

# The Seasons

by Bill Stevens

Based on the series of paintings, The Four Seasons  
by Cy Twombly

An examination on the cycle of life and the passage of time



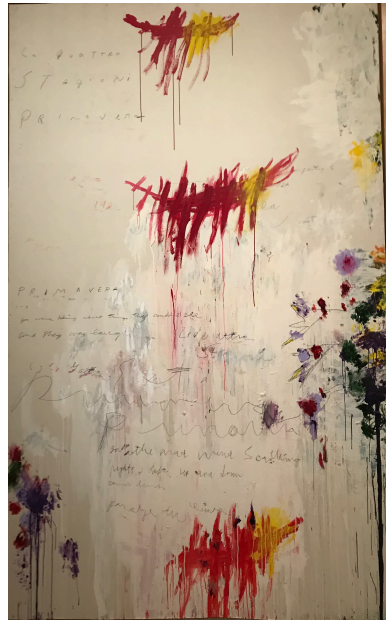
**Cy Twombly**

American, 1928-2011

**The Four Seasons: Winter** 1993

Synthetic polymer paint, oil, house paint,  
pencil and crayon on canvas

Gift of the artist, 1994



**Cy Twombly**

American, 1928-2011

**The Four Seasons: Spring** 1993

Synthetic polymer paint, oil, house paint,  
pencil and crayon on canvas

Gift of the artist, 1994



**Cy Twombly**

American, 1928-2011

**The Four Seasons: Summer** 1994

Synthetic polymer paint, oil, house paint,  
pencil and crayon on canvas

Gift of the artist, 1994



**Cy Twombly**

American, 1928-2011

**The Four Seasons: Autumn** 1993

Synthetic polymer paint, oil, house paint,  
pencil and crayon on canvas

Gift of the artist, 1994

In 2017, on a visit to the Museum of Modern Art, I walked in on the exhibit "The Four Seasons" by Cy Twombly. I have had this same sensation before, like when I entered the exhibit "The Stations of the Cross" by Barnett Newman at the Smithsonian or on my first viewing of the artwork of AK Dolven. I just knew that I had to compose music for this series of paintings as well.

The Museum of Modern Art presented a retrospective on the works of Cy Twombly that occurred from September 25, 1994 - January 10, 1995. From the book documenting the exhibit, "Cy Twombly: A Retrospective" by Kirk Varnedoe, MoMA Press:

CY TWOMBLY: A RETROSPECTIVE closes with a monumental new series, The Four Seasons (1993-1994). Twombly begins the series not with the promise of spring but with the heady wine harvests of autumn, in a canvas marked by deep reds and purples. Winter and Spring, the former bleak and chilly, the latter soaring and open, are both layered with lines of poetry by George Seferis. Summer evokes the warm shimmer of misty light on water.

Whereas, Cy Twombly begins his series with the work entitled Autumn, my production begins with Winter...

The panels Winter and Spring both continue the motif of the "ship" from previous Gaeta canvases, but each in a sharply separate spirit: somber, in the deep black, chilly white washes and stately, tough rhythms of the former, densely layered with lines of poetry from Seferis; more soaring and open, with brighter space and warmer hue, in the latter. Flowers and sun-warmed lyricism naturally attend Spring, but Twombly has also been reflecting on Stravinsky's Rite of Spring, and its inflections of more rasping sharpness, in his choice of color combinations. Summer is the broadest and hence in some senses the most eased and calmest of these unusually tall panels; awash in the warm shimmer and dazzle of misty light on water, it returns, in its dominant play of melting yellows and whites, to the atmospheric of Turner's landscapes, which Twombly has so long admired. For all its celebratory exuberance, Autumn carries within it some morbid undertones. Twombly's tentative handwriting spells out the title of the series in Italian, along with fragments of a poem by Georges Seferis that speaks of transience. In the center, we read the words of a well-known Latin epitaph (et in ARCADIA ego), reminding us that death dwells even in the happiest places. Below, we can also read the names of two gods associated with the riotous festivities of the autumn harvest: Bacchus, the young god of wine, and the old drunkard Silenus, his counterpart. The subject of the seasons' cycle is, of course, traditionally associated with quiescent or even melancholic retrospect; but the grand scale and ambition of these canvases speak more forcefully of new confidence and freedom — savoring the pleasures and mournfulness of each part of the turning year, but drawing special energy of renewal from the season of Silenus, heady with autumn's deepened wine and the sustenance of the harvest already gathered.

As I began to formulate some ideas on how to approach this subject matter, I became interested in examining the Seasons through our lives, the lives of our friends and family and the passage of time...

