

## Respighi: Pines of Rome - Fountains of Rome (1967)

Written by bluesever

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01] *Pines of Rome* -The pines of the Villa Borghese -Pines near a Catacomb -The pines of the Gianicolo -The pines of the Appian Way 02] *Fountains of Rome* -The fountain of the valle Giulia at Dawn -The Triton Fountain at morn -The Fountain of Trevi at midday -The villa Medici Fountain at sunset New Philharmonia Orchestra Charles Munch – conductor

Pines of Rome (Pini di Roma) is chronologically the second installment in Italian composer Ottorino Respighi's "Roman trilogy." It is a symphonic tone poem scored for a very large orchestra and cast in four movements, the musical content being representative of a literary plan. In Pines of Rome, Respighi succeeds spectacularly, producing a colorful and exciting montage of impressions that capture the imagination without wandering or becoming digressive.

"The Pines at the Villa Borghese" depicts a scene at a once-private resort, and Respighi's music captures the energy and irreverence of children at play, including a discordant trumpet "raspberry" towards the end. This is contrasted by an austere phrase of plainchant that begins "The Pines near the Catacombs." Meditative in mood, the movement leads to a climax built around an insistent, repeated figure stated in fifths in the strings. This leads seamlessly into the next section, "Pines of the Janiculum." Opening with a spray of color from the piano, the piece slowly evolves into a beautiful nocturne punctuated by the recorded sound of a nightingale's twittering, in one of the first instances where a recorded sound is specified for a concert score. This movement is successfully "impressionistic" without being particularly "French." "The Pines of the Appian Way" transforms from a slow, mysterious section into a loud, exciting march that evokes Ancient Rome, its gladiators, and its chivalry.

Italian music lovers in the early twentieth century more strongly resisted modern trends than those of greater Europe, as they were inclined toward opera and generally less enthusiastic about instrumental music. While Respighi was determined to lead Italian audiences, kicking and

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screaming if necessary, back to instrumental music, a field once dominated by Italian musicians, he was also keenly aware that it would not be an easy struggle. During the preparation of Pines of Rome for its 1924 premiere under conductor Bernardino Molinari, Respighi was quoted "Let them boo...what do I care?" And boo they did, at the raspberries in the "Villa Borghese," and at the sound of the recorded nightingale in the "Janiculum." But the triumphant march that concludes the work won the audience over, and the finale was greeted with an ovation.

Pines of Rome was soon played to great acclaim in the capitals of Europe, and even became a concert staple in the United States. Famous conductors such as Respighi's friend Toscanini, Koussevitzky, Fritz Reiner, Stokowski, and others, adopted Pines into their repertoires. The entire community of early Hollywood composers owes a huge debt of gratitude to Respighi for Pines and its scoring, which has been, time and again, acknowledged.

Nonetheless, many critics have condemned Respighi and Pines for being trashy, overblown, ultra-conservative and even fascistic. Time has borne out that Pines of Rome is a work that's here to stay; audiences love it, and it's the sort of work that, with a little effort, can make a good conductor sound like a great one. --- Uncle Dave Lewis, Rovi

Ottorino Respighi explained that he composed his symphonic poem Fontane di Roma (The Fountains of Rome), "to reproduce by means of tone an expression of nature," and to impart a feeling for the "principal events of Roman life." Based upon the sentiments and visions suggested to him by four of Rome's fountains, he noted in the score that each movement was "contemplated at the hour in which their character is most in harmony with the surrounding landscape or in which their beauty appears most impressive to the observer." The poem is remembered as his most creative turning point, as it constituted his first great success as an orchestral composer and has become his best known work.

Respighi arrived in Rome in 1913, when it was becoming Italy's most vigorous center of orchestral concert-giving, thus providing stimulation for Fontane di Roma. Prior to his arrival there, he taught at the Bologna Liceo Musicale. While in Bologna, he associated with the lega dei Cinque, an anti-establishment pressure-group, whose members included Pizzetti, Malipiero, Bastianelli, and Renzo Bossi. Although he had studied violin as a child, during this time he was more active as a piano accompanist than as a string player. When he was denied a permanent

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post in Bologna, he applied elsewhere, gaining a position as professor of composition at the Liceo Musicale di S Cecilia, Rome. He flourished there as a teacher. His students included Elsa Olivieri, whom he married in 1919. Rome, in its positive stage of musical development, provided Respighi with the perfect opportunity to present Fontane di Roma, which, although not immediately accepted, eventually brought him enormous success, wealth, and reputation.

In Rome, where the water has been good since ancient times, fountains carrying public water are an attraction in nearly every square. The fountains about which Respighi wrote, as well as many others in the area, were actually created in the Baroque style in the seventeenth century by the sculptor Bernini. The first part of the poem is inspired by the "Fountain of Valle Giulia" and depicts its peaceful pastoral landscape, where cattle pass at dawn. Blasts of horns and trills from the orchestra conjure up the image of joyful tritons and water-nymphs mingling and splashing at the "Triton Fountain." The "Fountain of Trevi" at midday, with a solemn theme, assumes a triumphal character depicting Neptune's chariot passing across the water, drawn by seahorses, followed by tritons and sirens. Finally, birds sing and bells toll to close the day at the "Villa Medici Fountain."

The work had its first performance in Rome on March 11, 1917, and in the United States on February 13, 1919. Shortly thereafter, Respighi was appointed director of the now state-funded Conservatorio di S Cecilia. Fontane di Roma has become inseparably linked with two additional symphonic poems, Pini di Roma (1923-1924) and Feste romane (1929), which were intentionally written as sequels. These works continue to have international success. ---

Meredith Gailey, Rovi

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