

Respighi's Roman Trilogy and Verismo Arias with Jonathan Tetelman

Wednesday, December 2, 2026 · 20:00 · Alte Oper Frankfurt
Kirill Petrenko, conductor · Jonathan Tetelman, tenor

TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME		MIN
1	RESPIGHI 1879–1936 <i>Fontane di Roma</i>	16'
2	CILEA 1866–1950 <i>'È la solita storia' (Federico's Lament, L'arlesiana, Act II)</i>	4'
3	GIORDANO 1867–1948 <i>'Amor ti vieta' (Fedora, Act II)</i>	2'
4	RESPIGHI 1879–1936 <i>Pini di Roma</i>	22'
5	MASCAGNI 1863–1945 <i>'Mamma, quel vino è generoso' (Turiddu's Farewell, Cavalleria rusticana)</i>	4'
6	LEONCAVALLO 1857–1919 <i>Intermezzo from Pagliacci</i>	4'
7	LEONCAVALLO 1857–1919 <i>'Recitar! ... Vesti la giubba' (Pagliacci, Act I)</i>	4'
8	RESPIGHI 1879–1936 <i>Feste romane</i>	25'
TOTAL MUSIC		81'

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.

16 minutes

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

Fontane di Roma (Fountains of Rome), completed in 1916, is the first of the three tone poems Ottorino Respighi devoted to Rome, and tonight all three are played in a single evening. Respighi had settled in the city only a few years earlier. Before that he had spent time in Russia as an orchestral violist, taking lessons in composition and orchestration from Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, and the Russian master's gift for instrumental colour is everywhere in this score.

Respighi chose four fountains, each seen at a different hour of the day, and set out to capture the feelings and images they suggested to him rather than to tell a story. He prefaced each section with a short description in the score. The four pictures run without a break, from dawn to nightfall, and the piece begins and ends in near silence.

The start was not easy. Arturo Toscanini had been due to conduct the first performance, but the plan fell through after a row over wartime programming, and the premiere at the Augusteo in Rome in March 1917, under Antonio Guarnieri, made little impression. Respighi put the score aside. It was Toscanini's performance in Milan in 1918 that made the work a success, and it launched Respighi's international career.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The Fountain of Valle Giulia at Dawn. A pastoral scene, in Respighi's words, with sheep passing in the damp mist of a Roman morning. Soft, rocking strings and a gentle woodwind melody set a hazy, still mood.

The Triton Fountain in the Morning. A sudden horn call, like a blast on a conch shell, summons naiads and tritons, who chase each other in a wild dance among the jets of water. Listen for the glittering runs in harps, celesta and woodwinds.

The Trevi Fountain at Midday. A solemn theme gathers strength until the full orchestra blazes out in fanfares: Neptune's chariot, drawn by sea horses, crossing the water. It is the single big climax of the piece, and it fades as quickly as it came.

The Villa Medici Fountain at Sunset. A melancholy close. A bell tolls for the evening prayer, birds twitter, leaves rustle, and the music slips away into the silence of night.

Francesco Cilea

1866–1950

4 minutes

*'È la solita storia' (Federico's Lament, *L'arlesiana*, Act II)*

THE COMPOSER

Francesco Cilea (1866–1950) was born in Palmi in Calabria and trained at the Naples Conservatory, where his student opera attracted the attention of the publisher Edoardo Sonzogno. He belonged to the generation of Italian composers, with Mascagni, Leoncavallo, Giordano and Puccini, who made their names in the 1890s with direct, passionate operas in the verismo style. His reputation rests on two works: *L'arlesiana* (1897), in which the young Enrico Caruso created the role of Federico, and *Adriana Lecouvreur* (1902), about the great eighteenth-century French actress, which remains in the repertoire as a vehicle for star sopranos. After the failure of his last opera, *Gloria* (1907), Cilea withdrew from the stage and devoted himself to teaching, serving for many years as director of the conservatories of Palermo and Naples.