Traditionally, the cycles of nature have offered an opportunity to contemplate the passage of human life— a theme that seems especially apt to the reflections of a mature artist contemplating the intimate but tenuous relationship between the self and the world, between the impulses of the body and the imperatives of language. For Cy Twombly, these grand paintings might return us to what he sees in the gravity of ancient Roman monuments and in the ferocious imprint that anonymous hands have left on their surfaces— an intuition that the eternal lives only in the urgency of ephemeral things.

For me, the inspiration for this work became my immediate family. My parents, Bill and Mary Stevens, my wife Laura and my son Miles. The passage of time, one year to the next, continuous, never-ending bringing both joy and sorrow, but also and most importantly - love.

Prior to the release of my album, Connections in 2018, I began to re-examine my music, both in terms of my playing and in my writing. As part of this re-examination, I took a moment to ask myself if there were any styles or concepts that I wish I had pursued further. In 1985/86, I composed my “Suite for Jazz Quintet” which received a grant from the Seattle Arts Commission. This suite was my first work to be in a more electric, ambient style. Written for three keyboards, drum machine, prepared sounds, Clevinger bass, electric guitar in coordination with the organic sounds of the trumpet, flugelhorn, alto, tenor and soprano saxes and flute, drums and percussion. Once this piece was completed, I returned to this style of writing only two more times, on the composition “Coast to Coast” on the 1987 album of the same name and in 1988 the composition “Twilight” from the album, Flip of the Coin.

I felt it was time to return and explore this concept further; however this time I would approach it from a different perspective. I wanted to maintain that electric, ambient texture, but this time in a more minimalistic style and I chose an unusual configuration to get this across (unusual for me, I guess). I made the decision that these pieces would be for solo trumpet accompanied by what I call ‘prepared settings for improvisation’ using GarageBand. Additionally, I also made the decision to not perform these pieces or the work as a whole in public; however I would video and audio tape myself performing with the recording and release the music through a video on social media at sunrise on each of the days of the new season beginning with Winter 2018 with the remainder to be presented throughout 2019 as follows:

Winter Solstice - December 21, 2018  
Vernal Equinox (Spring) - March 20, 2019  
Summer Solstice - June 21, 2019  
Fall Equinox (Autumn) - September 23, 2019

At the conclusion in September 2019, my plan would be to release the complete series in October as one playlist on Spotify that can be streamed and/or downloaded for free. It should also be noted that for each composition, I will be performing each piece on a different instrument that has a significant meaning for me...

Winter - Yamaha YTR-634 Trumpet  
Spring - Yamaha YFH-631 Flugelhorn  
Summer - Martin Committee Trumpet  
Autumn - Benge 3X Trumpet

Additionally, the compositions are not based on meter, but on time. The process I used comes from the late period Number Pieces by John Cage. These pieces employed time brackets to indicate where the performer was to begin playing and when to cease playing. What was played was up to the discretion of the performer as they followed a stopwatch. Using an iPad I used time markings to mark my entrances and exits from the music. Within those areas I used a number of notational devices. Sometimes actual notes and rhythms, other times just notes that can be played in any sequence or duration, at times directional drawings that suggested movement of a line and sections of improvisation.

I look forward to presenting this deeply personal music to you beginning in December 2018. Your feedback, as always, would be greatly appreciated. Thank you in advance for listening continuing throughout 2019 and thanks for being the most important part of my music.

Bill

Cy Twombly (Edwin Parker Twombly, Jr.) was born in 1928 in Lexington, Virginia. He studied at the School of the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston (1947-49) and, after moving to New York City in 1950, at The Art Students League (1950—51) and Black Mountain College in North Carolina (1951 and 1952). He traveled to Europe and North Africa during 1952 and 1953, and on his return, was drafted into the Army. In 1955 and 1956, he returned to Virginia to teach at Southern Seminary and Junior College.

Twombly traveled to Italy several times, settling in Rome, where he has lived and worked since 1957. Beginning in the mid - 1970's. Twombly also worked in his country residences at Bassano in Teverina, and, more recently, in the port town of Gaeta. Cy Twombly passed away on July 5, 2011 in Rome, Italy..



**Bill Stevens plays the trumpet and flugelhorn, is a composer and arranger and performs in New York City with many of his own ensembles. He has been a guest speaker at the Norwegian Academy of Music in Oslo, Norway and the Australasian Jazz & Improvised Research Network in Melbourne, Australia. He has most recently served as the Assistant Principal - Administration, Supervisor of Arts Disciplines & Director of Jazz Studies at the Frank Sinatra School of the Arts.**

**Produced by milessmiles productions**

**Selim Music Publishing (BMI), a subsidiary of milessmiles productions**

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