

Peoria Symphony Orchestra Program Notes
April 28, 2018
Michael Allsen

Note: texts/translations appear at the end of this file.

This closing concert of our season has a distinctly Italian flavor. Mendelssohn's vivacious "Italian" symphony is a musical souvenir of the happy times he spent in Italy while touring Europe as a young man. Mezzo-soprano Naomi O'Connell joins the Peoria Symphony Orchestra for a song cycle by Giuseppe Martucci - a passionate remembrance of love found and then lost. Rounding off the program is the evocative *Pines of Rome* by Respighi: the composer's colorful musical portrait of his home town, closing with the stirring sound of an ancient Roman army on the march.

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)
Symphony No.4 in A Major, p.90 ("Italian")

Mendelssohn composed the Symphony No.4 in 1830-33, and conducted the first performance in London on May 13, 1833. He later revised the score extensively.

Like many young men of wealthy nineteenth-century families, Felix Mendelssohn was able to indulge in the tradition of the "grand tour"—indeed, Mendelssohn seems to have spent most of his early adulthood as a tourist. Mendelssohn's letters from this period show him to be a keen and enthusiastic observer of the lands and cultures he visited. During 1830-31, Mendelssohn was in Italy, touring and socializing with other artistic-minded travelers (including Hector Berlioz). Italy seems to have been one of Mendelssohn's favorite stopovers. In a letter of 1830, he wrote: "This is Italy! What I have been looking forward to all my life as the greatest happiness is now begun, and I am basking in it."

That Mendelssohn would write a symphony inspired by festive Italian culture comes as no surprise. His traveling experiences provided inspiration for some of his finest musical works—his "Scotch" symphony (*No.3*) and the *Hebrides Overture*, are two of the very best musical observations of Scotland ever written. Most of the *Symphony No.4* was sketched out during his Italian tour. In February of 1831, he wrote from Rome to his sister Fanny: "The 'Italian' symphony is making great progress. It will be the jolliest piece I have ever done, especially the last movement. I have not found anything for the slow movement yet, and I think that I will save that for Naples."

Like Mozart, Mendelssohn has the historical reputation of effortless talent, but the "Italian" symphony was actually the product of many revisions. In another letter of 1831, Mendelssohn complained to Fanny that the piece was not falling together as well as he had originally thought, and was costing him an undue amount of effort. He completed the score in Berlin in March 1833, and conducted the first performance a few months later in London. However, Mendelssohn revised the score extensively in 1837, and at the time of his death he was planning to revise the *Saltarello* yet again. The 1837

version of the symphony (the version known today) was probably never performed during Mendelssohn's lifetime, and was only published after his death.

None of the creative pains that the “Italian” symphony cost the composer are evident in this, the “jolliest” of Mendelssohn's symphonies. The exuberant opening movement (*Allegro vivace*) is in 6/8 and is set in a thoroughly Classical sonata form. The opening theme is stated by the strings over a background of repeated chords in the winds. The second theme, announced by the woodwinds, is no less festive. Mendelssohn introduces a new, rather martial theme at the beginning of the fugal development section. A lengthy and dramatic crescendo leads into the recapitulation, which includes a brief reworking of the martial theme from the development.

In his letter to Fanny, Mendelssohn wrote that he intended to “save” the slow movement until he arrived in Naples, and the *Andante con moto* seems in fact to have been inspired by a religious procession that the composer witnessed in that city. The clarinet's opening figure sounds much like the chant intonation of a priest, and the plodding *pizzicato* bass line sets up a rather doleful mood for the main theme of the movement. This main theme is not in itself Italian, but may have been based upon a melody by Mendelssohn's composition teacher, Carl Friedrich Zelter.

The third movement, marked *Con moto moderato*, is in the spirit of a courtly Classical minuet. At the center of this movement is a lovely, pastoral trio with sonorous horns and delicate woodwind lines, that sounds much like Mendelssohn's later incidental music to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

The finale, titled *Saltarello*, is actually a combination of two Italian dances: the *Saltarello*, a jumping dance of ancient origin, and the *Tarantella*, a frantically fast and whirling couple dance. According to Italian tradition, the *Tarantella* is danced by the victim of a spider bite—the victim dances until he or she is cured (or dead). There is no stopping for breath in this energetic *finale*, which is not without a few dark moments. We hear directly from the composer's heart in this last movement — as Mendelssohn wrote to Zelter from Rome: “...I am enjoying the most wonderful combination of gaiety and seriousness, such as can only be found in Italy.”