ABOUT THE WORK

Francesco Cilea's opera *L'arlesiana* (1897) is based on Alphonse Daudet's story of Federico, a young Provençal farmer consumed by love for a woman from Arles who never appears on stage. When he learns that she has been another man's mistress, his family tries to steer him towards the loyal Vivetta, but he cannot let go, and the opera ends with his suicide.

The first performance, at the Teatro Lirico in Milan in November 1897, had a very young Enrico Caruso as Federico. The opera itself never became a repertoire piece, but Federico's lament from Act II, "È la solita storia del pastore" ("It is the same old story of the shepherd"), has been a tenor favourite ever since. Federico sings it as his simple younger brother falls asleep, comparing himself to the shepherd in a folk tale who drifts off before he can finish his story, and then admits, alone, that he cannot forget the woman who betrayed him.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The aria opens almost in a murmur, the voice half-speaking over a gently rocking accompaniment while the orchestra recalls the plain, folk-like tune of the shepherd's tale. Once Federico turns from the story to himself, the melody climbs and the orchestra swells, until the lament breaks into an open cry of pain near the top of the tenor's range. The whole arc, from quiet storytelling to despair, takes about four minutes.

Umberto Giordano

2 minutes

1867–1948

'Amor ti vieta' (Fedora, Act II)

THE COMPOSER

Umberto Giordano (1867–1948), born in Foggia in Apulia, studied at the Naples Conservatory and, like Mascagni, first came to attention through a competition for one-act operas run by the publisher Sonzogno. His great success came in 1896 with *Andrea Chénier*, a drama of the French Revolution first performed at La Scala, which has remained one of the most popular Italian operas ever since. Two years later *Fedora*, with the young Enrico Caruso as Loris, confirmed his reputation. Giordano's music is typical of the verismo style: vivid melody, strong theatrical effects and roles that give singers every chance to shine. He continued to write operas into the 1920s, but none matched the success of his two early masterpieces.

ABOUT THE WORK

Umberto Giordano's *Fedora* opened at the Teatro Lirico in Milan in November 1898, a year after *L'arlesiana* at the same theatre, and once again Enrico Caruso was in the cast, this time as Count Loris Ipanov. He had to repeat "Amor ti vieta" at the premiere. The opera is based on a play by Victorien Sardou written for Sarah Bernhardt: a thriller among Russian aristocrats in St Petersburg, Paris and Switzerland, with a murdered fiancé, police spies and a heroine who dies by poison.

Princess Fedora suspects Loris of the murder and, at a reception in her Paris house in Act II, tries to draw a confession out of him by flirting. Loris, who is genuinely in love with her, answers with "Amor ti vieta" ("Love forbids you not to love"). It lasts barely two minutes, one of the shortest famous arias in Italian opera.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

There is no build-up: the melody begins at once, broad and warm, with the strings following the voice closely underneath. Because it is so short, the aria grows in what feels like a single

breath, climbing steadily to its peak on the words “l’amor ti vi-eta” and then closing. It rewards a singer who can keep a long, smooth line at full intensity without forcing, which is exactly what makes it a favourite showpiece for lyric tenors.

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

Eight years after *Fountains of Rome*, Respighi returned to the city in *Pini di Roma* (*Pines of Rome*), first performed at the Augusteo in Rome in December 1924. This time his subject was the umbrella pines that shape the Roman skyline, and again he chose four sites, each a witness to a different period of the city’s life, moving from children playing in a modern park back to the legions of ancient Rome.

The piece is bolder and more theatrical than its predecessor, and it became the most frequently played of the three Roman tone poems. It also made history with a small technical innovation: in the third section Respighi calls for a gramophone recording of a real nightingale to be played with the orchestra. The final march adds *buccine*, the brass instruments of the Roman army, usually played today by flugelhorns or extra brass, and sometimes placed around the hall.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The Pines of the Villa Borghese. Children at play in the gardens: singing nursery rhymes, dancing in rings and marching like soldiers. Respighi compared them to swallows swarming at dusk. The chattering orchestra, trumpets and all, stops dead at the end.

