

Kirill Petrenko conducts Respighi and Martucci

Thursday, November 26, 2026 · 20:00 · Philharmonie Berlin

Kirill Petrenko, conductor

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	RESPIGHI 1879–1936 <i>Fontane di Roma</i>	16'
2	RESPIGHI 1879–1936 <i>Feste romane</i>	25'
3	MARTUCCI 1856–1909 <i>Notturmo in G-flat major, Op. 70 No. 1 (version for orchestra)</i>	7'
4	RESPIGHI 1879–1936 <i>Pini di Roma</i>	22'
TOTAL MUSIC		70'

Ottorino Respighi

1879–1936

Fontane di Roma

THE COMPOSER

Ottorino Respighi (1879–1936) was the leading Italian orchestral composer of his generation, and one of history’s supreme masters of orchestral colour. Trained in Italy and, crucially, in Russia, where he studied briefly with Rimsky-Korsakov, the great wizard of orchestration, he absorbed a dazzling command of instrumental sound that he applied to a distinctly Italian sensibility. At a time when Italian music meant, above all, opera, Respighi was unusual in devoting himself to the orchestra. He is best known for his brilliant ‘Roman trilogy’ of tone poems (Fountains of Rome, Pines of Rome and Roman Festivals) celebrating the sights, history and atmosphere of the Eternal City. A scholar as well as a colourist, he was also fascinated by early music, lovingly arranging Renaissance and Baroque pieces. His finest works combine spectacular orchestral virtuosity with vivid pictorialism and a warm lyrical gift.

ABOUT THE WORK

When Ottorino Respighi moved from his native Bologna to Rome in 1913 to teach composition at the Liceo di Santa Cecilia, he was at first overwhelmed by the city. Its monuments and the weight of its history

16 minutes

seemed to press in on him from every side. Yet he went on to write the best-known musical portrait of Rome: three tone poems that he himself thought of as a triptych, *Fontane di Roma* (“Fountains of Rome”), *Pini di Roma* (“Pines of Rome”) and *Feste romane* (“Roman Festivals”). At these concerts Kirill Petrenko performs all three.

Fontane di Roma came first, composed in 1915 and 1916. Respighi had spent time in Russia as a young orchestral violist and had taken lessons with Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, the great master of orchestral colour, and it shows. The idea is simple: four Roman fountains, each shown at the hour of the day when, in Respighi’s words, its character “most harmonises with the surroundings” or its beauty makes the strongest impression. Respighi was not after literal description of splashing water but, as he said, to express the feelings and visions the fountains stirred in him.

The first performance, in Rome in March 1917, was received coolly, and a disappointed Respighi put the score aside. Its fortunes changed the following year, when Arturo Toscanini conducted it in Milan with great success. The piece made Respighi’s name internationally.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The four sections run without a break.

The Fountain of Valle Giulia at Dawn. Muted strings and delicate woodwind solos paint “a pastoral landscape” in the soft mist of early morning. The archaic-sounding harmonies seem to reach back to a far older world.

The Triton Fountain in the Morning. A sudden, loud horn call wakes the water spirits: naiads and tritons chase one another in a wild dance beneath the spray, in sparkling, rushing figures across the orchestra.

The Trevi Fountain at Midday. The music gathers into a great triumphal wave as Neptune’s chariot, drawn by sea horses, crosses the water. Listen for the full orchestra at its most splendid, then for the long ebb back into near silence.

The Villa Medici Fountain at Sunset. A melancholy close: bells, birdsong and rustling leaves, in Respighi’s description, and then the stillness of night.

Ottorino Respighi

1879–1936

Feste romane

THE COMPOSER

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ABOUT THE WORK

Feste romane ("Roman Festivals"), completed in 1928, is the last and most extravagant of Respighi's three Roman tone poems. Where the fountains and the pines are places, this time Respighi depicts celebrations, and he moves through two thousand years of the city's history: from the brutal games of the imperial circus to the pilgrims of the Middle Ages, a harvest festival in the countryside and the noisy crowds of Respighi's own day.

