

SAN DIEGO SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA
A JACOBS MASTERWORKS CLASSICAL SPECIAL CONCERT
Edo de Waart, conductor

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HECTOR BERLIOZ

Overture to *Béatrice and Bénédict*

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Piano Concerto No. 24 in C minor, K. 491

Allegro

Larghetto

Allegretto

Lang Lang, piano

OTTORINO RESPIGHI

***Fontane di Roma* (Fountains of Rome)**

The Fountain of Valle Giulia at Dawn

The Triton Fountain at Morn

The Fountain of Trevi at Midday

The Villa Medici Fountain at Sunset

Overture to *Béatrice and Bénédict*

HECTOR BERLIOZ

Born December 11, 1803, La Côte-St. André, Grenoble

Died March 8, 1869, Paris

On the night of September 11, 1827, a fiery young French composer named Hector Berlioz – then not quite 24 – attended a performance of *Hamlet* in Paris. He came out of the theater a changed man, smitten by the beauty of Harriett Smithson, the actress who played Ophelia, and moved by the language and power of Shakespeare’s drama. Berlioz’s life was transformed that evening. He vowed on the spot to marry Harriett, and six years later he did. Their union would prove unhappy, but Berlioz’s infatuation with Shakespeare would last a lifetime and would lead him to compose a number of works inspired by Shakespeare’s plays. These include his “dramatic symphony” *Romeo and Juliet*, an overture to *King Lear* and various short works inspired by *Hamlet* and *The Tempest*. And Shakespeare would be the inspiration for Berlioz’s final opera.

During the 1850s Berlioz toured as a guest conductor of his own works, and his concerts in Baden-Baden were particularly successful. Encouraged by that success, Edouard Bénazet, the owner of the casino and theater in Baden-Baden, commissioned an opera from Berlioz for that theater. Berlioz was just coming off the overpowering effort that had gone into composing and producing *Les Troyens*, and now he was ready for something lighter. For the final time in his career, he turned to Shakespeare, in this case *Much Ado about Nothing*. Berlioz drew up his own libretto, keeping many lines from Shakespeare but also introducing characters and scenes of his own devising. The result was what Berlioz called “an opéra comique” in two acts. He took the focus off the potentially tragic relationship between Claudio and Hero, choosing instead to enjoy the battle of the sexes as exemplified by Beatrice and Benedick: that couple may express their disdain for marriage in general and for each other in particular, but they end up married at the happy conclusion of Shakespeare’s play. First produced at Baden-Baden on August 9, 1862, *Béatrice and Bénédict* enjoyed a successful premiere and was performed several times over the following seasons. Its success was one of the few pleasures of Berlioz’s unhappy final years – he died just a few years later, in 1869.

Béatrice and Bénédict is seldom staged today – its vast amount of spoken dialogue makes it difficult for opera companies – but Berlioz’s lively overture lives on in the concert hall.

That overture bursts to life on its skittering, playful main theme, which is tossed easily between strings and woodwinds. Berlioz reins in this energy for the solemn second theme-group, marked *Andante un poco sostenuto*. The rest of the overture treats these two themes, but there is never much of what might be called development in the textbook sense of that term. Instead, Berlioz simply alternates his themes, embellishes them as they go, and finally drives matters to a grand close on a ringing G Major chord for the whole orchestra. It is a sparkling introduction to the tale of love gone wrong – and love gone right – that will follow.

Piano Concerto No. 24 in C minor, K. 491

WOLFGANG AMADEUS MOZART

Born January 27, 1756, Salzburg

Died December 5, 1791, Vienna

From the fall of 1785 through the spring of 1786, Mozart was hard at work on *The Marriage of Figaro* – in fact, he completed the opera on April 29, only two days before its premiere. But in March he paused briefly to compose two piano concertos for the Lenten concert season, and they are two of his greatest works. Yet they could hardly be more unlike. The Concerto No. 23 in A Major (K. 488), completed on March 2, is all sunlight and gentle lyricism, but the Concerto No. 24 in C minor (K. 491), completed three weeks later on March 24, is one of Mozart's darkest and most powerful works. The manuscript betrays unusual agitation: there are numerous passages scratched out and – remarkably for this composer – there are a number of mistakes: wrong notes, things left out, passages inserted in the wrong places. It is dangerous to attempt to make connections between the condition of a manuscript and its creator's mental state, but everything about this concerto suggests trouble and turbulence.

C minor was the key Mozart reserved for his most emotionally charged music, and he employs the largest orchestra here he ever used in a concerto, requiring both oboes and clarinets. Everyone instinctively senses the symphonic character of this concerto: it exists not as a showcase for the pianist but as the most serious symphonic argument in which piano and orchestra participate as equals.

The orchestra's quiet but ominous opening theme will form the backbone of the *Allegro*. There is no true “contrasting” second subject but instead a wealth of secondary material, some of it derived motivically from the rhythm of that fertile opening theme. Even the piano's seemingly

calm entrance can be traced to material already introduced, and it too is soon penetrated by bits of the opening theme. There are moments of extraordinary agitation, almost violence, in the development, and that mood settles over the entire movement. Mozart left no cadenza, but the ending of this movement is as remarkable as everything else in it: the orchestra's entrance after the cadenza is not a gentle return but almost an explosion, and then – most unusually – the piano returns in the coda and helps propel the movement to a muttering close in which none of its tensions has been resolved.