Giuseppe Martucci (1856-1909) **La Canzone dei Ricordi (The Song of Memories)**

Martucci completed this song cycle in a version for piano and voice in 1886-1888, and he orchestrated it in 1898. The first performance was in Düsseldorf, on November 1, 1900. Duration 33:00.

Late 19th-century Italy was dominated by opera, and Giuseppe Martucci was overshadowed—then and now—by operatic composers like Verdi and Puccini. But Martucci, who focused most of his attention on instrumental works, was nevertheless an important figure in Italian musical life. Born near Naples, he studied first with his father, a military band director, and by the time he was 11 years old, he was studying piano

and composition at the Naples Conservatory. While still in his teens Martucci made a name for himself as a piano virtuoso, touring Italy, England, and Ireland, and earning admiration from none other than an aging Franz Liszt. In his twenties, he turned his attention more and more to composition and conducting—a wealthy Neapolitan patron funded an orchestra for Martucci to conduct, and he led a series of successful concerts in Naples throughout the early 1880s. In 1886, when he was just 30 years old, he accepted an invitation to Bologna to take prestigious posts as director of the conservatory, and as conductor of the most important Bolognese concert series. During his 16 years in Bologna, Martucci had a strong impact on Italian musical life, in particular introducing Italian audiences to contemporary works by non-Italians: Brahms, Wagner, Franck, D'Indy, Stanford and many others. This was also the period that saw the composition of most of his significant works. In 1902, he returned to Naples to direct the conservatory where he had studied as a teenager.

As a composer, Martucci was notable among the Italians in his day in that he wrote primarily instrumental pieces: several large orchestral works—including two symphonies and two piano concertos—over a dozen chamber works, and well over 100 works for solo piano. The orchestral song cycle heard here is one of relatively few works he wrote for the voice. He was also remarkable in the extent to which he was interested in music from outside of Italy, particularly Brahms and Wagner. While in Bologna, Martucci conducted the first Italian performance of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde* in 1888, and repeatedly programmed the symphonies at Brahms. (He and Brahms became friends, and Martucci later befriended Gustav Mahler as well.) Martucci also adapted many of these German influences into his own works, and the influence of Wagner is clearly heard in his song cycle *La Canzone dei Ricordi*. This song dates from early in his time in Bologna—a setting of seven highly emotional poems by the Neapolitan poet, critic, and librarian Rocco Pagliara (1855-1914).

Pagliara's poems trace the arc of a love affair played out in the poet's memory: from hopeful springtime beginnings to a weeping end. The opening poem, *No... svaniti non sono i sogni, e cedo* ("No... the dreams haven't vanished, and I yield"), serves as a kind of wistful introduction, as the poet summons memories of lost love. The delicate string accompaniment to this song is the perfect background to the nostalgic text. *Cantava'l ruscello la gaia canzone* ("The brook sang its cheerful song") is much lighter, with the orchestra providing the forest backdrop—a murmuring brook, birdcalls, and gentle breezes—to the poet wandering through the woods savoring a new found love. There is one short twinge of regret at the end, as the singer recalls that this is but a memory. *Fior di ginestra* ("Broom flower") is a lovely serenade, interrupted by more serious thoughts, and ending on a brief note of tragedy. In the fourth song, *Su'l mar la navicella* ("Over the sea, the little boat"), the orchestra provides a gentle, undulating background to the singer's memories of happier times spent by the sea. In *Un vago mormorio mi giunge* ("A faint murmuring reaches me"), the love affair has ended, and the orchestra provides a sensitive background to this tragic text. In the sixth poem, *A'l folto bosco, placida ombría* ("To the dense woods, to the placid shade"), the poet returns alone to the same forest where the love affair began—a kind of dark mirror image of the second song. The final poem is a shortened version of the first, now serving as a sentimental epilogue.

Ottorino Respighi (1879-1936) The Pines of Rome

The Pines of Rome was composed in 1923-24. The first performance was on December 14, 1924, in Rome.

