

12 May
Sydney Opera House

RESPIGHI'S ROMAN TRILOGY

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Founded in 1932 by the Australian Broadcasting Commission, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra has evolved into one of the world’s finest orchestras as Sydney has become one of the world’s great cities. Resident at the iconic Sydney Opera House, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra also performs in venues throughout Sydney and regional New South Wales, and international tours to Europe, Asia and the USA have earned the Orchestra worldwide recognition for artistic excellence.

The Orchestra’s first chief conductor was Sir Eugene Goossens, appointed in 1947; he was followed by Nicolai Malko, Dean Dixon, Moshe Atzmon, Willem van Otterloo, Louis Fremaux, Sir Charles Mackerras, Zdenek Macal, Stuart Challender, Edo de Waart and Gianluigi Gelmetti. Vladimir Ashkenazy was Principal Conductor from 2009 to 2013, followed by David Robertson as Chief Conductor from 2014 to 2019. Australian-born Simone Young commenced her role as Chief Conductor in 2022, a year in which the Orchestra made its return to a renewed Sydney Opera House Concert Hall.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra's concerts encompass masterpieces from the classical repertoire, music by some of the finest living composers, and collaborations with guest artists from all genres, reflecting the Orchestra's versatility and diverse appeal. Its award-winning education program is central to its commitment to the future of live symphonic music, and the Orchestra promotes the work of Australian composers through performances, recordings and its commissioning program.

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TEA & SYMPHONY

Friday 12 May, 11am

Concert Hall,
Sydney Opera House

RESPIGHI'S ROMAN TRILOGY

GLORIOUS LANDSCAPES

JOHN WILSON conductor

OTTORINO RESPIGHI (1879–1936)

Roman Festivals

i. *Circuses*

ii. *The Jubilee*

iii. *October Harvest Festival*

iv. *Epiphany*

Fountains of Rome

i. *The Fountain of Valle Giulia at Dawn*

ii. *The Triton Fountain in the Morning*

iii. *The Fountain of Trevi at Midday*

iv. *The Villa Medici Fountain at Sunset*

Pines of Rome

i. *The Pines of the Villa Borghese*

ii. *Pines Near a Catacomb*

ii. *The Pines of the Janiculum*

iv. *The Pines of the Appian Way*

ESTIMATED DURATIONS

24 minutes, 15 minutes,
23 minutes

The concert will conclude at
approximately 12 noon





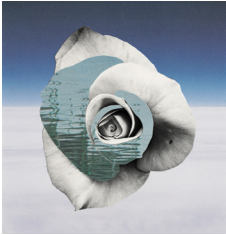
COVER IMAGE

Pexels/Dids

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MAY 2023		
	<p>STEPHEN HOUGH IN RECITAL GREAT ROMANTICS</p> <p>MOMPOU Cants màgics CHOPIN Ballade No.3 CHOPIN Two Nocturnes DEBUSSY Estampes STEPHEN HOUGH Partita LISZT Années de Pèlerinage: Three Petrarch Sonnets Dante Sonata</p> <p>STEPHEN HOUGH piano</p>	<p>International Pianists in Recital</p> <p>Monday 15 May, 7pm City Recital Hall</p>
	<p>STEPHEN HOUGH PERFORMS RACHMANINOV 1 PASSIONATE & DRAMATIC</p> <p>GORDON HAMILTON a great Big Blue Thing <i>50 Fanfares Commission</i> RACHMANINOV Piano Concerto No.1 KORNGOLD Symphony in F-sharp</p> <p>JOHN WILSON conductor STEPHEN HOUGH piano</p>	<p>Emirates Masters Series Emirates Thursday Afternoon Symphony</p> <p>Wednesday 17 May, 8pm Thursday 18 May, 1.30pm Friday 19 May, 8pm Saturday 20 May, 8pm Concert Hall, Sydney Opera House</p>
JUNE 2023		
	<p>MOZART'S GREAT MASS IN C MINOR VISIONARY & DRAMATIC</p> <p>MOZART Don Giovanni: Overture Symphony No.36, Linz Mass in C minor, The Great</p> <p>MASAAKI SUZUKI conductor SARA MACLIVER soprano RACHELLE DURKIN soprano NICHOLAS JONES tenor DAVID GRECO baritone SYDNEY PHILHARMONIA CHOIRS</p>	<p>Emirates Masters Series Thursday Afternoon Symphony</p> <p>Wednesday 7 June, 8pm Thursday 8 June, 1.30pm Friday 9 June, 8pm Saturday 10 June, 8pm Concert Hall, Sydney Opera House</p>
	<p>STEVE REICH & BACH GLITTERING HARMONIES</p> <p>DEBUSSY arr. OGUEY Rhapsodie JS BACH arr. OGUEY & CONSTABLE Concerto in D, BWV 1053R STEVE REICH Mallet Quartet</p> <p>SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA MUSICIANS</p>	<p>Cocktail Hour</p> <p>Friday 9 June, 6pm Saturday 10 June, 6pm Utzon Room, Sydney Opera House</p>
	<p>SIMONE YOUNG & STEVEN ISSERLIS POWERFUL & ROMANTIC</p> <p>BEETHOVEN The Creatures of Prometheus: Overture*</p> <p>WALTON Cello Concerto SCHUMANN Symphony No.4</p> <p><i>*Great Classics performance only</i></p> <p>SIMONE YOUNG conductor STEVEN ISSERLIS cello</p>	<p>Tea & Symphony Great Classics</p> <p>Friday 30 June, 11am Saturday 1 July, 2pm Concert Hall, Sydney Opera House</p>

