



Semiotic Dimension Deconstruction In The First Movement Of “Spring” By Vivaldi

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Abstract

Music is a means of expressing feelings and aesthetics in the human mind and heart. Through increasing human creativity, this media for expression comes in many types, one of which is program music, whose compositional construction is based on the composer's imagination to describe a character, atmosphere, or an event. Allegro of “Concerto No. 1 in E major, Op. 8, RV 269: Spring (La primavera)”, as the first movement of the program music The Four Seasons from Vivaldi, is famous for depicting the atmosphere of spring filled with birdsong, the wind blowing, to the sound of the river flowing. Therefore, this study intends to thoroughly examine those representations of this atmosphere through the deconstruction of the semiotic dimension. As an inductive qualitative research, Peirce's semiotic theory and the descriptive analysis data method are applied. Based on Peirce's semiotic theory, the description of the spring atmosphere is present in interpretant through the imitation of bird sounds, river flow, and storms; harmonic progressions, melodic motifs, musical technique ornaments, and collective structures in objects; as well as sonnets in representamen. Thus, it can be summarized that the illustration of the atmosphere in the title and sonnet is closely related to the music notation, meaning they are inseparable. In the past few years, an akin exploration that focuses on Vivaldi's works through the semiotic perspective was absent; hence, this study plays a huge part in its research contribution to the field of knowledge.

Keywords:

*Semiotic deconstruction,
Peirce's semiotic theory, first
movement “Spring”, The
Four Seasons, Vivaldi*

INTRODUCTION

Fundamentally, music is the art of combining sound to produce melody, rhythm, and harmonization. Music, quoted from Plato, offers numerous advantages for life (Budiawan & Nirmalasari, 2022). According to Sutanto (in Alfajar et al., 2014), no period of human civilization has ever gone without music because music is a representation of human feelings or thoughts. Music is a means of expressing feelings and aesthetics that exist in the human mind and heart. Music is often referred to as a universal language because music can be enjoyed by all levels of society. Music has developed far through increasing human creativity so that many types of music appear, one of which is program music. Program music itself falls under free-form music or composition, which is not limited by the governing conditions. The melodic motifs in these compositions are supported by the composer's own inventiveness in describing a person, situation, or even event.

One example of program music is Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*. Among Vivaldi's most famous compositions, *The Four Seasons* is one of the most beloved pieces of Baroque music. This work was written in 1723 and is included in the set *Op. 8 Il cimento dell'armonia e dell'invenzione* in 1725. *The Four Seasons* is divided into four sets, namely *La primavera (spring)*, *L'estate (summer)*, *L'autunno (autumn)*, and *L'inverno (winter)*. A detailed example of the program music mentioned above can be seen in the work "Concerto No. 1 in E major, Op. 8, RV 269: Spring (*La primavera*)," which describes how the atmosphere of spring is filled with birdsong, the wind, and the sound of the river flowing.

In other discussions, semiotics is often interpreted as a scientific discipline. With this standpoint, semiotics study literature or text through the close relation of signs, metaphor, symbolism, analogies, and meaning (Ratnawati & Muchsin, 2022). Semiotics, according to Charles Sanders Peirce (in Rorong, 2019), is a review of signs and the aspects that surround them, such as how they operate (*syntax semiotic*) and how these signs relate to each other (*semantic semiotics*). Shortly, Peirce said that semiotics is the study of how symbolic forms are interpreted. In line with the previous statement, "Concerto No. 1 in E major, Op. 8, RV 269: Spring (*La primavera*)" is an example of program music that illustrates the complexity of spring. Thus, this study aims to understand the meaning of the first movement (*allegro*) of "Concerto No. 1 in E major, Op. 8, RV 269: Spring (*La primavera*)" further through Peirce's semiotic theory so that the message the composer wants to convey can be understood from a better perspective.