The “Roman trilogy” of Respighi—the most successful Italian composer of his generation—includes three large symphonic poems that are easily his most famous works: *The Fountains of Rome* (1916), *The Pines of Rome* (1924), and *Roman Festivals* (1928). In these works, the composer creates a sonic portrait of his city—from *Fountains*, celebrating the great Bernini monuments, to the wild revelry of *Festivals*, Respighi paints a colorful, programmatic picture of the Eternal City. For the central work, *The Pines of Rome*, Respighi uses images of the ancient trees that line Rome’s parks and promenades to inspire four programmatic episodes. The four movements are played without pauses.

In the score, Respighi provides the following description of the first section, *Pines of the Villa Borghese*: “Children are at play in the pine grove of the Villa Borghese, dancing ‘Ring around the Rosy’; they mimic marching soldiers and battles; they chirp with excitement like swallows at evening, and they swarm away.” The music is appropriately light and high-spirited, with quick woodwind and horn lines beneath trumpet fanfares.

For *Pines near a Catacomb*, he turns to a much darker, “quasi-Medieval” texture. Respighi was fond of using Gregorian chant or chant like themes in his orchestral works, and the *Lento* second movement begins with a quiet chant that builds gradually towards a tremendous orchestral statement near the end of the movement. Here, we see “the shadows of the pines that crown the entrance to a catacomb. From the depths rises a dolorous chant which spreads solemnly, like a hymn, and then mysteriously dies away.”

In his description of *Pines of the Janiculum*, the composer notes: “There is a tremor in the air. The pines of the Janiculum hill are profiled in the full moon. A nightingale sings.” This is profoundly calm and quiet night-music, carried by the softer voices of the orchestra throughout. At the very conclusion, a recording of a nightingale’s singing is added to the orchestral texture—probably the very earliest instance of a composer using prerecorded sounds in a concert piece.

The final section is titled *Pines of the Appian Way*. Respighi gives the following colorful description of an ancient Roman army on the march: “Misty Dawn on the Appian Way. Solitary pines stand guard over the tragic countryside. The faint unceasing rhythm of numberless steps. A vision of ancient glories appears to the poet; trumpets blare and a consular army erupts in the brilliance of the newly risen sun—towards the Sacred Way, mounting to a triumph on the Capitoline Hill.” The movement opens quietly, with a slow and inexorable march, but builds gradually towards an enormous brassy peak (with several brassy knolls along the way). To create this picture of Roman military might,

Respighi's score calls for six *bucinae*—Roman war trumpets. [**Note:** He also provides the helpful suggestion that modern trumpets may be used if *bucinae* are not available!]

program notes ©2017 by J. Michael Allsen

for program page

Not sure of the exact format of your program page, but here are the composer names, titles, and movements as I use them in the notes.

Felix Mendelssohn (1809-1847)
Symphony No.4 in A Major, p.90 ("Italian")

Allegro vivace
Andante con moto
Con moto moderato
Saltarello

Giuseppe Martucci (1856-1909)
La Canzone dei Ricordi (The Song of Memories)

No... svaniti non sono i sogni, e cedo
Cantava'l ruscello la gaia canzone
Fior di ginestra
Su'l mar la navicella
Un vago mormorio mi giunge
A'l folto bosco, placida ombría
No... svaniti non sono i sogni, e cedo

Naomi O'Connell, mezzo-soprano

INTERMISSION [please confirm]

Ottorino Respighi (1879-1936)
The Pines of Rome

Pines of the Villa Borghese
Pines near a Catacomb
Pines of the Janiculum
Pines of the Appian Way

Giuseppe Martucci, *La canzone dei ricordi*

1. *No... svaniti non sono i sogni, e cedo*

*No... svaniti non sono i sogni, e cedo,
e m'abbandono a le carezze loro:
chiudo gli occhi pensosi e ti rivedo
come in un nimbo di faville d'oro!
Tu mi soridi amabilmente, e chiedo
de' lunghi affanni miei gentil ristoro!
A le dolci lusinghe ancora io credo
a' ricantar de le speranze in coro.*

