' (De Campos 2007: 315). As Caren Florance and Melinda Smith describe it, '[transcreation] is a recognition that exact translation is impossible and that each new work is a new creation based upon the original' (Florance & Smith 2017: n.p.). Daniel Pedersen mentions its commercial application as 'a strategy to perform all the adjustments necessary to make a campaign work in all the target markets, while at the same time staying loyal to the original creative intent of the campaign' (Pedersen 2014: 58). When considering the unprecedented marketing campaign that surrounded Kennedy's 1989 *Four Seasons* release, Pedersen's comment is particularly intriguing.

Munden's 'transcreation' of *The Four Seasons* sonnets was in part a means to understanding something of Kennedy's own processes – to think like Kennedy, even to *behave* like Kennedy, and Munden has been starting each day by playing Vivaldi on the violin, just as Kennedy starts each day practising Bach. That aspect of the biographer or storyteller's role was something Munden had already explored (in a much darker vein) in *The Bulmer Murder* (2017), the story of Captain John Bolton, accused of murdering his apprentice girl, Elizabeth Rainbow, in 1774, Bulmer being the village in which Munden himself has lived for over 30 years. The long title poem at the heart of the book is itself a hybrid literary form, combining prose extracts from the original account of the trial with new poems in which Munden retraces the various

incidents within the story. His preoccupation in the book is with the role of the writer as an accomplice, and in the final stanzas the Rs in the word 'Murder' twist over into Ns, spelling Munden's own name. It's an unnerving 'act', stepping into the shoes of a 'dangerous' character, but one that would seem to pay dividends in producing a text that disconcerts in ways that it surely must, if true to its subject.

For Munden's Kennedy project, bringing his own creativity to the task of 'interpretation' was fundamental. Embarking on the venture, he was already involved in a sonnet-writing project with Paul Hetherington at the University of Canberra, exploring how the traditional form might be treated with a degree of freedom. That same spirit of experiment informed his 'Four Seasons' writing more than any conscious engagement with translation theory, though it is interesting, in retrospect, to consider how the instinctive experiments fit with such theory, and where the poems sit on the spectrum between 'translations' and 'versions' (Reynolds 2011: 29). In terms of Roman Jakobson's tripartite distinction – between '*intralinguistic* (rewording), *interlinguistic* (translation proper) and *intersemiotic* (transmutation)' (quoted in Eco 2001: 65) – the *intersemiotic* or *transmutation* category clearly applies best.

Perhaps most relevant, though, is Eugene Nida's distinction between *formal* and *dynamic* equivalence:

A translation of dynamic equivalence aims at complete naturalness of expression, and tries to relate the receptor to modes of behavior relevant within the context of his own culture. (Nida 1964: 159)

Considering various degrees of equivalence within translation, Nida's *dynamic* equivalence hints at a transference of the spirit or sense of the original, whilst accepting that this may retain faithfulness beyond literal transfer: 'Thus a translation can express an evident "deep" sense of a text even by violating both lexical and referential faithfulness' (Eco 2001: 14).

In these new *Four Seasons* sonnets, the *culture* (to use Nida's term) is partly that of baroque concertos, partly that of the Munden/Hetherington 'unruly sonnets' project (Munden and Hetherington 2017), and partly that of maverick musician, Nigel Kennedy. The new sonnets aim to include all key images from the originals, while adhering more insistently to the vitality of Vivaldi's music – and Kennedy's rendition. Where he (Kennedy) takes the greatest liberties – as with a crushing electric violin in the summer storm – so do the new sonnets.

The original *Four Seasons* sonnets, once the individual lines are gathered from their positions in the score, are habitually presented in stanzas corresponding to the three movements of each concerto, rather than a more traditional sonnet form. The new translation follows suit, though varying the allocation of lines. The middle stanza/movement (typically a slow movement, *adagio* or *largo*) is indented, to accentuate the shift; sometimes, however, the syntax straddles the divide, reflecting the fluidity between movements mentioned above. There is a flexible rhyme scheme, with a ten-syllable line (the typical English equivalent of the longer Italian line) maintained throughout.

