



Classics Concert Insights Lecture

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RESPIGHI PINES OF ROME (1924)



PINI DI ROMA (PINES OF ROME)

OTTORINO RESPIGHI 1924

SYMPHONIC POEM = TONE POEM:

Single movement work for orchestra in which a poem or program provides the basis for musical narrative.

- The term Symphonic Poem was coined by Franz Liszt.
- Richard Strauss preferred the label Tone Poem.
- The musical structure is driven by the narrative.
- It can be completely formless. If adherent to form, it does so loosely.

PROGRAM MUSIC:

Instrumental composition depicting extra-musical material, or telling a literary story in musical terms. Examples: Beethoven Symphony #6 (Pastoral), Berlioz Symphony Fantastique, Rimsky-Korsakov Scheherazade.

RESPIGHI BIOGRAPHY (1879-1936):

- Born in Bologna. Trained by his father in piano and violin, then by other Italians.
- 1900: Studied with Rimsky-Korsakov in Russia for five months.
- 1902: Briefly performed in Germany. May have taken lessons from Max Bruch in Berlin.
- First violinist in a quintet until 1908.
- 1913 Onwards: Lived in Rome. Taught at the Conservatorio di Santa Cecilia, where he became director 1922-26.
- 1919: Married a former pupil and singer, Elsa, who was to become a great assistant, herself a composer. Elsa died at age 102.
- 1922: Mussolini rose to power. Respighi's music coincidentally came to be associated with Fascism.
- ROMAN TRILOGY: Fontane di Roma (Fountains of Rome) 1914; **Pini di Roma (Pines of Rome) 1924**; Feste Romane (Roman Festivals) 1928.
- December 1924: Pini di Roma premiered in Teatro Augusteo in Rome.
- 1926: American premiere by the New York Philharmonic conducted by Respighi's friend Arturo Toscanini.
- 1928: Brazilian visit. Composed Impressioni Braziliane (Brazilian Impressions)
- Published many scholarly works of early Italian music throughout his career.
- 1936: Died of a cardiac infection at age 56.

RESPIGHI, THE COMPOSER:

- Conservative and against the music of such Modernist contemporaries as Stravinsky and Schoenberg, yet not Classical.
- Respighi did not compose any symphonies.
- “*It is not necessarily true that one has to be a symphonic composer to be a great composer.*” Jesus Lopez-Cobos
- Fascinated by the music of Italy’s distant past, Respighi combined old Italian music with 20th century technique.
- Drawing from Italy’s operatic tradition, he was a master of colorful orchestration.
- Despite the popularity of his compositions, academic studies of Respighi are scant. This may partly be due to his perceived association with Mussolini. After 1986, 50th anniversary of his death, his reputation began to be rehabilitated.

PINI DI ROMA, PINES OF ROME:

Four movement work, played without interruption. Running time around 22 minutes. Respighi provides a brief program with each movement.

- I: Pini di Villa Borghese, Pines of the Villa Borghese
- II: Pini presso una catacomba, Pines near a catacomb
- III: Pini del Gianicolo, Pines of the Janiculum
- IV: Pini della Via Appia, Pines of the Appian Way

FIRST MOVEMENT: PINI DI VILLA BORGHESE, ALLEGRETTO VIVACE

Children are at play in the pine groves of the Villa Borghese, dancing the Italian equivalent of “Ring around the Rosy.” They play at soldiers, marching and fighting. They twitter and shriek, like swallows at evening. They come and go in swarms. Suddenly the scene changes.

- Brief introduction (B flat major). Brilliant and energetic music with a rollicking rhythm depicts the cacophony of children at play.
- Theme I (B flat major): A fanfare in cello, English horn and bassoon. Repeated.
- More introduction music provides a postlude.
- Bridge section: bird sounds, *like swallows at evening*; loud horn fanfares amid cacophony, evokes the military, *they play at soldiers*; energetic music interrupted with pauses, *they come and go in swarms*.
- Theme I (A major) returns, more subdued in oboe.

- Theme II (F major), an energetic, march-like melody, on French horns and clarinet, again evokes military play.
- Theme III (A major), a repeated rising phrase, presented with Theme II motive in accompaniment.
- Bridge section: loud music accelerates toward a brass climax derived from introduction material; more bird song; brief herky-jerky music evokes children at play.
- Theme IV (F major) in oboe and English horn, another fanfare, presented quietly as plain melody.
- Bridge: a march with drumbeat-like rhythm.
- Theme IV (D major) loud and fast; repeated three times, each louder and faster, accented with loud dissonant brass calls.
- Ends on an open cadence with a loud brass call.