*Ecco... io tendo le mani!
ecco a' rapito pensier
già tutto esulta, e un vivo foco
di sospir, di desío corre le vene!
Ma... tu passi ne l'aere, a' par di lene
nuvola dileguante a poco a poco,
per lontano orizzonte indefinito!*

2. *Cantava' l ruscello la gaia canzone*

*Cantava' l ruscello la gaia canzone,
cantavano i rami la festa d'aprile.
O primavera, o fulgida stagione,
o bel tempo gentile!*

*Vagavan pe' l cielo falene lucenti,
vagavan su' prati,
libando ogni fiore.
O primavera, o giorni sorridenti,
o bel tempo d'amore!*

*Avea carezze d'aliti ogni sentiero;
s'intrecciavano i cespi innamorati.
Oh... la pace fedel de la foresta!
Oh... il soave mistero!*

*Sovra' l mio volto pallido,
sopra la bruna testa,
candidi e profumati,
come nembo divino,
pioveano i petali de' l bianco spino!*

*Cantava' l ruscello la gaia canzone,
cantavan fra' rami melodiche voci.
O primavera, o rapida stagione,
o rei giorni veloci!*

3. *Fior di ginestra*

Fior di ginestra,

No... the dreams haven't vanished, and I yield,
and abandon myself to their caresses:
I close my eyes pensively and see you again
as in a cloud of golden rays!
You smile at me lovingly, and I ask
for gentle relief to my long suffering!
I can believe again in your sweet words,
in this singing of our hopes in chorus.

Here... I extend my hands!
here, in my rapt thoughts,
all of me exults, and a living fire
of sighs, of desire, runs through my veins!
But ... you fade into the air, like a misty cloud
vanishing little by little,
into the distant, undefinable horizon!

The brook sang its cheerful song,
the branches sang for the April feast.
O spring, O shining season,
O beautiful and sweet time of year!

Bright butterflies lit the sky above,
wandering across meadows,
drinking from every flower
O spring, O smiling days,
O beautiful time of love!

Every path was caressed by breezes;
the hedges entwined as if in love.
Oh... the faithful peace of the forest!
Oh... its gentle mystery!

Upon my pallid face
and upon my dark hair,
snow-white and perfumed,
in a divine cloud,
rained down the petals of the hawthorn!

The brook sang its cheerful song,
from the boughs sang melodious voices.
O spring, O fleeting season,
O quickly vanishing days!

—Broom flower,

*io sono lo scolar, voi la maestra.
Guardandovi ne'l volto tutto imparo:
voi la maestra siete, io lo scolaro!*

*Così dicea la dolce serenata,
così dicea la serenata mesta...
Dunque, su'l volto mio,
imparasti l'oblío?*

*Fior di viola,
sconsolata fra tutte è un'alma sola:
su'l suo sentier non brilla amor né speme.
Vogliamo, o bella, far la strada insieme?*

*Così dicea la dolce serenata,
così dicea la serenata mesta...*

Vogliamo, o bella, far la strada insieme?

*Ed ora... ove sei tu? Vedi, son sola!
e piango, e piango, e piango!*

4. Su'l mar la navicella

*Su'l mar la navicella,
vaga conchiglia nera,
fuggía, leggera e snella,
per la tranquilla sera.*

*Parea, come sospinta
da l'ala de'l disío,
e l'anima era vinta
da un infinito oblío.*

*Su'l nostro capo'l volo de li alcioni
e l'aleggiar de le brezze serene;
e mormoravan languide canzoni,
a' flutti in sen, fantastiche sirene.*

*Più vivo, in ogni stella,
c'era un folgore arcano:
fuggía la navicella,
su'l mar, lontan, lontano...*

5. Un vago mormorío mi giunge: muta

*Un vago mormorío mi giunge: muta,
rimango ad origliare, e'l cor tremante
una dolce speranza risaluta.
Ahi, mi par di vederlo a me d'innate!
Ma'l mormorío che m'ha portato'l vento
è sussurro di rami e non d'amor!
L'inganno è già svanito d'un momento:
torno a piangere ancor!*

I am the student, you are the master.
Gazing into your face, I learn everything:
you are the master, I am the student!

That is how the sweet serenade went,
That is how the sad serenade went...
Did you learn, while gazing into my face,
how to forget?

