

About the Music

by DR. RICHARD E. RODDA

The Fountains of Rome (1916)

— Ottorino Respighi

Born July 9, 1879 in Bologna.

Died April 18, 1936 in Rome.

The Fountains of Rome is the earliest of the Roman trilogy of symphonic poems by which Respighi is primarily represented in the world's concert halls. (*The Pines of Rome* followed in 1924, *Roman Festivals* in 1929.) It was also his first great public success, though his notoriety was not achieved without a certain difficulty. Arturo Toscanini had agreed to conduct the premiere of *Fountains*, late in 1916. Germany and Italy were at war then, however, and there had been recent bombings of Italian towns that resulted in heavy casualties. Despite heated anti-German feelings, Toscanini refused to drop selections by that arch Teuton Richard Wagner from his programs. When he began *Siegfried's Funeral March* on one November concert, grumbling arose in the audience and finally erupted with a shout from the balcony: "This piece is for the Paduan dead." The infuriated Toscanini hurled his baton at the unruly audience and stormed off the stage and out of Rome. Plans for the premiere of *The Fountains of Rome* were delayed, and the work had to wait until the following March to be heard, in a concert conducted by Antonio Guarnieri. Respighi's wife, Elsa, reported that the premiere was not a success. Indeed, the composer, whose music had not yet found much favor, expected as much. Trying to make light of the possibility of failure, he warned one of his friends to "take your umbrella and galoshes" to the premiere of this modern-day "Water Music." It was with Toscanini's performances in Milan and Rome of the following year that *The Fountains of Rome* — and Respighi's reputation — became established.

Respighi told his wife that he thought it strange no one had ever depicted the famous Roman fountains in music, that no one had ever made them sing, "for they are the very voice of the city," he said. This sparkling work paints colorful pictures of four of these famous landmarks as seen through the dawn-to-dusk cycle of a single day. Its musical style combines elements of Debussian Impressionism and Straussian vigor with Respighi's own brilliant sense of lyricism and orchestral color. Elsa noted that *The Fountains of Rome* was written "to satisfy a spiritual need. It is in a way a synthesis of Respighi's feelings, thoughts and sensations during those first few months of life in Rome."

Respighi prefaced the orchestral score of *The Fountains of Rome* with the following description of the music:

"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.

"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.

“A sudden loud and insistent blast of horns above 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.

“Next there appears a solemn theme borne on the undulations of the orchestra. It is the fountain of Trevi at mid-day. The solemn theme, passing from the woodwind to the brass instruments, assumes a triumphal character. Trumpets peal: across the radiant surface of the water there passes Neptune’s chariot drawn by sea-horses, and followed by a train of sirens and tritons. The procession then vanishes while faint trumpet blasts resound in the distance.

“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.”

Symphony No. 7 in C major (in One Movement), — Jean Sibelius (1865-1957)
Op. 105 (1923-1924)

Born December 8, 1865 in Hämeenlinna, Finland.

Died September 20, 1957 in Järvenpää, Finland.

One of the most important stylistic trends in the historical development of the symphony was its evolution toward a totally integrated, single span of music. The symphonies of Haydn and Mozart, for all their prodigious technical and expressive brilliance, comprised essentially four separate orchestral essays linked almost exclusively by key and style. It was Beethoven, particularly in the Fifth and Ninth Symphonies, who showed how the individual symphonic movements could be related one to another to produce a cumulative emotional effect surpassingly greater than any music written by his forebears. The sense of summing-up, of struggle overcome and victory won, of apotheosis achieved in the finales of those symphonies, is one of Beethoven’s most important legacies to 19th-century music.

With Beethoven as exemplar, an important part in the evolution of the symphony during the Romantic century was played by the attempts (and successes) to hew its component movements into a unified, meaningful arch of music. Berlioz, for example, posited a single melody, an *idée fixe*, that appeared as a unifying structural and emotional device in each of the movements of his *Symphonie Fantastique*. Schumann transformed a germinal motive in his Fourth Symphony into important thematic material throughout the work, and emphasized the interrelatedness of the movements by leaving their forms incomplete, forcing the music to continue. In the finale of his Third Symphony, Brahms telescoped the movement’s development and recapitulation sections. Liszt, following the lead of Schubert’s *Wanderer Fantasy*, created the symphonic poem, the single-movement genre integrated as much by the pervasiveness of its motives and the abutting of its movement-like sections

as by its programmatic content. In the one-movement Seventh Symphony of Jean Sibelius, this Romantic urge toward structural unification reached its logical goal.

