Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra
2018-2019 Mellon Grand Classics Season

March 15 and 17, 2019

JURAJ VALČUHA, CONDUCTOR
LUKÁŠ VONDRÁČEK, PIANO

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF — Concerto No. 3 in D minor for Piano and Orchestra, Opus 30

I. Allegro ma non tanto
II. Intermezzo: Adagio —
III. Finale: Alla breve

Mr. Vondráček

Intermission

OTTORINO RESPIGHI — *The Fountains of Rome*

I. The Valle Giulia Fountain at Dawn
II. The Triton Fountain at Morning
III. The Trevi Fountain at Noon
IV. The Villa Medici Fountain at Sunset

(*Played without pause*)

OTTORINO RESPIGHI — *The Pines of Rome*

I. The Pines of the Villa Borghese
II. Pines near a Catacomb
III. The Pines of the Janiculum
IV. The Pines of the Appian Way

(*Played without pause*)

PROGRAM NOTES BY DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

SERGEI RACHMANINOFF

Concerto No. 3 in D minor for Piano and Orchestra, Op. 30

Sergei Rachmaninoff was born in Oneg (near Novgorod), Russia, on April 1, 1873, and died in Beverly Hills, California, on March 28, 1943. He composed his Third Piano Concerto in 1909, and it was premiered at Carnegie Hall in New York by the New York Philharmonic with conductor Walter Damrosch and Rachmaninoff as the soloist on November 28, 1909. The Pittsburgh Symphony first performed the concerto at Syria Mosque with conductor Fritz Reiner and Rachmaninoff again as the soloist in January 1941, and most recently performed it with conductor Gianandrea Noseda and pianist Denis Kozhukhin in January 2016. The score calls for pairs of woodwinds, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, percussion and strings. Performance time: approximately 43 minutes.

The worlds of technology and art sometimes brush against each other in curious ways. In 1909, it seems, Sergei Rachmaninoff wanted one of those new mechanical wonders — an automobile. And thereupon hangs the tale of his first visit to America.

The impresario Henry Wolfson of New York arranged a thirty-concert tour for the 1909-1910 season for Rachmaninoff to play and conduct his own works in a number of American cities. Rachmaninoff was at first hesitant about leaving his family and home for such an extended overseas trip, but the generous financial remuneration was too tempting to resist. With a few tour details still left unsettled, Wolfson died suddenly in the spring of 1909, and the composer was much relieved that the journey would probably be cancelled. Wolfson's agency had a contract with Rachmaninoff, however, and during the summer finished the arrangements for his appearances so that the composer-pianist-conductor was obliged to leave for New York as scheduled. Trying to look on the bright side of this daunting prospect, Rachmaninoff wrote to his long-time friend Nikita Morozov, "I don't want to go. But then perhaps, after America I'll be able to buy myself that automobile.... It may not be so bad after all!" It was for the American tour that Rachmaninoff composed his Third Piano Concerto.

The Concerto consists of three large movements. The first is a modified sonata form which begins with a haunting theme, recalled in the later movements, that sets perfectly the Concerto's mood of somber intensity. The *espressivo* second theme is presented by the pianist, whose part has, by this point, abundantly demonstrated the staggering technical challenge this piece offers to the soloist, a characteristic Rachmaninoff had disguised by the simplicity of the opening. The development section is concerned mostly with transformations of fragments from the first theme. A massive cadenza, separated into two parts by the recall of the main theme by the woodwinds, leads to the recapitulation. The earlier material is greatly abbreviated in this closing section, with just a single presentation of the opening melody and a brief, staccato version of the subsidiary theme.

The second movement, subtitled *Intermezzo*, which Dr. Otto Kinkleday described in his notes for the New York premiere as "tender and melancholy, yet not tearful," is a set of free variations with an inserted episode.