Pines near a Catacomb. Darkness. Low, muted strings, and a trumpet offstage sings a slow chant, as if rising from an early Christian burial place under the trees. The chant swells to a great climax and sinks back into shadow.

The Pines of the Janiculum. Night on the Janiculum hill: a piano cadenza, a long clarinet solo under the full moon, and at the end the recorded nightingale singing over hushed chords.

The Pines of the Appian Way. Dawn on the old military road. A soft, relentless tread in the low instruments, piano and timpani grows into a march as the consul's army approaches. The buccine enter with fanfares and the orchestra, with organ, builds to an overwhelming climax as the legions climb the Capitol in triumph.

Pietro Mascagni

4 minutes

1863–1945

'Mamma, quel vino è generoso' (Turiddu's Farewell, Cavalleria rusticana)

THE COMPOSER

Pietro Mascagni (1863–1945) was born in Livorno in Tuscany and began his musical studies there at thirteen. He went on to the Milan Conservatory but left without finishing his studies to tour as a conductor with operetta companies, and then settled as a music teacher in the small town of Cerignola in Apulia. In 1889 he entered the Milan publisher Sonzogno's competition for one-act operas with *Cavalleria rusticana*, which won; its premiere in Rome in May 1890 made him internationally famous at the age of twenty-six and launched the verismo movement in Italian opera. He wrote fifteen operas in all, among them *L'amico Fritz* and *Iris*, and had a long career as a conductor, but none of his later works matched the success of his first.

ABOUT THE WORK

Pietro Mascagni was an unknown music teacher in the small town of Cerignola when he entered the one-act opera competition run by the Milan publisher Edoardo Sonzogno. His *Cavalleria rusticana* (Rustic Chivalry), based on a Sicilian story by Giovanni Verga, won, and its

premiere at the Teatro Costanzi in Rome on 17 May 1890 was a sensation. The opera is usually named as the first great work of verismo, the “realist” style of Italian opera about ordinary people and violent passions, and it is still often paired with Leoncavallo’s *Pagliacci*, heard later tonight.

The story takes place on Easter morning in a Sicilian village. Turiddu, back from military service, has found his fiancée Lola married to the carter Alfio; he has seduced Santuzza, and then resumed his affair with Lola. Santuzza, abandoned, tells Alfio. After a drinking song outside his mother’s wine shop, Turiddu is challenged by Alfio to a duel to the death.

“Mamma, quel vino è generoso” is Turiddu’s farewell to his mother, Mamma Lucia, moments later. Flushed with wine, he tells her he must go outside for air, asks her, if he does not return, to be a mother to Santuzza. Then he is gone, and within moments a scream announces that he has been killed.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

The scene begins with an almost casual excuse (“Mother, that wine is strong”), but the pretence cracks quickly. Listen for the agitated orchestra beneath the voice, and for the growing urgency as Turiddu’s thoughts turn to Santuzza. The climax comes with his repeated pleas for a kiss (“Un bacio, mamma! Un altro bacio!”) and a final cry of “Addio!”, sung at full force, before he rushes out.

Ruggero Leoncavallo

1857–1919

Intermezzo from Pagliacci

THE COMPOSER

Ruggero Leoncavallo (1857–1919) was born in Naples and studied at its conservatory, and he spent years as a struggling musician, working as a pianist and teacher in Egypt, Paris and elsewhere, before a single work changed his life. Inspired by the success of Mascagni’s *Cavalleria rusticana* in 1890, he quickly wrote the words and music of *Pagliacci*; its premiere in Milan in 1892, conducted by Arturo Toscanini, made it an immediate international hit, and it has been one of the most performed operas in the world ever since. An accomplished writer, Leoncavallo also wrote libretti for others, and he contributed to the early libretto of Puccini’s *Manon Lescaut*. His own version of *La bohème* (1897) was overshadowed by Puccini’s opera on the same subject, and none of his later works achieved lasting success; but *Pagliacci* alone guarantees his place in the history of opera.