NOTES:

- The Villa Borghese is currently an art museum with an extensive garden complex, the third largest park in Rome.
- The entire movement is cast in the treble range, the sound imitating children at play.
- The themes are brief and derive from folk song, provided for the composer by his wife Elsa.
- As predicted by Respighi, this movement was booed by the audience in the premiere performance, mainly because of the dissonant trumpet calls.

SECOND MOVEMENT: PINI PRESSO UNA CATACOMBA, LENTO

We see the shadows of the pines, which overhang the entrance of a catacomb. From the depths rises a chant, which echoes solemnly, like a hymn, and then is mysteriously silenced.

- Depicting the ancient catacombs of Rome, the sound joltingly shifts from upper to very low register.
- The music employs the ancient Aeolian and Ionian modes of harmony that evoke the Gregorian chant.
- The movement is sectional: Intro – A – B – A' – Coda
- INTRODUCTION: Movement begins with a slow, solemn introduction in basses and cellos, quiet with drone accompaniment.
- SECTION A, FIRST PART (Aeolian Mode): Theme I is a dialogue between French horn and clarinet. French horn quietly intones a falling melody with a dotted rhythm. Clarinet responds with low strings in accompaniment. French horn repeats the falling melody and extends it. Solemn drone accompaniment throughout.

- SECTION A, SECOND PART (Aeolian Mode): In a slightly louder passage, the rising melody is presented in variation by strings, music still solemn and slow. Another variation of the same melody, in winds with harp flourishes, stands out in higher register.
- SECTION B (Ionian Mode): An off stage trumpet plays a new chant, in high register, with periodic ringing bells. The passage evokes a solo human voice singing in a church. A string accompaniment in counterpoint no longer contains the low register drones of Section A. The section is brighter, yet still ecclesiastic.
- SECTION A' (Aeolian Mode): Low register music returns quietly with a repeating motive of section A forming an ostinato base. It slowly builds up to a monumental crescendo, climaxing twice. In the latter half of this loud, imposing music, a brass melody line intones Section B music atop the loud ostinato. The music slowly dies down.
- CODA: In three parts. A quiet French horn codetta begins a denouement to the drama that just took place. The brass recall Theme I motive in a quiet, slow passage with tympani beats. Bassoons recall same motive with drone accompaniment in another, yet more quiet, slow passage.
- Music segways to an entirely different mood on the bare drone accompaniment.

NOTES:

- Evoking Christians of ancient Rome, Respighi selects ancient musical procedures that date back to the 8th and 9th centuries, set to modern orchestration, to create an ecclesiastical slow movement.
- The introduction and Section A material is based on *organum*, a type of early church music. The ostinato figure that persistently repeats is a chant that is part of this *organum*.
- Nearly two thirds of this movement feature pedal or ostinato figures. These substantially contribute to the aura of church music.
- The monumental crescendo of Section A' foreshadows the even more dramatic crescendo of the Finale.

THIRD MOVEMENT: PINI DEL GIANICOLO, LENTO

There is a thrill in the air. The full moon reveals a profile of the pines of Gianocolo's Hill. A nightingale sings.

- The mood of the music dramatically changes to peaceful and contemplative.
- Sectional: A – B – A
- Brief introduction, rhapsodic piano arpeggios.
- A: Solo clarinet plays Theme I, a pretty, lyrical tune, the sound evoking bird song. Static harmonies and quiet orchestral accompaniment create a serene mood. Clarinet presents the theme three times, each receiving a slow response from strings. The last version is extended and receives a pretty response from flute. Cellos play another version of the

tune, still slow and lyrical. A shimmering codetta leads to a bridge passage exploring a motive derived from the theme in different instrument groups.

- B: Harp arpeggios usher in a new rising-falling melody, Theme II, on oboe with harp accompaniment. Cellos respond. The mood is heavenly. Violins take up Theme II in a louder, more lavish presentation, harp still in accompaniment. A quiet, twinkling codetta begins with a reprise of Theme I on flutes, with harp, celesta and piano flourishes and light percussion, that evoke the serenity of a moonlit midnight.
- A: Solo clarinet reprises Theme I; no accompaniment. Recorded birdcalls with a subdued, shimmering accompaniment, *A Nightingale Sings*. Theme I quietly reprised by the harp, birdcalls still in the air. Music fades away ethereally.

