

THE PINES OF ROME

In 1924 Ottorino Respighi presented the second of his patriotic symphonic poems titled *The Pines Of Rome* (Pini di Roma). A sequel of sorts to *The Fountains Of Rome* (Fontane di Roma, 1917) *The Pines of Rome* is a programmatic visual feast for the ears. A work in four movements, each movement visualizes a different scene from the city of Rome, Italy.

The first movement, *The Pines of the Villa Borghese* (i pini di Villa Borghese) begins fast and frenetic with soaring brass and piano setting the scene of children playing beneath the pine trees of the Borghese gardens. This brief opening statement pushes quickly into the second movement, *Pines Near A Catacomb* (pini presso una catacomba), which opens in stark contrast to the opening by depicting the pines of the Roman catacombs of Campagna. In this movement a low drone gives way to a stunning and eerie melodic statement by a solo trumpet, distant as though entombed within the catacombs themselves. This melancholy trumpet solo plants the seed for one of the first high points of the composition as the strains of his melody blend with an exuberant crescendo to create a gripping and highly aesthetic experience.

The third movement of Respighi's *Pines of Rome*, *The Pines of the Janiculum* (I pini del Gianicolo), presents a solo clarinet describing in song a nighttime view of the hill of Janiculum. She plays a gentle, romantic melody atop a bed of hushed instruments. This clarinet melody then passes on to other sections of the ensemble before the movement concludes with the recorded sound of a nightingale helping us to gently segue into the final movement, *The Pines of the Apian Way*.

The Pines of the Apian Way (I pini della Via Appia) are some of the most simple, natural, yet incredibly breathtaking sights to behold in Rome. These giant pine trees are groomed to remove their lower branches, and soar what seems like miles into the sky. In *The Pines of Rome* Respighi paints this image in a manner and method that can only be described as the most intense and most physically moving finales of all of his compositions. A slow pulsating rhythm opens the fourth movement, as one by one other instruments enter to join in the procession. A solo English horn enters to present the theme of the movement, a somber yet lilting thought that is picked up by the horns and eventually the entire brass section. The procession grows louder and stronger as these soldiers approach, marching down one of the most famous avenues in all of the ancient world. As the procession arrives the brass, bass drums, and timpani begin to pound at your senses, not overwhelming them, but driving your heart into a blissful frenzy. The final stanzas of Respighi's *Pines of Rome* conclude with an incredible feast of lush, powerful chords and crystal clear imagery, leaving you wanting to find a way to hop the next plane to Italy to see it all for yourself.

SCHEHERAZADE

Scheherazade's specific inspiration was *The Tales of the Arabian Nights*. The scenario, inscribed on the score, concerns the mighty and misogynous Sultan Sharyar who enjoyed his nuptial pleasures without the risk of acquiring a life-long nag by the politically-incorrect expedient of having each wife executed the morning after. However, Scheherazade enchanted him with wondrous tales, each of which she craftily left unfinished at the night's end (rather like the old Saturday matinee "cliff-hangers"). Left wanting for more, Sharyar repeatedly had to stay the execution, finally admitting defeat.

The music of Scheherazade is like a magic carpet: it can transport you to another world. Rimsky-Korsakov originally called the movements Prelude, Ballade, Adagio, and Finale, but felt that it didn't qualify as a "symphony" because of its programmatic nature and lack of strict formality (all movements being merely variational).

The Sea and Sinbad's Ship (Largo e Maestoso - Allegro non troppo) Two memorable mottos represent the protagonists: "Sharyar", majestic and fearsome, and "Scheherazade", sinuously seductive. The movement alternates three climactic passages, casting "Sharyar" in the role of Sinbad, with three calm twilight episodes featuring both mottos.

The Tale of the Kalendar Prince (Lento - Andante) The Kalendarers were wandering beggars, for some superstitious reason fêted as royalty. The movement is a ternary form (ABA) regarding deployment of themes, but otherwise a kaleidoscope of increasingly colorful variations. "Scheherazade" weaves her spell to introduce the A theme - half dancing, half declamatory. The B theme is based on "Sharyar". A bold march gradually emerges, bracketed by two cadenzas on the declamatory part of A. "Sharyar" reappears, low down, generating a huge crescendo to a knockout close.

The Young Prince and Princess (Andantino quasi Allegretto) Invent a story of young love, if you wish - Rimsky provided scant clues: the sumptuous main theme he identified with the Prince, a brief counter-subject (rippling clarinet) with the Princess, and at the central allegretto he suggested, "They carry the Princess on a palanquin". Again, this is a "ternary/variational" form. The first section rings the changes on textures tinted by added wind, with contrasting solo woodwind timbres. The allegretto, one of those wonderful oriental dances, is just an upbeat variation of the same material, where the snare-drum part is played on more than the snare-drum. A resounding trumpet-led rubato reinstates tempo primo for a rhapsodic closing section where solo instruments predominate, and "Scheherazade" embroiders the tale. The codetta is particularly captivating, woodwind swirl and scintillating percussion: what images that conjures!

Festival at Baghdad - The Sea - Shipwreck on a Rock surmounted by a Bronze Warrior - Conclusion (Allegro molto) Paralleling the work's beginning, the introduction finds "Sharyar" now gruffly impatient (grabbing first whack on the bass drum), and "Scheherazade" correspondingly more animated. The Festival is, loosely, a "rondo/variational": AB[AC]ABA, where [C], developing the Kalendar fanfare, hijacks

the second [A]'s climax. The first and third occurrences of [A], a skittering dance, whip up a blaze of crackling trumpets and booming tuttis - these last based on the Kalendar Prince's tune. [B] is the "palanquin" allegretto, liquidly re-scored. The final [A] builds manically, trumpets triple-tonguing like mad, only for the scene to cut cinematographically to Sinbad's storm-tossed ship, which shudders and breaks. In the stunned calm one recognizes, through the thematic identity, that this symbolizes Sharyar's rising passion for his enchantress and cataclysmic acquiescence to the superiority of woman (or at least this particular woman). "Sharyar" and "Scheherazade" finally make sweet music together.