"One of the most dashing and exciting pieces of music ever composed for piano and orchestra" is how Patrick Piggot described the finale. The movement is structured in three large sections. The first part has an abundance of themes that Rachmaninoff skillfully derived from those of the opening movement. The relationship is further strengthened in the finale's second section, where both themes from the opening movement are recalled in slow tempo. The pace again quickens, and the music from the first part of the finale returns with some modifications. A brief solo cadenza leads to the coda, a dazzling final stanza with fistfuls of chords propelling the headlong rush to the dramatic closing gestures.

OTTORINO RESPIGHI

The Fountains of Rome

Ottorino Respighi was born in Bologna on July 9, 1879, and died in Rome on April 18, 1936. He composed *Le fontane di Roma* ("The Fountains of Rome") in 1916, and it was premiered in Rome with conductor Antonio Guarnieri and the Augusteo Orchestra on March 11, 1917. The Pittsburgh Symphony first performed the work at Syria Mosque with conductor Eugene Goossens in December 1929, and most recently performed it with music director Manfred Honeck in February 2012. The score calls for piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, two harps, piano, celesta, organ and strings. Performance time: approximately 17 minutes.

Ottorino Respighi, born on July 9, 1879 into the family of a piano teacher in Bologna, was introduced to music by his father and progressed so rapidly that he began his professional training in violin, piano and composition at age thirteen at the city's respected Liceo Musicale; his principal teacher was the school's director, Giuseppe Martucci, then Italy's leading composer of orchestral music. Respighi was granted a leave from the Liceo in 1900 to play as a violist with the orchestra of the St. Petersburg Opera, and he took advantage of his time in Russia to arrange what he called "a few, but for me very important" lessons with Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, whose brilliant orchestral technique would prove to be a lasting influence. Respighi returned to Bologna the following year to complete his degree and then went to Berlin to study violin and composition with Max Bruch. After spending another season in St. Petersburg, he settled in Bologna in 1903, earning his living as a free-lance violinist and receiving his earliest notice as a composer — some of his violin and piano pieces were published in 1904; his first opera, *Re Enzo* ("*King Enzo*"), was given a student production at the Liceo in 1905; Rodolfo Ferrari conducted the *Notturno* on an orchestral concert at the Metropolitan Opera House in New York in 1908 — and becoming active as an editor and arranger of music from the 17th and 18th centuries.

Respighi was back in Berlin in 1908, teaching piano at a private school there, befriending such musical luminaries as Busoni, Kreisler, Caruso, Paderewski and Bruno Walter, and promoting his work so effectively that the renowned conductor Arthur Nikisch included his transcription of Monteverdi's *Lamento d'Arianna* on a Philharmonic concert. Deeply impressed by a performance of Richard Strauss' three-year-old *Salome* that he attended in Berlin, Respighi went home to Bologna in 1909 and wrote his own operatic "tragic poem in three acts," *Semirâma*, set in ancient Babylon; it was premiered in Bologna in 1910. Performances of the *Notturno* and excerpts from *Semirâma* in Rome in 1912 (and frustration at being unable to land a regular teaching appointment at Bologna's Liceo Musicale) led him to accept a post on the faculty of Rome's Santa Cecilia Academy in 1913. He found his first great success, and his musical voice, with the opulent tone poem *The Fountains of Rome* and the first set of *Ancient Airs and Dances* in 1917. He was appointed director of the Conservatory of the Santa Cecilia Academy in 1923, but found the administrative duties too intrusive on his creative work and resigned from the position three years later, though he did continue teaching privately for several years. Respighi began touring internationally with a visit to Prague in 1921 and he thereafter traveled extensively throughout Europe and North and South America to conduct and occasionally appear as piano soloist in his works; he made four trips to the United States between 1925 and 1932. His burgeoning career began to take a toll on his health, however, and a heart murmur was diagnosed in 1931. Like Gustav Mahler after a similar diagnosis of heart disease, Respighi nevertheless carried on with his demanding schedule and by 1935 he had pretty well worn himself out. He died of a heart attack in Rome on April 18, 1936; he was 56.

