



TCHAIKOVSKY
THE SEASONS

Sissi Makropoulou *harp*

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky 1840-1893

The Seasons Op.37a (1876)

Arranged by Sissi Makropoulou

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|--|------|---|-------|
| 1. January At the Fireside/
By the Heart | 4'56 | 7. July Reaper's Song | 2'16 |
| <i>Moderato semplice, ma espressivo,
in E flat</i> | | <i>Allegro moderato con moto,
in E flat</i> | |
| 2. February Carnival | 4'09 | 8. August The Harvest | 5'16 |
| <i>Allegro giusto, in D</i> | | <i>Allegro vivace, in B minor</i> | |
| 3. March Song of the Lark | 2'56 | 9. September The Hunt | 4'07 |
| <i>Andantino espressivo, in G minor</i> | | <i>Allegro non troppo, in G</i> | |
| 4. April Snowdrop | 3'18 | 10. October Autumn Song | 3'46 |
| <i>Allegretto con moto e un poco
rubato, in B flat</i> | | <i>Andante doloroso e molto
cantabile, in D minor</i> | |
| 5. May White Nights | 4'08 | 11. November On the Troika | 4'03 |
| <i>Andantion, in G</i> | | <i>Allegro moderato, in E</i> | |
| 6. June Barcarolle | 4'43 | 12. December Christmas | 5'05 |
| <i>Andante cantabile, in G minor</i> | | <i>Tempo di valse, in A flat</i> | |
| | | 13. Andantino | |
| | | <i>from Symphony No.4</i> | 11'16 |

Sissi Makropoulou harp
played on a Horngacher Zabaleta harp

The Seasons is a work whose existence is well-known to most of us music lovers. However it is paradoxically rarely performed. I remember meeting Evgeny Kissin at the canteen of the Berliner Philharmonie in February 2019. I was taking a break from practicing and he was soundchecking for his recital. I rushed to him like a kid. I introduced myself and went quickly to the point: the seasons of Tchaikovsky. I wanted to know which months he likes the most, which ones he played and tell him how happy I am that I am arranging them on the harp. Answering laconically to my (maybe childish) enthusiasm, he said he grew up with this music. And then I really felt like a kid. Of course he has! there I was telling him something so generic... But the weirdest thing in this story is that I also grew up with this music, even though I am not Russian. My mother, an Athenian wise lady, was listening to this album very often when I was young. I don't remember who the pianist was. What counts is the memory and the fact that it has possibly played out in many aspects of myself, since every time I hear Tchaikovsky, I feel like listening to him talking. And I have been listening, playing, reading about him with so much zest for many years.

I am therefore very proud to present you my arrangement for solo harp recorded in the KulturKirche Nikodemus in Berlin.

The bonus track – the second movement of the 4th Symphony also has a very special meaning. After playing with maestro Teodor Currentzis and his orchestra musicAeterna an all-Tchaikovsky program (Francesca da Rimini, Romeo and Juliet, 4th, 5th, 6th Symphony), the decision seemed fatal. I had to play this piece.

Tchaikovsky dedicated this symphony to his patron Madame von Meck. Their relationship, the epitome of a platonic love, has influenced one of the most touching pieces in music history. I hear the words that speak for tenderness, benevolence and loneliness- the core of romantic love- in each every note. And I remember one rehearsal with maestro where he was painstakingly practicing this very first theme with the cello section. Just them, him and me hiding in some corner. Each one of them

played this theme till it was too late to be able to try more. And exactly that's how it was for me, when I decided to recreate this wonder on my instrument. I recorded as many takes as I could, till I couldn't do more. At least for now.

I will always wonder if I did it right. And I will always hope for the forgiveness of the purist ones.

January

January had to be transposed a semitone higher than the original. With respect to Pyotr, I hope he wouldn't mind my small intervention. In its original tonality (E major) the piece would be unplayable on the harp. However, having three flats instead (in E flat major) gives the possibility to the harpist to use the so called enharmonics.