4 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Ruggero Leoncavallo wrote both words and music of *Pagliacci* (Clowns), first performed at the Teatro Dal Verme in Milan in May 1892 under the young Arturo Toscanini. It made him famous overnight. Like *Cavalleria rusticana*, it tells a story of jealousy and sudden violence among ordinary people: Canio, head of a troupe of travelling players in a southern Italian village, discovers that his wife Nedda has a lover, and that evening, during a comedy in which he plays a betrayed clown, he kills them both in front of the audience.

Between the two acts Leoncavallo placed a short orchestral Intermezzo. It follows Canio's outburst of grief at the end of Act I and leads into the evening performance of Act II, where the catastrophe will unfold. Like the more famous Intermezzo in *Cavalleria rusticana*, it gives the orchestra a moment to itself and has become a popular concert piece. In tonight's programme the order is reversed: the Intermezzo comes first, as a prelude to Canio's aria.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

A weighty, solemn opening, then themes of grief from the opera taken up broadly by the strings. The music swells to a passionate climax and then subsides into a quiet, dark close: a few minutes of the warm, emotional Italian orchestral sound of the 1890s.

Ruggero Leoncavallo

1857–1919

4 minutes

'Recitar! ... Vesti la giubba' (*Pagliacci*, Act I)

THE COMPOSER

Ruggero Leoncavallo (1857–1919) was born in Naples and studied at its conservatory, and he spent years as a struggling musician, working as a pianist and teacher in Egypt, Paris and elsewhere, before a single work changed his life. Inspired by the success of Mascagni's *Cavalleria rusticana* in 1890, he quickly wrote the words and music of *Pagliacci*; its premiere in Milan in 1892, conducted by Arturo Toscanini, made it an immediate international hit, and it has been one of the most performed operas in the world ever since. An accomplished writer, Leoncavallo also wrote libretti for others, and he contributed to the early libretto of Puccini's *Manon Lescaut*. His own version of *La bohème* (1897) was overshadowed by Puccini's opera on the same subject, and none of his later works achieved lasting success; but *Pagliacci* alone guarantees his place in the history of opera.

ABOUT THE WORK

“Recitar! ... Vesti la giubba” (“To perform! ... Put on the costume”) closes Act I of *Pagliacci*, and it is perhaps the most famous tenor aria of the verismo repertoire. Canio has just caught his wife Nedda with a lover, though the man escaped unrecognised. Yet the evening’s performance is about to begin, and Canio must go on stage as Pagliaccio, the clown whose role is to be mocked as a deceived husband.

Alone, he tries to pull himself together. In the recitative he wonders how he can act when he is half out of his mind; in the aria he orders himself to put on the costume and the powder, because the public has paid and wants to laugh. “Ridi, Pagliaccio”: laugh, clown, at your broken love. The gap between the mask and the man is the heart of the opera, and Leoncavallo expresses it in a melody of overwhelming directness.

The aria also has its place in the history of recording. Enrico Caruso recorded it several times in the first years of the twentieth century, and his versions became some of the best-selling records of the early gramophone era.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

First the recitative: broken, halting phrases, each answered by an outburst in the orchestra, as Canio struggles to think straight. Then the aria, built on a sobbing phrase first heard in the opera’s prelude. The line rises to the great climax on “Ridi, Pagliaccio, sul tuo amore infranto!”, the most exposed moment in the piece. Many tenors then break into a real sob, and the orchestra takes the melody over in a final surge of grief.

Ottorino Respighi

1879–1936

Feste romane

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, lov-

25 minutes

ingly arranging Renaissance and Baroque pieces. His finest works combine spectacular orchestral virtuosity with vivid pictorialism and a warm lyrical gift.

ABOUT THE WORK

Feste romane (Roman Festivals), completed in 1928, is the last and largest of Respighi's three Roman tone poems. Where *Fountains* painted times of day and *Pines* the landscape, *Festivals* turns to the crowd: four celebrations, from ancient Rome to Respighi's own time. Arturo Toscanini, who had made *Fountains of Rome* famous, gave the first performance with the New York Philharmonic at Carnegie Hall in February 1929.

