

Adrian Symphony Orchestra

Program Notes

The Pines of Rome

Ottorino Respighi (1879 - 19360)

While Ottorino Respighi grew up in Bologna and was trained in the best traditions of Italian music, it was the two years he spent in St. Petersburg studying under Rimsky-Korsakov that polished his already considerable skills in orchestration. He also studied the masters of Italian opera - Verdi, Leoncavallo, and Puccini among them. He drew upon all of these influences to bring the magnificent color to his great Roman trilogy. Composed in 1924, *The Pines of Rome* is the second in this trilogy and was inspired by different locales in Rome, and by its history.

He begins his tone poem at the Villa Borghese, a 17th century palace with wonderful gardens. In his own words he tells us that “children are at play in the pine groves. They dance round in circles, they play at soldiers, marching and fighting. They are wrought up by their own cries like swallows at evening, they come and go in swarms.” He even incorporates some of the children’s Italian nursery songs into this movement.

He continues his work as musical tourist guide by visiting the pine trees near a catacomb. The music suggests the somber atmosphere of the underground burial chambers and is in stark contrast to the first movement. In his own words he invites us to “see the shades of the pine trees fringing the entrance to a catacomb. From the depth rises the sound of mournful psalm-singing, floating through the air like a solemn hymn, gradually and mysteriously dispersing.”

He next takes the listener to the Janiculum, one of Rome’s seven hills. The pines here are far from the noise of the central city on a moonlit night. Respighi says, “a quiver runs through the air; the pine trees of the Janiculum stand distinctly outlined in the clear light of a full moon. A nightingale is singing.” In Respighi’s time the incorporation of birdsong into a musical piece was highly innovative.

We then move on to the Appian Way, where historically legions of Roman soldiers marched over the ancient stones. Respighi says, “Misty dawn...with solitary pine trees guarding the magic landscape; the muffled, ceaseless rhythm of unending footsteps. Trumpets sound and, in the brilliance of the newly risen sun, a consular army bursts forth toward the Sacred Way, mounting in triumph to the Capitol.” The sound steadily builds to one of Italian music’s truly great crescendos, and the closing chords, featuring the brass, seem to affirm the power and eternal nature of the Roman Empire.

Beryl McHenry