—Violet flower,
unhappiest of all is a lonely soul:
on its path neither love nor hope shines.
Do you want, O beauty, to walk together?

That is how the sweet serenade went,
That is how the sad serenade went...

Do you want, O beauty, to walk together?

And now... where are you? Look, I'm alone!
And I weep, I weep, I weep!

Over the sea, the little boat,
like a pretty black seashell,
sped off, light and swift,
in the tranquil evening.

It seemed to be moved
by wings of desire,
and my soul was overwhelmed
by an infinite oblivion.

Above our heads soared the gulls
and gentle breezes stirred the air;
and murmuring languorous songs,
fantastic sirens sang among the waves.

Glimmering in every star,
there was a mysterious spark:
as the little boat sailed off,
over the sea, far, far away...

A faint murmuring reaches me: mute,
I stop to listen, and my trembling heart
remembers sweet hope.
Alas, I think I see him before me!
But the murmurs brought by the wind
is the whispering of branches, and not of love!
The illusion has faded away in a moment:
I return to weeping again!

*Lambisce'l capo mio gentil carezza,
e mi riscote e turba i sensi miei:
de la sua man la tepida dolcezza
parmi sentir, come ne' giorni bei.
Ma l'aleggiar che'l crine m'a sfiorato
è carezza d'auretta e non d'amor!
L'inganno d'un istante è dileguato:
torno a piangere ancor!*

6. A' folto bosco, placida ombría

*A' folto bosco, placida ombría,
ove sciogliamo l'inno d'amore,
sempre ritorna l'anima mia,
triste, languente, ne'l suo dolore!
Ahi... più fedeli, forse,
le fronde serbano l'eco de' miei sospiri:
ancor, fra'rami, forse,
s'asconde la nota estrema de' miei deliri!*

*O dolce notte, o pallide stelle misteriose,
o profumi de l'aria!
o malía de le rose!
Voi mi turbaste l'anima,
col vostro influsso arcano,
di novi desiderii in un tumulto strano!
Voi, ne' silenzi estatici
di mite alba lunar,
voi mi faceste piangere,
voi mi faceste amar!*

*Occhi profondi e mistici
che vincer mi sapeste,
chi vi compose il fascino
de la pupille meste?
Ne'l petto ancor mi tremano
le vostre flamme ardeni;
v'ascolto ancora,
o languidi sospiri, o caldi accenti!
Ah! voi, ne l'incantesimo
di bianca alba lunar,
voi mi faceste piangere,
voi mi faceste amar!*

7. No... svaniti non sono i sogni, e cedo

*No... svaniti non sono i sogni, e cedo
e m'abbandono a le tristezze loro:
chiudo gli occhi pensosi e ti rivedo
come in un nimbo di faville d'oro...*

*Ma tu passi ne l'aere ...
...dileguante...*

Brushing my head, is a gentle caress,
startling me and disturbing my senses:
the sweet warmth of his hand
seems to bring back the feeling of better days.
But the gentle breeze that touched my hair
is the caress of the breeze, and not of love!
The illusion has faded away in a moment:
I return to weeping again!

To the dense woods, to the placid shade,
where we sang our hymn of love,
my soul always returns,
sad, tormented, in its distress!
Alas... maybe more faithfully,
the branches will preserve the echo of my sighs:
or even, perhaps among the branches,
my cries of ecstasy are still hidden!

O sweet night! O pale, mysterious stars,
O fragrances of the air!
O spell cast by the roses!
It was you who troubled my soul,
through your mysterious powers,
awakening new desires in a strange turmoil!
You, in the ecstatic silences
of the gentle moonrise,
you, who made me weep,
you, who made me love!

Eyes, deep and mystical,
which first subdued me,
who cast the enchanting spell
of your sad gaze?
Your ardent flames
still tremble in my heart;
I can still hear you,
O languorous sighs, O passionate words!
Ah! it was you, in the spell
of the white moonrise,
you, who made me weep,
you, who made me love!

No... the dreams haven't vanished, and I yield,
and abandon myself to their sadness:
I close my eyes pensively and see you again
as in a cloud of golden rays...

But... you fade into the air,
...vanishing...

per lontano orizzonte indefinito!

into the distant horizon... undefinable!