ABOUT THE ARTISTS

JOHN WILSON conductor

John Wilson is in demand at the highest level across the globe, regularly guest conducting the world's finest orchestras: in recent seasons these have included the London Symphony, London Philharmonic, Royal Concertgebouw, Budapest Festival, Oslo Philharmonic, Bavarian Radio Symphony, Royal Stockholm Philharmonic and Sydney Symphony orchestras, and productions at English National Opera and Glyndebourne Summer Festival.

For many years Wilson appeared widely across the UK and abroad with the John Wilson Orchestra. In 2018 he relaunched the Sinfonia of London. Their much anticipated BBC Proms debut in 2021 was described by *The Guardian* as "truly outstanding" and they are now much in demand across the UK, returning to the BBC Proms, Birmingham Symphony Hall and London's Barbican Centre among other venues this season.

Wilson has a large and varied discography and his recordings with the Sinfonia of London have received exceptional acclaim and several awards including, for three successive years, the BBC Music Magazine Award in the Orchestral category for the Korngold Symphony in F sharp (2020), Respighi *Roman Trilogy* (2021) and Dutilleux *Le Loup* (2022) recordings. *The Observer* described the Respighi recording as "massive, audacious and vividly played" and *The Times* declared it one of the three "truly outstanding accounts of this trilogy" of all time, after those by Toscanini (1949) and Muti (1984).

Born in Gateshead, Wilson studied composition and conducting at the Royal College of Music where, in 2011, he was made a Fellow. In March 2019, John Wilson was awarded the prestigious ISM Distinguished Musician Award for his services to music and in 2021 was appointed Henry Wood Chair of Conducting at the Royal Academy of Music.



John Wilson
Photo by Camilla Greenwell

ABOUT THE MUSIC

OTTORINO RESPIGHI (1879–1936)

Roman Trilogy

Ottorino Respighi left his native Bologna in early 1913 to take up the position of professor of composition at the Santa Cecilia Conservatorium in Rome. The sheer scale of the Eternal City overwhelmed him and, although he had plenty of friends and activities to keep him occupied, Respighi struggled to settle in, enduring severe bouts of melancholy for several years.

According to Elsa Olivieri Sangiacomo, a student of Respighi's at the Conservatorium who became his wife and biographer, the symphonic poem *Fountains of Rome* (1916) proved cathartic. The success of that work put Respighi's career on the map in Italy and abroad. But it also marked a new chapter in the composer's life and a newfound happiness in his adopted hometown where he would live and work until his death.

Fountains also served as the template for *Pines of Rome* (1924) and *Roman Festivals* (1928), the subsequent instalments in the so-called Roman trilogy that reflect, in Elsa's words, 'how Respighi saw and felt the varied spirit of Rome'.

Roman Festivals is the last of three works in which Respighi sought to depict aspects of Rome — the city in which he lived from 1913 until his death in 1936. It was written in 1928, some years after *The Fountains of Rome* and *The Pines of Rome*, by which time Respighi had become known as a composer outside his own country.

The fly-leaf of the score of *Roman Festivals* bears the following notes, which are here combined with a description of the music.



Ottorino Respighi

ABOUT THE MUSIC

Circuses

A threatening sky hangs over the Massimo Circus, but it is the people's holiday; 'Ave Nero!' The iron doors are unlocked, the strains of a religious song and the howling of wild beasts float on the air. The crowd rises in agitation: unperturbed, the song of the martyrs develops, conquers and then is lost in the tumult.

The movement begins *moderato* with a shrill salute — then launches into *molto allegro* with a call of three trumpets. Both are repeated several times, varied and combined. In the midst of the tumult, the chant of the martyrs is heard played softly by the woodwind and violins. At intervals the roar of the beasts is heard in the lower woodwind and brass; the chant swells to a great fervour, and then the first section is repeated. After a hurried passage for strings and woodwind, probably representative of the excitement of the people, the movement comes to a solemn end.