Each sonnet is titled like its equivalent concerto (e.g. 'Sonnet in E major'), signaling the intersemiotic nature of the work. The titling (and reference to musical tempi, e.g. *allegro – largo – allegro*) is partly a conceit, a tribute to Vivaldi's own dual thinking,



but it is also suggestive of how music and poetry, despite fundamental differences, can operate alike. As Burton Raffel states:

Both music and poetry are, in a sense, languages within languages. Organized sound – perhaps the broadest definition of music – is scarcely ever a communication system in the way that words are: music speaks, to be sure, but if its message is to be translated into verbal terms only the most elementary expressions are recognizable. But in the manipulation of its proper component parts – pitch, rhythm, instrumental color, dynamics, and the like – music is closely analogous to speech. (Raffel 1964-65: 453)

In Munden's 'Winter' there are some notable 'departures' from the original text that actually align the words even more closely with the music. The *brrrrr*, for instance, is nowhere in sight within the original text; it's taken from the emphasised vibrato on a single low note at the related moment in the music. It also corresponds to the chattering teeth, aiming for intensified onomatopoeia. Likewise, the 'pizzicato' rain mirrors the music as much as the Italian text, with the quality of verbal/musical sound the priority, yet with the 'introduced' word (pizzicato) acting as a bond with the original language. There is a deliberate conflation here of music and poetry, which accords with what Ray Jackendoff (2009) has argued:

poetry is the result of superimposing musical principles to some degree on linguistic utterances. Thus to the extent that poetic form conveys affect, it is precisely because it invokes principles of musical perception that are not normally associated with language. (Jackendoff 2009: 198)

That music and poetry relate in this way holds particular significance for the translator and yet, as Şebnem Susam-Sarajeva has commented, 'the topic of translation and music has remained on the periphery of translation studies' (Susam-Sarajeva 2014: 190). As she goes on to say:

Few of us with a background in translation studies can effectively deal with meanings derived not only from text, but also from melody, pitch, duration, loudness, timbre, dynamics, rhythm, tempo, expression, harmony, pause, stress or articulation in music. If we consider that research in translation and music may also require a background in media studies, cultural studies and/or semiotics, we can begin to appreciate the difficulties encountered by anyone who ventures into this field. (190)

The Zummo-Munden *Four Seasons* sonnets have been informed by the authors' different but complementary backgrounds – in translation studies, music and poetry. In Susam-Sarajeva's words, they have experienced how 'The intersection of translation and music [...] can enrich our understanding of what translation might entail, how far its boundaries can be extended and how it relates to other forms of expression' (Susam-Sarajeva 2014: 191). That last point, in particular, is one that Munden plans to explore in his larger, ongoing study of Kennedy and his transcreational performances of musical texts.

## Conclusion

*The Four Seasons* recording of 1989 was Kennedy's breakthrough, even though he had already achieved considerable acclaim with his recordings of the Elgar, Mendelssohn, Bruch, Tchaikovsky and Sibelius violin concertos, and music by Bartok and Duke Ellington. It has remained central to his persona, despite the fact that he has bemoaned EMI's requests for more of the same: 'Where's the fifth season?' he claims they used to say. It therefore seems appropriate for these new translations of the *Four*

*Seasons* sonnets (printed here below in full) to take centre stage in Munden's Kennedy book.

This article has focused almost exclusively on the translations in order to explore in depth a particular challenge that seemed fruitful and of importance to the overall venture – *interpreting Nigel Kennedy*. In doing so, it has perhaps highlighted a general virtue of translation as a practice for writers. As Raffel comments:

Surely no one will deny that the immense facility with which musicians can cross-fertilize each other is a blessing to the art. It would seem to be largely poets, however – and only a minority even among poets – who are aware of how much translation can do to cross-fertilize them. (Raffel 1964-65: 456)

The Zummo-Munden collaboration has served a valuable purpose not only in translating the sonnets but also in approaching the larger subject – a musician for whom collaboration is an essential, driving force. Unlike music, poetry is often viewed as a predominantly solitary art, and the viability of poetry in translation is ever questioned. Perhaps a model of collaborative, intersemiotic, poetic translation may usefully unsettle both views.

## **THE FOUR SEASONS**

(Il Cimento dell' Armonia e dell' Inventione)

*after Vivaldi*

*for Nigel Kennedy and the Orchestra of Life*

### **Sonnet in E Major (La Primavera/Spring)**

*allegro – largo – allegro*

Ushered in by a noodling guitarist,  
the birds are in full swing; for the soloist,  
with this music in his veins, it's a lark.  
In his Villa shirt he chirps and chirrups  
while tight, bright buds unfurl to improvise  
a canopy of leaves. His supple wrist  
whips up a storm then settles for reprise.

A trance... he drifts off, sprawled under the trees  
among daisies and meadow buttercups,  
with a sampled, softly murmuring breeze  
and the viola's monotonous bark.

