

American Record Guide

November/December 2001

VIVALDI: *The Four Seasons*

Jessica Park, Tania Davison, Eun-Mee Jeong, Timothy O'Neill, v; Starling Chamber Orchestra/ Kurt Sassmannshaus – Starling 2001 – 42 minutes
Starling Project (513-421-4404 or www.starling.org)

No, friends, this is not just another *Four Seasons*.

This is a very special recording, for any number of reasons. For one thing, the oldest of the four soloists was 22 when the recording was made. For another, the soloists play two Stradivarius and two Guarneri instruments, loaned for the recording by Machold Rare Violins Ltd.. For another, the conductor, Kurt Sassmannshaus, is that rare musician, both a superb teacher and a splendid conductor. The pieces come together to make a remarkable whole.

There are a hundred little touches in the performances that tell us the soloists know exactly what to do with the priceless instruments entrusted to them. And a Maestro Sassmannshaus knows exactly what to do with his ensemble. Tempos are near-ideal, balances as close to perfect as I expect to hear. There is real feeling for the music, real fire and spirit in the playing. It truly is a joy to hear.

The recording was made in the Harris Concert Hall at Aspen, and is excellent: balanced, clean, rich, warm. The notes and packaging are excellent.

In the past I have been less than enthusiastic about versions of *Four Seasons* by distinguished professionals. I was skeptical about this one, but changed my mind in a hurry. This is one of those rare recordings that reaches out and grabs you, making you want to listen. I found it a deeply moving experience, and I encourage anyone interested in great performances to listen to it.

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