

THE FOUNTAINS OF ROME
By OTTORINO RESPIGHI
Born July 9, 1879, in Bologna; died April 18, 1936, in Rome

Although Bolognese by birth, Ottorino Respighi spent most of the latter part of his life in Rome. He came to that city in 1913 to accept a position as professor of composition at the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia. Prior to that time, he had spent two years in Russia, where he played viola in the orchestra of the St. Petersburg Opera and studied orchestration with Rimsky-Korsakov, and two years in Berlin, where he studied composition with Max Bruch and taught piano at a private school. Respighi, however, was a reluctant Roman at best. His choice of the Eternal City as his "base of operation" was one of necessity rather than personal preference. Curiously, he found Rome, with its hectic, fast-paced lifestyle and its historical, cultural, artistic, and religious magnificence somewhat intimidating. Nevertheless, it was his "adopted" city rather than peaceful, quiet Bologna that he chose to commemorate in his trilogy of colorful symphonic poems Fontane di Roma (The Fountains of Rome), Pini di Roma (The Pines of Rome), and Feste Romane (Roman Festivals).

Respighi completed The Fountains of Rome, the first symphonic poem of the trilogy, in 1916. The first performance took place on March 11, 1917 in Rome with Antonio Guarnieri conducting the Augusteo Orchestra. Although the premiere was a success, the score did not become a major attraction until the following year, when Arturo Toscanini included it in a concert he conducted in Rome for the benefit of artists disabled in World War I.

"In this symphonic poem," Respighi noted in his preface to the published score of The Fountains of Rome, "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 in which their character is most in harmony with the surrounding landscape, or in which their beauty appears most impressive to the observer." Of the four fountains he selected for musical depiction, two are in natural surroundings and two are in the streets. They are the Fountain of the Valle Giulia at dawn, the Triton Fountain in the morning, the Fountain of Trevi at midday, and the Villa Medici Fountain at Sunset.

Respighi also included in the published score the following descriptive comments about the four sections which comprise The Fountains of Rome, each of which is played without pause:

"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 a 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 midday. The solemn theme, passing from the wood 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 then vanishes, while faint trumpet blasts resound in the distance.

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

©Kenneth C. Viant