Bring on the cheerleaders, goat skins and pipes,  
revelry that breaks into yelps and whoops...  
The dogs are out – *Yeah!* A bump of the fist.

**Sonnet in G Minor (L'Estate/Summer)**

*allegro non molto – adagio – presto*

Scorched pines. A sweltering stasis. The heat  
has pressed the air almost to silence. Note  
follows note like stuttering beads of sweat  
but there – in the bow's quick tilt – the cuckoo,  
followed by a warbling dove and the trill  
of the finch, those fingers thrillingly close.  
Breezing triplets flutter against a beat  
the north wind blasts to hell – and there'll be more.

A fly-infested lull, a fractious growl  
itching for a livewire scare. So why not –  
with a stack of Marshalls to hand – let loose

the thunder and lightning for real? ... *One ... two*  
*mississippi three mississippi four ...*  
The cornfields are all trashed by golf-ball hail.

**Sonnet in F Major (L'Autunno/Autumn)**

*allegro – adagio molto – allegro*

Jazz trumpet? It's a party! – the harvest  
gathered in. The drinking is in earnest  
with flagons of claret and ale on tap;  
they drink at the gallop, drink till they drop,  
nod off ... only to get that second wind  
and party on full pelt into the night.

Passed out, they enter a parallel realm –

a kaleidoscopic haze in which time  
is an elasticated, weightless dream  
in the autumnal cool – sleeping till dawn

when it's hip flask, hunting horn, horse and hound.  
One poor terrified animal must run  
for its life – their sport. It gives up the fight.  
Job done, they saddle up and trot back home.

**Sonnet in F Minor (L'Inverno/Winter)**

*allegro non molto – largo – allegro*

Frost... snow... layers of ice. The wind has bite.  
We're shivering in its grip, a cold snap  
like nothing we've known... *brrrrrrr*... We run, and thump  
our numbed, gloved hands together, stop and stamp  
our snow-deep frozen boots on frozen earth.

Later, feet up, in a chair by the hearth,  
I hear the pizzicato rain outside,  
a soporific, intimate reprieve

before we're back on the shifting ice, slide  
and slip with skittering strings that believe  
they can negotiate the cracks. The slap-  
stick of our fall is what hurries our flight,  
and if the wind howls through the house despite  
battening it down, it's a shrill delight.

**Endnotes**

1. The two discs of *A Very Nice Album* are titled 'Melody' and 'Invention', in close reference to 'Harmony and Invention' in the title of the larger set of concertos to which *The Four Seasons* belong.
2. When Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Graywolf Press, 2014) won the National Book Critics Circle Award for Poetry, there was widespread disgruntlement in amongst the praise, but a growing number of hybrid works, e.g.

Vahni Capildeo's *Measures of Expatriation* (Carcanet, 2016) and other prose/poetry collections, suggests a changing literary landscape.

3. Kennedy has increasingly tended to emphasise the 'barking' in the second movement of 'Spring', with the violas producing a particularly gruff, almost 'unmusical' sound. He takes this even further in the third movement, leading his orchestra into vocalised barks before each reprise of the main theme.

4. On her album *Venezia* (Sony, 2006) Juliette Pochin sings lines from Vivaldi's sonnets over *The Four Seasons*, selectively replacing the solo violin. In early performances of his *New Four Seasons*, Kennedy also used vocalists. They are still credited on the recording, though at some stage they were clearly dropped from the mix.

5. A useful account of improvisation in the baroque era is provided by Hyesoo Yoo (2015).

6. Guilar points out that, 'given that there is rarely more than one version of an Old English poem Pasternack's argument is vulnerable to the objection that there is very little proof to support her theory' (Guilar 2017: 63).

7. Astor Piazzolla's *The Four Seasons of Buenos Aires* (1970) were first performed (and recorded) in the random order of Winter, Summer, Autumn, Spring. In *The New Four Seasons*, Kennedy maintains the original calendar sequence, but adds a guitar introduction that makes 'Spring' seem to emerge from an existing musical environment, rather than start from scratch. This, together with an additional 'End' track in a similar vein, is suggestive of an ongoing music, even a cycle. Electronic devices may of course make the cycle a reality.

8. Max Richter's *Recomposed* version of *The Four Seasons* (Deutsche Grammophon, 2012) makes far more radical departures. He comments: 'I've probably thrown away ... three quarters of the notes' (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qTapNp-31rU>).

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