It needs a huge orchestra, even by Respighi's standards: a large percussion section including ratchet, sleigh bells and wood blocks, a piano for four hands, an organ, a mandolin and buccine, the brass instruments of the ancient Roman army, usually played today by modern brass instruments. It has never matched the popularity of its two companions, but its energy and orchestral brilliance have always had admirers.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Circenses (Circus Games). Blaring brass fanfares announce the games in the Circus Maximus under Nero. Against the roar of the crowd, the Christian martyrs sing their hymn in the strings and woodwinds, while the beasts snarl around them. The movement ends with crushing chords for the full orchestra and organ.

Il giubileo (The Jubilee). Weary medieval pilgrims trudge towards Rome: the opening is marked “sad and tired”. When they catch sight of the city from Monte Mario, they break into a hymn of praise, and bells ring out across the orchestra.

L'Ottobrata (The October Festival). A celebration of harvest and hunting in the Roman countryside. Listen for horn calls, and for a mandolin that accompanies a love serenade in the evening.

La Befana (Epiphany). The eve of Epiphany in Piazza Navona: a chaotic, cinematic crowd scene of street songs and dances, a barrel organ and a drunken reveller played by a solo trombone. Respighi builds everything to a frantic, exhilarating close.

Giuseppe Martucci

1856–1909

7 minutes

Notturmo in G-flat major, Op. 70 No. 1 (version for orchestra)

THE COMPOSER

Giuseppe Martucci (1856–1909) was born in Capua and studied at the Naples Conservatory from the age of eleven, having appeared in public as a child prodigy at the piano. He toured Europe as a virtuoso pianist, taught piano in Naples, and in 1886 moved to Bologna, where he directed the Liceo Musicale. Unusually for an Italian composer of his generation he wrote no operas, concentrating instead on symphonies, concertos, chamber and piano music in a style rooted in the German tradition of Schumann and Brahms. As a conductor he introduced Wagner's music to Italian audiences, giving the first Italian performance of *Tristan und Isolde* in Bologna in 1888. His pupils in Bologna included Ottorino Respighi, and his music was championed by Arturo Toscanini.

ABOUT THE WORK

Giuseppe Martucci was an unusual figure in nineteenth-century Italy: a composer who wrote no operas. A virtuoso pianist, conductor and teacher, he devoted his career to instrumental music at a time when Italian musical life revolved around the opera house. As a conductor he championed Wagner, leading the first Italian performance of *Tristan und Isolde* in Bologna in 1888. As director of the music school in Bologna he taught composition to the young Ottorino Respighi and became an important influence on him. That link explains the *Notturmo's* place in this all-Respighi evening: here is the teacher, framed by the pupil's three Roman portraits.

The Notturmo began life as a piano piece in 1891. Martucci scored it for orchestra in 1901, and in that year it was performed at the Teatro Regio in Turin; he often used it as an encore at his own concerts. It became one of his most frequently played works and was a favourite of Arturo Toscanini, who conducted Martucci's music throughout his career; his performances of Martucci's orchestral works with the NBC Symphony Orchestra have since been issued on record.

A nocturne is a piece that evokes the night, usually quiet and reflective, in the tradition of the piano nocturnes of John Field and Chopin. Martucci's is a short, tender piece built around a single warm melody, and one critic has heard in it the same inward mood as Wagner's *Siegfried Idyll* or Mahler's Adagietto.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

After the brilliance of the Roman festivals, the Notturmo changes the scale completely. Listen for the long, singing melody, introduced softly and then passed around the orchestra, and for the way Martucci's delicate orchestration lets the strings and woodwind glow rather than blaze. Its ancestors are less Italian opera than the German Romantic tradition that Martucci admired, from Schumann and Brahms to Wagner.

Ottorino Respighi

22 minutes

1879–1936

Pini di Roma

THE COMPOSER

Ottorino Respighi (1879–1936) was the leading Italian orchestral composer of his generation, and one of history's supreme masters of orchestral colour. Trained in Italy and, crucially, in Russia, where he studied briefly with Rimsky-Korsakov, the great wizard of orchestration, he absorbed a dazzling command of instrumental sound that he applied to a distinctly Italian sensibility. At a time when Italian music meant, above all, opera, Respighi was unusual in devoting himself to the orchestra. He is best known for his brilliant 'Roman trilogy' of tone poems (Fountains of Rome, Pines of Rome and Roman Festivals) celebrating the sights, history and atmosphere of the Eternal City. A scholar as well as a colourist, he was also fascinated by early music, lovingly arranging Renaissance and Baroque pieces. His finest works combine spectacular orchestral virtuosity with vivid pictorialism and a warm lyrical gift.