Mozart needs some relief at this point, and it comes in the *Larghetto*, which moves to E-flat Major. This movement is similar in character to the *Romanze* slow movement of the Piano Concerto No. 20 in D minor (K. 466), composed the year before. As in that concerto, the solo piano introduces the singing main theme of what will be a slow rondo, but this one is ingenious: each of the three interludes is introduced by the woodwind band, and then piano and strings comment on their music. Mozart's writing for woodwinds was always distinguished, and here it is astonishing: each of these interludes creates a small world of its own.

The dark mood of the opening movement returns at the first instant of the finale: we are back in C minor, and the strings' opening theme breathes the same suppressed power of the concerto's opening. The finale is not the expected rondo, but a variation-form movement, based on the opening theme. The variations are often double variations, with the second part a development of the first. Along the way, Mozart offers two intervening episodes, both introduced by the wind band; these seem at first to provide contrast, but closer familiarity reveals them to be subtle variations of the main theme. At the end, Mozart pauses for a cadenza, but when the orchestra returns, he re-bars the main theme in 6/8, and on that flowing meter the concerto dances to its close. Or at least tries to, for Mozart remains firmly in C minor, and the music closes in darkness and defiance.

Mozart's Piano Concerto in C minor has moved countless listeners, but none more than a young pianist named Ludwig van Beethoven, who arrived in Vienna six years later. Listening to a performance of this concerto with his friend, the pianist Jean-Baptiste Cramer, the young Beethoven nearly despaired, exclaiming: "Oh, Cramer! Cramer! We will never be able to do anything like this!" Yet the influence of this concerto can be felt in much of Beethoven's music: in the choice of key, in the dark and dramatic argument, and even in the shape of themes; the opening of Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto, composed in 1800, is clearly "lifted" from the

opening of this concerto. It is as if the extraordinary power of Mozart's music, still trembling in the air of Vienna, took hold of the young composer in a way he could not escape.

Fontane di Roma (Fountains of Rome)

OTTORINO RESPIGHI

Born July 9, 1879, Bologna

Died April 18, 1936, Rome

Ottorino Respighi's three sets of Roman tone-poems – *Fountains of Rome* (1916), *Pines of Rome* (1924) and *Roman Festivals* (1928) – have become some of the most popular orchestral works ever written, but their early success was precarious, and the discouraged composer almost abandoned the entire concept. The young Respighi had made extended stays in St. Petersburg, where he took private lessons in orchestration from Rimsky-Korsakov and played viola in the opera orchestra, and in Berlin, where he attended Bruch's lectures. When he returned to Italy in 1913 to become a professor of composition at the Conservatory of St. Cecilia in Rome, Respighi was 34 and had been composing for nearly two decades without much success.

In 1916, as World War I ravaged Europe, Respighi composed a suite for orchestra inspired by four of Rome's striking fountains and called simply *Fountains of Rome*. The composer had high hopes for this music, but its premiere in March 1917 was a failure: the performance was apparently indifferent, and the music fell flat with the audience. Later that year Arturo Toscanini saw the score and asked to perform it at a concert in Rome to benefit Italian artists wounded in the war, but Respighi was so demoralized by the music's initial failure and its dim prospects that he would not even attend that concert. And of course, the result was almost predictable: Toscanini's performance in February 1918 was so incandescent that it swept the audience away, the firm of Ricordi asked to publish the score, and *Fountains of Rome* quickly established an international reputation for its surprised composer.

The influences on the Roman trilogy have been noted frequently: Respighi's studies with Rimsky-Korsakov show up in the sumptuous sound of the orchestra, while Richard Strauss's tone-poems provide the model for this sort of orchestral pictorialism. Yet Respighi transcends those influences: he writes for an orchestra larger and more varied than Rimsky ever used, and his musical aims are different from Strauss's. Strauss had used the orchestra to depict specific actions and to tell a story, but Respighi is not so much interested in musical narrative – in telling

a story – as he is in creating atmosphere.

And Respighi was a master of evoking atmosphere. In a prefatory note to the score of *Fountains*, he made his intentions clear: “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.” In the score, Respighi also provided brief synopses of the four movements of *Fountains of Rome*, which are played without pause. His notes are quoted in full here, followed by more detailed musical descriptions of each movement.

1. *The Fountain of Valle Giulia at Dawn. 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.* Respighi evokes the misty dawn with murmuring muted strings, while soft woodwind solos echo the pipes of those herding the cattle.

2. *The Triton Fountain in the Morning. 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.* Bernini’s Triton Fountain depicts frolicking tritons and sea-nymphs, and Respighi’s music is alive with this energy and motion. The spectacular horn-calls at the beginning give way to trills that seem to sparkle, like sunlight reflecting off leaping water. Woodwinds and harp bring us “the frenzied dance,” and all seems motion, energy and light here.

3. *The Fountain of Trevi at Midday. 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 Trevi Fountain remains a great favorite with tourists, who are told that they will be granted a return trip to Rome if they pitch a coin over their shoulder into the water. This is one of Respighi’s most powerful movements, and it is in constant motion upward, its themes driving ever higher. The climax explodes with energy, and the music subsides as receding trumpets fade into the distance.

4. *The Villa Medici Fountain at Sunset.* 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. Respighi assigns the “sad theme” to a duet of flute and English horn. The energy of the previous movement is now entirely gone, and as daylight fades the music grows quiet, slips into the lower strings and fades away as birds trill and distant churchbells ring.

-Program notes by Eric Bromberger