Many studies applying the semiotic perspective of Charles Sanders Peirce have been carried out so that this research has a solid knowledge base. In the last five years, the publications of Shofiani (2021), Puspitasari (2021), Kurniawati (2019), Setiawan (2020), Putri and Putri (2021), Gusmail (2018), as well as Zain et al. (2021) is significant because it reviews cultural issues through Peirce's semiotic perspective, as one of the main topics in this study. However, the big difference in this study is how the exploration of this point of view is deconstructed through the lens of classical music (the first movement (*allegro*) of "Concerto No. 1 in E major, Op. 8, RV 269: Spring (*La primavera*)").

Then, the publication of Anggraeni et al. (2019) and Yusuf (2018) are also quite substantial because each examines Peirce's semiotic dimension in a song. However, like previous articles, this publication only discusses semiotics from a lyrical standpoint, whereas this research examines how the lyrics (*sonnets*) of the first movement (*allegro*) of "Concerto No. 1 in E major, Op. 8, RV 269: Spring (*La primavera*)" has an inseparable connection in its musical progression patterns. On the other hand, in the last ten years, explorations by Fish (2015), Stone-Davis (2015), Richardson (2014), Locky (2017), as well as Sakellion and Da (2013) are vital to this research because they discuss the basics of *The Four Seasons* very extensively, as the primary topic of this study. However, in the last ten years also, investigations regarding the search for semiotics in general with a focus on Vivaldi's work could not be found, so this study has an urgency. Thus, as the significance of the study, this research will provide new insights and act as one of the latest references on topics that have not been raised before in accordance with the research objectives, namely to understand the first movement (*allegro*) of "Concerto No. 1 in E major, Op. 8, RV 269: Spring (*La primavera*)" through the deconstruction of the semiotic dimension of Peirce. *My conclusion from this is that song words matter most, as words, when they are not part of an autorial unity, when they are still open to interpretation - not just by their singers, but by their listeners too* (Frith, 2016: 226)

METHOD

In its examination, this research is a qualitative research. According to Rosyada (2020), in research that is

investigated qualitatively, the researcher is the main instrument, the data collection strategy is triangulation, the data processing is inductive, and the emphasis is placed on meaning rather than generalizations in research findings. Generally, research with a qualitative perspective has two primary objectives: to describe and reveal and to describe and explain (Khairuddin, 2020). As explained above, based on Abdussamad (2021), the analysis used in qualitative research can really highlight the processes of deductive and inductive inference, where the dynamics of relationships between phenomena are examined using logic. In this study, from an overall point of view, the investigation's conclusions are carried out inductively according to the context of the topic's study. Conclusions with the inductive character itself can be analyzed as a situation where the researcher makes the data raise problems or let the data present an openness to interpretation. Then, in data investigation, the semiotic theory by Charles Sanders Peirce is applied. Exploring data through the semiotic method here means studying signs from a musical perspective in depth to understand the message or expression of feelings that the composer wants to convey. In Peirce's semiotic theory, it is said that sign is an integral aspect of human communication and cognition. Based on his theory, there are three basic elements of semiotics, namely signs (representamen), objects, and interpretants (Yumiolda & Zulkifli, 2022). Representamen is the sign itself, the form taken by the sign or the medium used to convey it. Then, the object is the thing marked or designated by a sign (representamen). Lastly, the interpretant is the meaning or concept conveyed by a sign to an

interpreter. It is a mental or cognitive process that occurs when a sign is perceived and turn the sign into an object representation. For example, Patriansyah and Wijaya (2021) explain how officials who commit corruption (*representamen*) can be illustrated through a visual depiction of a pig wearing a tie (*object*) that suggests greed (*interpretant*). Thus, this study will examine the first movement (*allegro*) of “Concerto No. 1 in E major, Op. 8, RV 269: Spring (*La primavera*)” with a semiotic dimension through the factors of representamen (sign), object, and interpretant. Then, in data elaboration, the descriptive analysis method was applied. This approach involves a statement of fact followed by an analysis that provides not only sufficient understanding but also an explanation (Habsy, 2017).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

