

Program Notes

Nostalgia, travel, and a sense of place can often have lasting effects on the way we approach everyday life. Whether traveling to a place you longed to be, leaving behind all you had known in a war-torn land, or finding inspiration and beauty somewhere new, we all hold onto the memories of a particular town, city, or even an entire country. Composers perhaps have a unique response to traveling, as they often find inspiration in locations and events.



Respighi

Ottorino Respighi was born into a musical family, and learned violin and piano at a young age. Although he remained in his home city of Bologna for his musical studies, he became principal violist at the Russian Imperial Theatre in St. Petersburg. Because of this position, he became heavily influenced by Italian opera, and studied composition with Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. Respighi returned to Bologna to complete his training, and earned a second diploma from the Liceo Musicale. He began touring as a violinist and

eventually moved to Rome in order to focus on composition. Regardless of his travels across Europe and studies in multiple countries, Respighi continually returned to his Italian roots, both in his music and his residence. In 1913, he was appointed professor of composition at Rome's St. Cecilia Conservatory.

Respighi had a fascination with old Italian music, and transcribed renaissance and baroque lute pieces in his *Ancient Airs and Dances*. He also looked back to Roman antiquity as inspiration for a number of pieces. Respighi's **Fountains of Rome** is his musical depiction of, as the title suggests, four fountains in Rome. Although the subject matter of the work is blatantly obvious, Respighi focuses on time as well as place, creating a different language for each of the four sections of the tone poem. He writes:

In this symphonic poem the composer has endeavored to give expression to the sentiments and visions suggested to him by four of Rome's fountains, contemplated at the hour when their characters are most in harmony with the surrounding landscape, or at which their beauty is most impressive to the observer.

The first part of the poem, inspired by the fountain of Valle Giulia, depicts a pastoral landscape: droves of cattle pass and disappear in the fresh, damp mists of the Roman dawn.

A sudden loud and insistent blast of horns above the trills of the whole orchestra introduces the second part, “The Triton Fountain.” It is like a joyous call, summoning troops of naiads and tritons, who come running up, pursuing each other and mingling in a frenzied dance between the jets of water.

Next there appears a solemn theme borne on the undulations of the orchestra. It is the fountain of Trevi at mid-day. The solemn theme, passing from the woodwind to the brass instruments, assumes a triumphal character. Trumpets peal: Across the radiant surface of the water there passes Neptune’s chariot drawn by seahorses and followed by a train of sirens and tritons. The procession vanishes while faint trumpet blasts resound in the distance.

The fourth part, the Fountain at the Villa Medici, is announced by a sad theme which rises above the subdued warbling. It is the nostalgic hour of sunset. The air is full of the sound of tolling bells, the twittering of birds, the rustling of leaves. Then all dies peacefully into the silence of the night.

Miklós Rózsa was born in Hungary, studied in Germany, and lived in France, the United Kingdom, and the United States. For the later – and longest – part of his career, Rózsa lived and worked in Hollywood. Although he wrote many classical works, he is best known for his film scores, which earned him 17 Oscar nominations, and 3 wins: *Spellbound* (1945), *A Double Life* (1947), and *Ben-Hur* (1959). Rózsa’s upbringing was similar



Rózsa

to Respighi’s in that they were both born into a musical family and began musical studies at an early age. Rózsa’s mother, a pianist who studied with students of Franz Liszt, introduced him to both classical and Hungarian folk music, and her brother was a violinist with the Budapest Opera. Although his father did enjoy folk music, he was an industrialist, and insisted his son study chemistry, but after one year, he transferred to the Leipzig Conservatory to study composition. Although Rózsa was influenced by Hungarian folk music, his time spent studying and briefly working in Germany lessened what would have been a much heavier folk sound in his music – though this is not to say his works do not contain any aspects of his heritage.