The Fountains of Rome is the earliest of the Roman trilogy of symphonic poems by which Respighi is most frequently represented in the world's concert halls. (*The Pines of Rome* followed in 1924, *Roman Festivals* in 1929.) It was also his first great public success, though his notoriety was not achieved without a certain difficulty. Toscanini had agreed to conduct the premiere of the *Fountains*, late in 1916. Germany and Italy were at war then, and there had been recent bombings of Italian towns that resulted in heavy casualties. Despite heated anti-German feelings, however, Toscanini refused to drop from his programs selections by that arch Teuton Richard Wagner. When he began *Siegfried's Funeral March* on one November concert, grumbling arose in the audience and finally erupted with a shout from the balcony: "This piece is for the Paduan dead." The infuriated Toscanini hurled his baton at the unruly audience and stormed off the stage and out of Rome. Plans for the premiere of *The Fountains of Rome* were therefore delayed, and the work had to wait until the following March to be heard, in a concert conducted by Antonio Guarnieri. Respighi's wife, Elsa, reported that the premiere was not a success. Indeed, the composer, whose music had not yet found much favor, expected as much. Trying to make light of the possibility of failure, he warned one of his friends to "take your umbrella and galoshes" to the premiere of this modern-day "Water Music."

It was with Toscanini's performances in Milan and Rome the following year that *The Fountains of Rome* — and Respighi's reputation — were established.

Respighi prefaced the orchestral score of *The Fountains of Rome* with the following description of the music:

"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 in which their character is most in harmony with the surrounding landscape, or in which their beauty appears 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 a Roman dawn.

"A sudden loud and insistent blast of horns above 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 sea-horses, 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."

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The Pines of Rome

Respighi composed *I pini di Roma* ("The Pines of Rome") in 1923-1924, and it was premiered in Rome with conductor Bernardino Molinari and the Augusteo Orchestra on December 14, 1924. The Pittsburgh Symphony first performed the work at Syria Mosque with Eugene Goossens in April 1931, and most recently performed it with music director Manfred Honeck in February 2012. The score calls for piccolo, three flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, piano, celesta, organ, six off-stage "bucinae" or ancient Roman war trumpets (played on trumpet and trombone), strings, and a recording of the song of a nightingale. Performance time: approximately 26 minutes.

Of *The Pines of Rome*, the second work of Respighi's trilogy on Roman subjects, the composer wrote (in the third person): "While in his preceding work, *The Fountains of Rome*, the composer sought to reproduce by means of tone an impression of nature, in *The Pines of Rome* he uses nature as a point of departure, in order to recall memories and visions. The centuries-old trees which dominate so characteristically the Roman landscape become testimony for the principal events in Roman life." Respighi collected material for this work for some time. His wife, Elsa, recalled in the short biography of her husband that he had asked her in 1920 to sing some songs from her days of childhood play in the Villa Borghese. She was wonderfully surprised when they emerged four years later in the first section of *The Pines of Rome*.

Respighi supplied the following synopsis of the four continuous sections of *The Pines of Rome* as a preface to the score:

"1. *The Pines of the Villa Borghese*. Children are at play in the pine grove of the Villa Borghese, dancing the Italian equivalent of 'Ring around the Rosy'; mimicking marching soldiers and battles; twittering and shrieking like swallows at evening; and they disappear. Suddenly the scene changes to ...

"2. *The Pines near a Catacomb*. We see the shadows of the pines, which overhang the entrance of a catacomb. From the depths rises a chant which re-echoes solemnly, like a hymn, and is then mysteriously silenced.

"3. *The Pines of the Janiculum*. There is a thrill in the air. The full moon reveals the profile of the pines of Gianicolo's Hill. A nightingale sings.

"4. *The Pines of the Appian Way*. 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."

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