It is the most extravagant of the three. The orchestra includes a mandolin, a large percussion section with ratchet, sleigh bells and wood blocks, offstage *buccine* (usually played by trumpets) and an organ, and Respighi himself felt afterwards that he had reached the limit of orchestral sonority and colour. It has never been quite as popular as its two predecessors, but it is a spectacular test for a virtuoso orchestra, and it ends the evening in uproar.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Circenses (Circus Games). A threatening sky hangs over the Circus Maximus, wrote Respighi, but it is the people's holiday. Brass fanfares greet the emperor, and in the arena the hymn of the Christian martyrs rises against the snarling of wild beasts. The martyrs' chant holds out, then is drowned in violent chords over the organ.

Il Giubileo (The Jubilee). Medieval pilgrims trudge towards Rome, praying. Then, from the summit of Monte Mario, the holy city comes into view; a hymn bursts out and the church bells ring in reply. Respighi weaves in the old Easter hymn "Christ ist erstanden".

L'Ottobrata (The October Festival). The grape harvest in the hills outside Rome: hunting horns, tinkling bells and love songs. At twilight a mandolin plays a romantic serenade.

La Befana (Epiphany). The night before Epiphany in the Piazza Navona. Trumpets set a frantic rhythm, and out of the din come snatches of folk dances, a barrel organ, a street vendor's cry, and a drunken reveller portrayed by a slurring solo trombone. The finale gathers everything into a deafening, joyous climax.

Tonight's artists

Jonathan Tetelman *tenor*

Jonathan Tetelman sings four scenes from Italian opera around 1900, each a tenor at a breaking point. Two of the roles are closely his own: he sang Loris in *Fedora* at Oper Frankfurt in 2022, a performance the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* praised for its warmth and elegance, and he made his Vienna State Opera debut as Turiddu in *Cavalleria rusticana*. The arias are set between Respighi's three Roman tone poems, so that the evening moves between the orchestra at full stretch and the voice alone. The programme is repeated at the Festspielhaus Baden-Baden on 3 December.

Jonathan Tetelman was born in Castro, Chile, in 1988 and was adopted as a baby by American parents who raised him in New Jersey. He began as a baritone, studying at the Manhattan School of Music, and made the transition to tenor during graduate studies at the Mannes School of Music. He has since become one of the most sought-after tenors in Italian and French opera, in roles such as Rodolfo, Cavaradossi, Pinkerton, Alfredo, Werther and Loris Ipanov in Giordano's *Fedora*, at houses including the Royal Opera House, the Metropolitan Opera, the Vienna State Opera and the Deutsche Oper Berlin. He records exclusively for Deutsche Grammophon: his debut album *Arias* (2022) won him an OPUS KLASSIK Young Artist award, and *The Great Puccini* (2023) received a Gramophone Award.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **Rome: The Biography of a City**

Christopher Hibbert, Penguin 1988

Christopher Hibbert's history of Rome follows the city across the centuries, a good background to the fountains, pines, Appian Way and festivals that Respighi depicts.

ACCESSIBLE **Toscanini: Musician of Conscience**

Harvey Sachs, W. W. Norton 2018

Toscanini conducted the first performance of *Pagliacci* in 1892 and of Respighi's *Feste romane* in 1929, so his life links both halves of this programme.

DEEPER **The Autumn of Italian Opera: From Verismo to Modernism, 1890-1915**

Alan Mallach, Northeastern University Press 2007

A detailed study of Italian opera between 1890 and 1915, covering Mascagni, Leoncavallo, Cilea and Giordano, the composers of to-night's arias.

SOURCES

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17. Composer Profile: Pietro Mascagni, The Man Behind Cavalleria Rusticana, OperaWire. <https://operawire.com/?p=26783>
18. Pagliacci, Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pagliacci>
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