Rózsa’s **Cello Concerto** does exhibit many influences of Hungarian folk music, as it was composed for Hungarian-American cellist János

Starker and premiered with the Berlin Radio Symphony in 1969. It is rather condensed compared to many of his other classic works, which have been characterized as being overly lyrical. Despite these differences, it was heavily criticized, at least initially, for its use of dissonances, and because it retained a sound all too similar to his film scores. The work was also written while Rózsa was in Santa Margherita, Italy, and at a point in his life where he began to experiment with much more dissonant sonorities. Reception of the work later changed, and it is now regarded as one of Rózsa's greatest, albeit difficult, works.

The concerto itself is considered important in the larger canon of orchestral works for cello. Rózsa worked closely with Starker on revising the piece before its world premiere, and further revised it before its American premiere the following year. Starker recounted his input on the work, which included technical aspects as well as note and orchestration changes, and how Rózsa was inclined to receive input on his composition and readily make revisions, which he was expected to do when writing film scores.

Overall, the orchestration is somewhat tempered, considering Rózsa somewhat expanded the instrumentation from what a composer might use to accompany a cello. Despite this, he wrote the solo cello and orchestra parts in a way that each instrument's individual sound is preserved, and the cello is not drowned out by the accompanying forces. One unique aspect of the work is how orchestral textures are used to augment thematic material. He also wrote frequent interactions between the solo cello and orchestra in a way that enables virtuosic playing as well as highlighting subtle nuances in phrases. The work's three movements are written in standard orchestral forms, but each takes on its own character: The first movement is a fairly standard sonata form, and contains many virtuosic passages. The second movement exhibits an influence of Hungarian folk music, and is written in Rózsa's "night music style." The third is a standard sonata rondo form, but includes a great deal of virtuosic writing and is much more rhythmically charged than the two previous movements. The difference in character between movements is perhaps why the work was initially criticized for being too much like a film score, though the movie-esque qualities of the concerto can perhaps be expected, as Rózsa treated its composition and revision in much the same way he did his film scores.

Just as Rózsa settled in Hollywood, the Russian-born pianist and composer Sergei Rachmaninoff settled in Beverly Hills, California – though this was at the end of his life, and the move was at the suggestion of his doctor that a warmer climate would help his health. His immigration to the U.S. was not fueled as much by his musical career as it was by the Russian Revolution. After a concert tour in Scandinavia, Rachmaninoff took

his family to the United States, to live permanently. Though he was prone to suffer through periods of depression, often due to the poor reception of his music, Rachmaninoff felt a continued longing for his homeland after his permanent departure in 1918. As his compositional output slowed later in his life (mainly due to many years of aggressive touring schedules and declining health), in a somewhat odd turn of events, Rachmaninoff allowed Respighi to orchestrate a few of his pieces.



Rachmaninoff

Perhaps the best illustration of how the critical reception of his music affected Rachmaninoff lies in his symphonies. His first attempt at the genre was a disaster, through no fault of the composer, but the conductor of the work's premiere was supposedly drunk, which led to an incredibly poor reception. This frustrated and disheartened Rachmaninoff to the point where it stifled his composition. Fortunately, his second attempt at a symphony was the complete opposite, and his second symphony was a complete success. When he began work on his **Symphony No. 3**, it had been nearly twenty years since Rachmaninoff fled his beloved Russia. He sought a place to recreate his estate, and eventually found the closest facsimile he could near lake Lucerne, in Switzerland.

Rachmaninoff filled the three movements of the symphony with memories and a sense of longing for his homeland. Its opening passages emulate a Russian Orthodox melody, possessing chant-like qualities. Through a series of unexpected melodic changes and shifts in tonal color, Rachmaninoff looks back to an earlier time in his compositional career, where the music flowed with greater ease and a sense of home. The second movement reflects the music of two of his best-known pieces, the Second and Third Piano Concertos. Its moods constantly shift, creating a kaleidoscopic effect that is brought to an end by a return to the movement's opening themes. The finale is quite possibly one of the quintessential representations of Rachmaninoff's extroverted music. Here he injects the medieval chant for the *Dies Irae* (Judgement Day), which is a motif that he often worked into his compositions. Despite the foreboding nature of the chant, and Rachmaninoff's many years of longing to once again experience the comforts of his homeland and estate, the work ends with a joyous, albeit abrupt, outburst.