According to Cobley and Jansz (in Hasibuan, 2022), the definition of semiotics begins with the Greek word, which means sign, namely *semeion*. In its understanding, semiotics is a scientific study that examines various things, events, and cultural aspects as a kind of sign (Imron, 2019). In line with that, Charles Sanders Peirce (in Rorong, 2019) also interprets semiotics as a review of signs and the aspects that surround them, such as how they operate (*syntax semiotic*) and how signs relate to each other (*semantic semiotic*). Shortly, Peirce said that semiotics is the study of how symbolic forms are interpreted. The development and widespread use of semiotics itself begin with the analysis of sign systems. The understanding of the semiotic theory of Ferdinand De Saussure and Charles Sanders Peirce, who are considered the fathers of

modern semiotics, as well as the semiotic theory of Roland Barthes, is the basis of semiotics in the context of this analysis. According to Peirce, the sign (*representamen*), object, and interpretant are the three main components of semiotics. With its breadth of concepts and structural explanations of all signs, Peirce's semiotic theory is often referred to as the "Grand Theory." Peirce attempted to isolate the fundamental constituents of the sign and rearrange them into a single structure (Seto in Usman, 2017). Logic is the main basis of Peirce's semiotic theory because it is directly related to humans, which underlies Peirce's reasoning on signs.

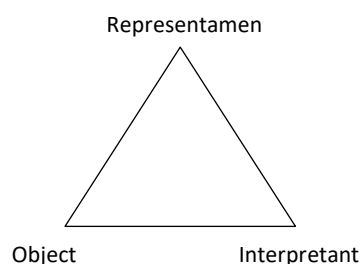


Figure 1. Illustration of Peirce's semiotic theory

(Source: Alberthiene, 2023)

Antonio Lucio Vivaldi (1678—1741) was one of the composers of the Baroque era who produced many chamber and vocal compositions, namely around 46 operas and 500 concertos. Vivaldi's original musical compositions are considered ideal because they are full of variations of musical idioms that can be learned as real objects other than just to be heard. According to Prier (in Budi, 2021), Antonio Vivaldi created a new play approach; the music is rich in motifs, the beats are easily recognizable, and the harmonies are simple and easy to play or listen to. Much of Vivaldi's work was created especially for the

female vocal group at the Ospedale della Pietà, a home for abandoned children and orphans, which was also the place where Vivaldi taught violin. Subsequently, Vivaldi's works also significantly influenced the development of Baroque music in Europe, where he created various innovations in orchestration, violin technique, and the program music he pioneered, one of which is *The Four Seasons*.

The Four Seasons (in Italian *Le quattro stagioni*) is a set of violin concerto compositions published by Vivaldi in 1723. These works are included in *Il Cimento dell' Armonia e dell' Invention* (The Contest Between Harmony and Invention), a collection of Vivaldi's compositions consisting of 12 concertos. The composition of *The Four Seasons* depicts the cycle of changing seasons, starting with spring, summer, autumn, and winter. Each concerto contains three movements with a fast—slow—fast tempo (*allegro—adagio—allegro*). This work is an essential piece of music because it initiated the transition from the form of the Baroque *concerto grosso* to the modern solo concerto and contributed to making instrumental music an independent entity from vocal music. Through *The Four Seasons*, Vivaldi created a new arrangement for the orchestra consisting of solo violin, string quartet (first and second violin, viola, and cello), as well as *basso continuo* (harpsichord or organ). In this composition, Vivaldi evokes storms, flowing rivers, birds singing, dogs and herdsmen barking, swarming flies, as well as cozy winter fires (Heller in Wardoyo, 2022). Thus, as previously stated, *The Four Seasons* is included in the category of program music, which is a musical representation of an event, narrative, or situation that connects

the issues presented when the music is played (H. Hasibuan et al., 2019). Unlike most Baroque compositions, Vivaldi includes a *sonnet* (Italian verse consisting of 14 lines) for each concerto. However, it is also debatable whether Vivaldi wrote the concerto to accompany his sonnets or vice versa. Not only that, there is no definite source regarding the author of this sonnet, although some still state that Vivaldi himself wrote the sonnet.