It was in 1918, when he was struggling to bring his Fifth Symphony into its final shape, that Sibelius first mentioned plans for two further such works, apparently conceived simultaneously in the euphoric rush following the end of the Great War: “The VIIth symphony. Joy of life and vitality, with *appassionato* passages. In three movements — the last a ‘Hellenic rondo.’ ... It looks as if I were to compose three symphonies at the same time.... With regard to VI and VII, the plans may be altered according to the development of musical ideas. As usual, I am a slave to my themes and submit to their demands.” He continued to tinker with the Fifth Symphony until the autumn of the following year, when he proclaimed it done. After the premiere of the Sixth Symphony, in February 1923 in Helsinki, he immediately went to Italy and began serious work on its successor. He completed the score on March 3, 1924. The piece that emerged, however, bore no resemblance to the three-movement work of the 1918 plan. It was instead a closely reasoned, single-movement work, the true end result of the Romantics’ quest for the ultimate symphonic form. For Sibelius, this magnificent, rounded span of music took on nearly mystical significance. “The final form of one’s work,” he wrote, “is, indeed, dependent on powers that are stronger than oneself. Later on, one can substantiate this or that, but on the whole one is merely a tool. This wonderful logic — let us call it God — that governs a work of art is an irresistible power.... These symphonies of mine [Nos. 5, 6 and 7] are more in the nature of professions of faith than my other works.” Rumors of an eighth symphony persisted throughout the remaining three decades of Sibelius’ life. He almost certainly did some work on such a score, but nothing ever was issued to the public — perhaps his sketches were destroyed soon after their conception; perhaps, on his instructions, after his death in 1957. Ultimately he came to the realization, as must anyone sensitive to the historical tradition of the symphonic form, that he had accomplished all that he could in the Seventh Symphony, and that no further advances were possible for him.

There have been many attempts to explain the formal substance of the Symphony; some say it is in three movements, some five, some something else. Gerald Abraham’s is the most salient point, however: “The most remarkable aspect of Sibelius’ Seventh Symphony is that it is an *organic* symphony in one movement; not merely a long movement in which various sections correspond to slow movement, scherzo and so on, but a single indivisible organism.” The essence of this music, as it was for Beethoven in his last years, is in its *becoming* rather than in its *achieving*. The climaxes, the points of arrival, are only important as the logical consequence of what has preceded them, and can therefore be left almost as soon as they are reached so that the inexorable movement toward the next point of arrival — the essential function of any art form that exists in and structures time — may start again. The most fruitful way to hear such a work as the Seventh Symphony is to leave aside conventional formal expectations and allow the composer to be the guide through the experience — by building tension, and releasing it; by creating transient obscurity to be resolved into crystalline clarity; by shaping time and emotions.

Symphony No. 3 in C minor, Op. 78, “Organ” (1886) — Camille Saint-Saëns

Born October 9, 1835 in Paris.

Died December 16, 1921 in Algiers.

“There goes the French Beethoven,” declared Charles Gounod to a friend as he pointed out Camille Saint-Saëns at the Paris premiere of the “Organ” Symphony. This was high praise, indeed, and not without foundation. Though the depths of feeling that Beethoven plumbed were never accessible to Saint-Saëns, both musicians largely devoted their lives to the great abstract forms of instrumental music — symphony, concerto, sonata — that are the most difficult to compose and the most rewarding to accomplish. This was no mean feat for Saint-Saëns.

The Paris in which Saint-Saëns grew up, studied and lived was enamored of the vacuous stage works of Meyerbeer, Offenbach and a host of lesser lights in which little attention was given to artistic merit, only to convention and entertainment. Berlioz tried to break this stranglehold of mediocrity, and earned for himself a reputation as an eccentric, albeit a talented one, whose works were thought unperformable and probably best left to the pedantic Germans anyway. Saint-Saëns, with his love of Palestrina, Rameau, Beethoven and, above all, Mozart, also determined not to be enticed into the *Opéra Comique* but to follow his calling toward a more noble art. To that end, he helped establish the *Société Nationale de Musique* in 1871 to perform the serious concert works of French composers. The venture was a success, and did much to give a renewed sense of artistic purpose to the country’s best musicians.

Saint-Saëns produced a great deal of music to promote the ideals of the *Société Nationale de Musique*, including ten concertos and various smaller works for solo instruments and orchestra, four tone poems, two orchestral suites and five symphonies, the second and third of which were unpublished for decades and discounted in the usual numbering of these works. The last of the symphonies, the No. 3 in C minor, is his masterwork in the genre. Saint-Saëns placed much importance on this composition. He pondered it for a long time and realized it with great care, unusual for this artist, who said of himself that he composed music “as an apple tree produces apples,” that is, naturally and without visible effort. “I have given in this Symphony,” he confessed, “everything that I could give.”

Of the work’s construction, Saint-Saëns wrote, “This Symphony is divided into two parts, though it includes practically the traditional four movements. The first, checked in development, serves as an introduction to the *Adagio*. In the same manner, the scherzo is connected with the finale.” Saint-Saëns clarified the division of the two parts by using the organ only in the second half of each: dark and rich in Part I, noble and uplifting in Part II. The entire work is unified by transformations of the main theme, heard in the strings at the beginning after a brief and mysterious introduction. In his “Organ” Symphony, Saint-Saëns combined the techniques of thematic transformation, elision of movements and richness of orchestration with a clarity of thought and grandeur of vision to create one of the masterpieces of French symphonic music.

HARRISBURG SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

Saturday, February 10, 2018 at 8:00 p.m.

Sunday, February 11, 2018 at 3:00 p.m.

STUART MALINA, Conducting
/ , Organ

The Fountains of Rome

Ottorino Respighi
(1879-1936)

The Valle Giulia Fountain at Dawn

The Triton Fountain at Morning

The Trevi Fountain at Noon

The Villa Medici Fountain at Sunset

(Played without pause)

Symphony No. 7 in C major (in One Movement), Op. 105

Jean Sibelius
(1865-1957)

— INTERMISSION —

Symphony No. 3 in C minor, Op. 78, "Organ"

Camille Saint-Saëns
(1835-1921)

Adagio — Allegro moderato —

Poco adagio

Allegro moderato — Presto — Allegro moderato —

Maestoso — Allegro