January has the freshness of an opening movement. Like introducing yourself while entering a room. This room is full with flowers. Maybe it's a home of a loving family. Maybe Pyotr's home? what if he is somewhere there playing with his favorite toy, the piano? and his mother is looking from the corner.

Tchaikovsky experienced loss at a very tender age. His mother died of cholera. They found her in the bath-tub lifeless. If his life was a Greek tragedy, that could be seen a "foreshadowing" or as we call it in Greek "προοικονομία". That's because for many years people thought Tchaikovsky also died of cholera. Or at least that was what his family tried to spread in order to protect his name. The truth is something very different.

"The music. I can't get it out of my head" that's what his family recalls hearing him say over and over since he was a child.

February

This movement is one of the most challenging to play well. Its quick tempo, scales, and in general the pianistic writing of it, makes it pretty difficult to apply on the harp. But the beat is so mesmerizing that if you concentrate in it, the result can be electric.

One has to spend a long time practicing the theme, in different tempi, so to find the right sound and articulation.

The second theme (00:12) had to be played half time in order to sound good. However I hope it's not contradictive to what Pyotr must have had in mind.

March

A gem that could be originally written for harp. A compact movement that works as the best preview for the whole piece. Easily rewarding for the player and for the listener, it's the piece I know the best. I like to start recitals with this one, or sometimes end them. And I confess when this part comes (00:34) I always feel my heart breaking. I hear the despair in these notes each very time, like a short dose of Tchaikovsky's tragic life in a sip. It's cathartic.

April

April is as fresh as April can be. One cannot not think of trees blooming. I personally hear a song line and a woman's voice singing it. To help me play it more vocally, I even wrote some lyrics. The moment of genesis is worth mentioning. I was in New York in 2017 and it was April. I was sitting in my hotel room high up a sky scraper gazing from the window. There I noticed a white paper bag flying in the air.

*along with a breeze
and sounds from the trees
here comes
a white paper bag*

*flies high
so high
then low
the white paper bag*

*Sky scraper man
sees paper bag
flying over land
can't offer hand*

*It has no complexion
and aims no attention
how cool
the white paper bag*

*Goes right
bit left
then still
the white paper bag*

*Sky scraper man
sees paper bag
flying over land
can't offer hand*

Try to sing those words on the melody line. Maybe you like it as I do.

May

This was one of the months that needed the least of arrangement. It can be played straight from the piano score and it suits the harp technique very well. The first theme has an effortless character. Like sitting on a tree and just feeling the breeze. I've never done that, but that's what I was thinking while I was playing it. The more nonchalant the first theme is, the better an impact the second one has (01:23). Allegretto giocoso

indicates the composer and the character immediately becomes dark and alarming. It's urging for something that comes when we arrive on the f sharp major, the least flattering tonality for the harp, since we must have all six pedals on the lowest position and therefore stress almost all the strings of the harp. However when you have a good instrument, it resonates in all tonalities. And the Horngacher Zabaleta model that I had the chance to acquire twelve years ago, is one of the best harps I have ever played.

June

Within this movement lies probably the first memory of my life. I remember being very young, maybe three. My mother, a genuine cinephile, took me to the cinema to watch the movie "The bear" by Jean-Jacques Annaud. I remember some scenes so vividly and how I couldn't sleep after. In one scene, the bear gets wounded by a hunter. Lying aching by a river, the bear seems to wait stoically for the last hours. However a little bear sees him and approaches. It smells the wound and starts licking it. In this powerful moment an orchestra arrangement of June is being played. Hard to keep tears from falling. And that's how I feel when I hear or play the piece. As if someone is soothing my wounds.

July

For this movement it was a bit challenging to find the right sound. Partly because it's not very harpistically composed. And mostly because the basses are very important. Especially when they ought to be played staccato, you need a lot of time and nerves to find the right fingering. Or think that you are playing walking bass with a jazz band and suddenly you get it. So that's what I did to get over the long repetitive practicing of the bass notes as smoother as it gets. Not always could I keep myself cool...