NOTES:

- The Janiculum Hill, sometimes referred to as the eighth hill of Rome, is outside the old city and offers breathtaking views of Rome.
- The peace and serenity of this movement is evoked by slow tempo, drone harmonies, and lyrical melodies in different instrument groups. The harp adds to the heavenly, ethereal mood.
- The music of this movement is redolent of Debussy.
- The use of a gramophone to play recorded birdcalls was a gesture ahead of its time and distinguishes Pini di Roma as a pioneering work in the use of electronics in orchestration.
- Until then, birdcalls had been scored by composers, as exemplified by Beethoven's Sixth Symphony (Pastoral).
- The recording was controversial in its own time. It was booed by the audience of the premiere in 1924.
- "*I simply realized that no combination of wind instruments could quite counterfeit the real bird's song.*" Respighi
- The birdcall recording is provided to orchestras that perform the work by the publisher along with the score. Over the years the format has changed from records to cassettes to CD.

FOURTH MOVEMENT: PINI DE LA VIA APPIA, TEMPO DI MARCIA

Misty dawn on the Appian Way. The tragic country is guarded by solitary pines. Indistinctly, incessantly, the rhythm of innumerable steps. To the poet's fantasy appears a vision of past glories; trumpets blare and the army of the consul advances brilliantly in the grandeur of a newly risen sun toward the Sacred Way, mounting in triumph the Capitoline Hill.

This movement is a dramatic march, evoking an ancient Roman army approaching at a distance and at the end, passing by the audience. The movement is formless and in two parts.

PART I: *Misty dawn on the Appian Way*

- Quiet two-note drumbeats at a steady beat. Other elements of the orchestra quietly join the beat and evoke the sound of distant *innumerable footsteps* of a marching army. This beat will remain as a steady ostinato through the entire movement.
- Occasional, brief, muffled motives on bassoon, horns and strings atop the march, create an aura of foggy mystery.
- Bass clarinet presents what will later become the military theme of the grand climax.
- A sinuous, exotic melody on English horn appears atop the steady march. The two beat ostinato of the march picks up in volume as the army approaches closer. This English horn solo evokes distant lands, the Middle-East maybe, or North Africa, from where the victorious army might be returning.
- The lengthy English horn solo ends in fragments of the song in conversation with bassoons.

PART II: *Army of the consul advances brilliantly*

- Horns present the military theme, a rising melody with dotted rhythms, atop the still relatively quiet march.
- The military theme is repeated, rising in a dramatic crescendo as the rest of the orchestra and more brass instruments join in. *Trumpets blare and the army of the consul advances brilliantly.*
- A loud climax breaks out with a cymbal crash, and is sustained, *the grandeur of the rising sun*. The theme is repeated fortissimo on all brass, the march now very loud. The army has arrived in front of the spectators.
- The loud march is sustained for around two minutes (the movement is around five minutes), creating the impression of a very large army *mounting in triumph the Capitoline Hill*.
- Amid fortissimo brass stating the military theme, loud percussion beating the march and multi-textured orchestral accompaniment, another loud cymbal crash announces a second, louder climax.
- March melody rises and a motive of the theme is loudly repeated in a codetta that reaches the loudest climax yet, with massive drumrolls.

NOTES:

- The finale of Pini di Roma is one of the most dramatic, sustained climaxes in the entire concert repertoire, surpassing Ravel's Bolero, which it resembles.
- Via Appia, the Appian Way, was one of the main roads leading into Rome. It connected Rome to Brindisi in antiquity. Roman armies marched home via this road.
- For the final climax, Respighi called for *buccine*, old brass instruments that date back to ancient Rome. He accepted flugelhorns as a modern replacement.

- The audience of the premiere performance, the same one that booed the first and third movements, gave this finale a rousing applause.

A RECOLLECTION ABOUT THE AMERICAN PREMIERE OF PINI DI ROMA FROM
ELSA RESPIGHI, 1978

“One always got the impression that this great conductor (Toscanini) always wanted to be a composer himself. He was certainly a great interpreter, but I am sure his often strange and harsh behavior towards some of his contemporaries came from that frustration of not being able to create music himself.

(The premiere of Pini di Roma) was...an unforgettable evening. Carnegie Hall was decorated from top to bottom with flowers and Italian and American flags. In the audience were famous artists and personalities. Toscanini delivered an excellent performance of Pini di Roma and he had to return four or five times to the podium to acknowledge the applause, but without Respighi.

I knew that there had been a dispute between him and the maestro and I told Ottorino that since everybody knew that he was here, he should go out too. He finally agreed to accompany Toscanini, causing tremendous shouting and cheering. They had a standing ovation from thousands of people. The players improvised fanfares on their instruments. I had never before experienced such a tremendous physical sensation.

But the curious fact about Respighi going out to accept that applause was, that Toscanini had murmured to him, putting his hand over his shoulder, ‘Come Respighi, let’s go out, do share my success!’

FROM A SERIES OF INTERVIEWS BY ADRIANO BASSI