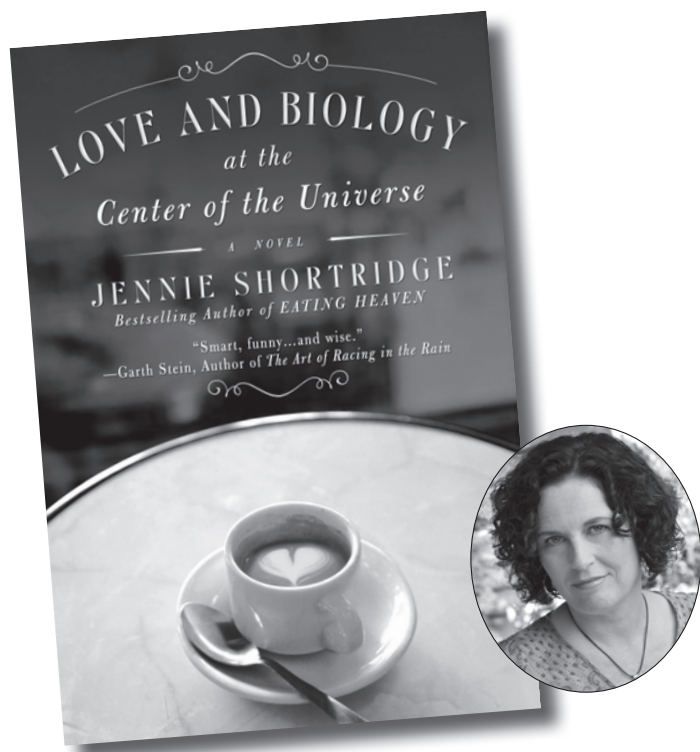




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The Four Seasons
7:30 p.m. Thursday, July 10
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Traditionally Elegant

SARAH CHANG MIXES IT UP WITH VIVALDI By Cali Bagby

Sarah Chang energetically tosses her long black hair in rhythm with her arm as her bow flies across the strings of her violin. Elegantly dressed in a changing array of gowns of lace and silk, the virtuoso violinist produces a gripping and passionate performance in her Vivaldi *Four Seasons* video. Eugene audiences can see Chang, her legendary gowns and her equally celebrated violin skills in person this summer at the OBF.

Chang, now 27, began to study the violin at age 4 and was admitted to Juilliard at the age of 5. In 1999, she was the youngest artist ever to be awarded the Avery Fisher Grand Prize, and Yale University named a chair in honor of Chang in Sprague Hall in 2005.

One of Chang's most recent accomplishments is her album Vivaldi: *The Four Seasons* with the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra, which was released in October of 2007.

"Vivaldi really was the beginning of everything. He came before Bach, came before Mozart and Beethoven," says Chang in her "Making of the *Four Seasons*" music video. "He is, I guess the epitome of all Baroque composers. In my heart, the *Four Seasons* are the jewels of the whole Vivaldi repertoire." (Watch Chang discuss her work and perform at sarahchang.com)

The Four Seasons, published in 1725, caught the ear of King Louis XV, who was drawn to the piece "Spring." Modern audiences are still charmed by the music. Eugeneans may agree with the French King when it comes to "Spring" because we can certainly identify with cool air and rain clouds. Though Vivaldi composed 46 operas, 73 sonatas and more than 500 concerti, *The Four Seasons* with their fast-slow-fast movements remain Vivaldi's best-known work.

Great violinists like Chang strive to paint, with strings and bows, the scenes that an unknown author, perhaps Vivaldi, wrote in sonnets that correspond to each movement of the *Seasons*. "Spring" is full of birds, streams and thunderstorms; "Autumn" is a time of harvesting, dancing, singing and hunting and "Winter" is a time to sit by the fire and escape the harsh winds.

John Evans, executive director of the OBF, says that he wanted to combine Chang's

performance with the baton of Nicholas McGegan, the artistic director of San Francisco Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra, whom Evans describes as a "period performance maestro." Evans believes this will create an exciting mix. "Sarah will have her own take on the *Four Seasons*; she comes from a different world," says Evans. "I want to see what Nick and Sarah will make of the *Four Seasons* [along] with a modern instrument orchestra. It could be a very interesting interpretation."

Unlike other artists, Chang says she brings Vivaldi's depictions of the seasons to life by a more traditional presentation that stays true to the composer's notes. "I do decorate, but I don't stray too much from what Vivaldi wrote down. I've heard those wild recordings of Carmignola and Fabio Biondi and love it, but at the same time it wasn't really my take on it," Chang told Caroline Gill in *Gramophone Magazine*. "I don't see it as a virtuosic piece: it's something very beautiful and lyrical in a way that should be childlike and pure, and I wanted to stick to that."

Chang spent a year experimenting with different ways in which to play Vivaldi's work on the album. According to Gill, Chang tried on the sound of an orchestra versus the sounds of seven musicians before she decided the *Four Seasons* needed a chamber performance for the recording. Though the piece has been heavily performed and recorded in the 20th and early 21st centuries, Chang loves the music.

"Unlike a lot of the pieces I play, which I learnt when I was barely out of like toddler years, Vivaldi is something I did not even touch [until recently], which is a little unusual because I know it's so popular and everybody plays it!" Chang said in an interview with Ben Hogwood on musicOMH.com. "There's a lot of freedom with Vivaldi, and I'm having a lot of fun with that right now."

The second half of the concert features more modern composers. Respighi's "The Birds" and Stravinsky's Suite from *Pulcinella* create a link to the elegance of high Baroque, Evans says, a link that should create an arc connecting Vivaldi to the present with the help of the talented McGegan and Bach Fest orchestra.



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