August

August is surely the best month of the year. In case you don't agree, then you are definitely not Greek. In August time stops, and people move to the shore. If you would paint it, you would use blue and beige. And if you would compose it, it would be ambient and meditative piece. So you can imagine my surprise when I heard Pyotr's version of it. Totally different. Still so capturing. An August that thrives for something. Its agitating tempo gives the impression of running to catch a very important thing. Maybe September? And the dense, fast beat sounds like taken out of a techno track. I tried to keep this agonizing character, but I am afraid it's almost impossible on the harp. I anticipate there will come a next harpist made of this ink of the new generations, better and faster. Alas evolution theory deniers!

September

September is August's offspring. Nonchalant and chilled. Again very different in character as a September of today's culture would be depicted as. Some connect it as a beginning of the year and therefore it must be somehow stressed. Maybe Tchaikovsky connected it with the end of harvest and that's why it feels calm. Like sitting down after a big day. The repetitive octaves sound like a ticking clock. However I like to play them rubato. Like a clock that's out of time and maybe from another planet: utopia, where time stays still but we can still breath.

October

I always had a personal attachment to this movement. Together with June, I would say they are the most irresistible movements. And strangely enough, October was the last month I arranged and played. As if I was keeping the best part for the end. It worked like bread and butter!

On the second theme I had to spend some time to find the right pedaling. It needs a lot of preciseness when and how you put the pedals. The slightest latency and you

have a noise destroying everything. But practice makes perfect. Once you master the second theme, then the whole piece feels like a sip of velvet (I know velvet is not a drink, but if it were, it would be this movement.)

For the passionate ones, I would recommend listening to it or playing it when it's late at night and everybody is asleep. Then hopefully your ego is too. Because in the motive of the first theme lies a valuable lesson. It's a big question with a question mark. But the answer never comes. I like to play the short scale that follows a bit anticipated. But very simple. As if not knowing. As if just listening. Exactly like humbleness would feel like. And then the second theme, enjoying itself in the major key, feels like a revelation- maybe the result of living in a humble way.

November

This is the only month that cannot be played live. The beginning goes well till 03:10 where editing is needed. So at the recording we needed to stop four times in order for me to change pedals. I confess we cheated a little bit. But the end justifies the means (a machiavellian grin is followed).

I can't forget a video a stranger sent to me a few months ago. It's an animated short movie featuring an orchestra version of the months November and October. In the video a carriage is depicted. A couple in love sits in it hugging. This carriage is very special. It can fly over Russian villages, where snow has carefully covered the roofs of houses. And one can imagine how the music would sound if played on a snowed roof top. You know this dampening that snow produces- as if all the superfluous things are excluded and only the core is kept.

December

The last movement is somehow celebrating. A festive valse, one of Pyotr's beloved form. This one has a very generous character, specifically in this sostenuto moment (00:08). I like to think of it like the gesture of offering a hand to a dance partner. Did

he have Christmas in his mind? who knows. I do so anyway. Colours and gold and snowflakes in the background. And rondo forms so that we can return to where we were. Because it was nice.

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The athenian harpist **Sissi Makropoulou** celebrates music in a multi-faceted, but still very personal way. Living and working in Berlin as a freelancer, she enjoys her collaborations with orchestras such as the Berliner Philharmoniker, the Deutsche Oper and musicAeterna. As a solo harpist she has won numerous prizes (2007/ 5th Dutch Harp competition, 2010/ Young Soloists competition in Athens). She has performed under the baton of Daniel Barenboim, Andris Nelsons, Matthias Pintscher and T. Currentzis.

Sissi Makropoulou is also active as a composer under the pseudonym **Sissi Rada**. Her works have been performed at the Diaghilev Festival in Perm, at the Kammerspiele in Munich, XJazz Festival in Berlin, and Dansmuseet in Stockholm. She was educated at the Atheneum Conservatory, the Conservatorium van Amsterdam, the Hochschule für Musik Detmold and the Universität der Künste Berlin.

Dedicated to my mother

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