The first concerto of Vivaldi's composition *The Four Seasons* is "Concerto No. 1 in E major, Op. 8, RV 269: Spring (*La primavera*). In accordance with the title of this concerto, "Spring" tells about the arrival of spring. Vivaldi creates bright and cheerful timbres with a calm, relaxed, and flowing rhythm. The tempo is fast—slow—fast to represent the intensity of all the different events that occur in spring. The first movement of "Spring" replicates the sounds of birdsong and spring storms. The repetition of the main theme by the orchestra after each solo part gives the melody a complete and full impression. Subsequently, the contrast of solos and the recurring main theme makes it possible to hear various other sounds of spring, such as the wind blowing, the rustling of the river, as well as the pouring rain accompanied by lightning and thunder. One thing that is unusual in this composition, as said above, is that Vivaldi inserts a sonnet that is related to the composition he created. Below is the sonnet on the first movement (*allegro*) of "Concerto No. 1 in E major, Op. 8, RV 269: Spring (*La primavera*)":

*Springtime is upon us.
The birds celebrate her return with
festive song,
and murmuring streams are
softly caressed by the breezes.*

*Thunderstorms, those heralds of
Spring, roar,
casting their dark mantle over heaven.
Then they die away to silence,
and the birds take up their magical
songs once more.*

Based on the description above, the analysis of the first movement (*allegro*) of “Concerto No. 1 in E major, Op. 8, RV 269: Spring (*La primavera*)” through Peirce's semiotic dimensions is as follows:

Table 1. First Movement (*Allegro*) Analysis of Vivaldi's “Spring” through Peirce's Semiotic Theory

Representamen	Object	Interpretant
<i>Springtime is upon us sonnet</i>	Lively melodic opening and closing phrases (antecedent and consequent phrases) at the beginning played by the entire orchestra, use of homophonic and polyphonic harmonies, and perfect cadences (bars 1—13)	The feeling of joy and cheerfulness as a depiction of spring
<i>The birds celebrate her return with festive song sonnet</i>	Solo melodies are played with many techniques, namely <i>mordent</i> , <i>staccato</i> , <i>layered entry</i> , <i>trill</i> , and <i>imitation</i> (bars 14—28)	Imitation of bird sounds
<i>and murmuring streams are softly caressed by the breezes sonnet</i>	The lead melody that uses <i>slurs</i> to connect any two notes together (bars 32—41)	Represents the flowing feeling of the flowing river and also creates a moving feeling representing the wind
<i>thunderstorms, those heralds of Spring, roar, casting their dark mantle over heaven sonnet</i>	Instruments are composed at low pitch and unison (making the music sound <i>weighty</i> and <i>threatening</i>). In order to convey uncertainty, there is a contrast between the violin's	Depicts a spring storm with the sky turning black, thunder,

	swift ascending pitch and run solo and lightning the <i>tremolo</i> method (the fast heavy rubbing sound) (bars 45—56)	
<i>then they die away to silence, and the birds take up their charming songs once more sonnet</i>	The melody uses many techniques from <i>staccato</i> to <i>trill</i> , like bars 14—28, but there are changes in duration and motifs (bars 60—66 and bars 71—76)	Imitation of bird sounds

CONCLUSIONS

The Four Seasons by Antonio Lucio Vivaldi is a program music, which means that the composition is based on the composer's imagination to describe a character, an atmosphere, or an event. As a composition that describes the cycle of changing seasons, *Allegro* of “Concerto No. 1 in E major, Op. 8, RV 269: Spring (*La primavera*)” as its first movement depicts how the atmosphere of spring is filled with birdsong, the wind blowing, to the sound of the river flowing. Based on Peirce's semiotic theory, the description of the spring atmosphere is present in the imitation of bird sounds, river flow, and storms in the interpretant; harmonic progressions, melodic motifs, musical technique ornaments, and collective structures in objects; as well as sonnets in representamen. Thus, it can be concluded that the illustration of the atmosphere in the title and the sonnet is closely related to the notation, meaning they are inseparable. As a recommendation, further semiotic research on other movements in “Spring” or the next concerto of *The Four Seasons* is strongly encouraged to provide a deeper understanding of the work's overall meaning.

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