ABOUT THE WORK

Respighi said that two features of Rome had spoken to his imagination above all: its "marvellous fountains" and the "umbrella-like pines that appear in every part of the horizon". The fountains became

his first Roman tone poem in 1916; the pines followed in *Pini di Roma*, completed in 1924 after years of starting and restarting. It has become the most frequently performed of the three.

Each of the four sections takes a group of pine trees as its starting point and uses it to evoke a different moment in the city's history. The children playing in the Villa Borghese belong to Respighi's own day; the pines near a catacomb recall the early Christians; the pines of the Janiculum hill are seen by moonlight; and those of the Appian Way call up the legions of the Roman Republic marching towards the Capitol. The piece moves from day to night and ends at dawn.

Pini di Roma contains one of the most famous novelties in orchestral music: at the end of the third section, Respighi asks for a gramophone recording of a real nightingale to be played together with the orchestra. It was an early instance of recorded sound in the concert hall. Respighi also calls for buccine, the curved brass instruments of the ancient Roman army, which in modern performances are usually played by flugelhorns or similar instruments offstage.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The Pines of the Villa Borghese. Children play under the trees, singing nursery rhymes and pretending to be soldiers: bright, noisy music with shrill, chattering figures that Respighi compared to swallows.

Pines near a Catacomb. Suddenly the children are gone. Low strings, horns and the deep pedal notes of the organ suggest the underground tombs, and a solemn chant rises from below, played by a distant trumpet and then taken up by the whole orchestra.

The Pines of the Janiculum. A moonlit nocturne. A solo clarinet, which Respighi asks to be played "as if in a dream", leads a hushed night scene with a short piano cadenza. At the end, listen for the recorded nightingale singing alone over the orchestra's sustained chords.

The Pines of the Appian Way. Out of the dawn mist comes a steady, distant marching tread. Respighi imagined the "unending steps" of a Roman army. The march grows relentlessly louder as trumpets and buccine join in, until the army reaches the Capitoline Hill in a blaze of sound.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **Rome: A Cultural, Visual, and Personal History**

Robert Hughes, Vintage 2012

Robert Hughes's personal history of Rome, from the ancient city to the present, is a vivid companion to Respighi's musical portraits of its fountains, pines and festivals.

ACCESSIBLE **Toscanini: Musician of Conscience**

Harvey Sachs, W. W. Norton 2018

Arturo Toscanini championed Martucci's music and gave the premiere of Respighi's *Feste romane* in New York in 1929, and this biography shows him at the heart of Italian musical life.

DEEPER **Music in Fascist Italy**

Harvey Sachs, W. W. Norton 1988

Harvey Sachs's study of musical life under Mussolini, the political and cultural setting in which Respighi completed his Roman trilogy.

SOURCES

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8. Feste romane, Los Angeles Philharmonic. <https://www.laphil.com/works/feste-romane>
9. Giuseppe Martucci, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Giuseppe_Martucci
10. Giuseppe Martucci: Notturmo, op. 70; Novelletta, op. 82 (preface), Musikproduktion Höflich. https://repertoire-explorer.musikmph.de/wp-content/uploads/vorworte_prefaces/978.pdf
11. Legends, Teatro Regio Torino. <https://teatroregio.torino.it/en/concerti-2025-2026/legends>
12. Pines of Rome, Wikipedia. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pines_of_Rome
13. Ottorino Respighi: Pini di Roma (Pines of Rome), Nashville Symphony. <https://nashvillesymphony.org/classical-program-notes/ottorino-respighi-pini-di-roma-pines-of-rome>
14. Rome: A Cultural, Visual, and Personal History, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780375711688>
15. Toscanini: Musician of Conscience, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9781631494901>
16. Music in Fascist Italy, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780393025637>



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<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/bp-2026-11-26-petrenko>

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