The Jubilee

The pilgrims trail along the highway, praying. Finally appears from the summit of Monte Mario, to ardent eyes and gasping souls, the Holy City: 'Rome! Rome!' A hymn of praise bursts forth, the churches ring out their reply.

This movement begins *doloroso e slancio* (sorrowful and weary), with a laboured march of the pilgrims, for strings alone. Clarinet and other woodwind join in and the excitement suddenly grows. After a shout from the orchestra the solo viola hints at a glimpse of the Holy City, and then the march continues at a more rapid pace. A hymn for woodwind rises above the march and grows and grows until it bursts forth as a paean of praise for full orchestra. The bells ring out and die away and the movement ends with a calmer version of the hymn and a phrase of plainsong.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

October Harvest Festival

The October festival in the Roman *Castelli* (hill towns) covered with vines: hunting echoes, tinkling of bells, songs of love. Then in the tender even-fall arises a romantic serenade.

The festival begins *allegro giocoso*. Hunting calls for trumpets, answered by horns, lead to a joyous dance which grows more and more feverish until the bells ring out, after which the tumult subsides into cadenza-like passages for clarinet and horn. Then follows the love serenade, for violins accompanied by strings, horns and mandolin.

Epiphany

The night before Epiphany in the Piazza Navona. A characteristic rhythm of trumpets dominates the frantic clamour: above the swelling noise float, from time to time, rustic motives, *saltarello* cadenzas, the strains of a barrel-organ and the appeal of the town-crier, the harsh song of the drunk and the lively *stornello* (an old Italian form of popular song) in which is expressed the popular spirit: 'We are Romans, let us pass!'

Beginning softly, this *vivo* movement depicts a scene of revelry on the eve of Epiphany. The work closes with a wild dance in which the whole orchestra participates.

Regarding ***The Fountains of Rome***, Respighi noted:

In this symphonic poem the composer has endeavoured to give impression 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, 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.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

A sudden loud and insistent blast of horns above the trills of the whole orchestra introduces the second part. 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 Midday*. 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 at Sunset*, is announced by a sad theme which rises above a subdued warbling. It is the nostalgic hour of sunset...

Claudio Guastalla, librettist of a number of Respighi's operas, wrote the 'captions' which appear at the front of the score of ***Pines of Rome*** — but only after the work was completed:

I. The pines of the Villa Borghese

Children are at play in the pine groves of Villa Borghese [the traditional children's song *Madama Doré*]; they dance round in circles, they play at soldiers, marching and fighting, they are wrought up by their own cries like swallows at evening, they come and go in swarms. Suddenly the scene changes, and

II. Pines near a catacomb

we see the shade of the pine trees fringing the entrance to a catacomb. From the depth there rises the sound of mournful psalm-singing, floating through the air like a solemn hymn [the Advent plainchant *Veni, veni, Emmanue!*], and gradually and mysteriously dispersing.

ABOUT THE MUSIC

III. The pines of the Janiculum

A quiver runs through the air: the pine trees of the Janiculum stand distinctly outlined in the clear light of a full moon. A nightingale is singing [this is the first instance of a pre-recorded sound forming part of a musical score].

IV. The pines of the Appian Way

Misty dawn on the Appian Way: solitary pine trees guarding the magic landscape; the muffled, ceaseless rhythm of unending footsteps. The poet had a fantastic vision of bygone glories: trumpets sound and, in the brilliance of the newly-risen sun, a consular army bursts forth towards the Sacred Way, mounting in triumph to the Capitol.

Given Respighi's success — he is one of the best-loved, most-often recorded and widely performed of all composers of the 20th century — it now seems extraordinary that the BBC had banned his music during the Second World War for its supposedly proto-fascist connotations. The fourth movement of the *Pines*, together with the more overtly triumphal *Roman Festivals*, are often pointed to as evidence of Respighi's sympathy for the Fascist glorification of the Rome of Empire. However, any objective reading of the composer's letters, public statements or the accounts of those who knew him suggest such claims are fanciful.

Notes by Scott Davie ©2007 and Vincent Ciccarello © 2012

“COME AND LISTEN TO THE NOISE THAT IT MAKES.”

Conductor John Wilson will conduct Respighi's Roman Trilogy with the Sydney Symphony in May, and he is imploring everyone to come and experience the scale of these extraordinary works.

By Hugh Robertson

Few cities have inspired the world like Rome, and even fewer have been realised so vividly in music as in Ottorino Respighi's *Roman Trilogy*.

In his three great tone poems *Fountains of Rome* (1916), *Pines of Rome* (1924) and *Roman Festivals* (1928), Respighi conjures up unforgettable images of that ancient city: the tall trees flanking the Appian Way, the glimmer of coins at the bottom of the Trevi Fountain, the echoes of ancient gladiatorial battles reverberating around the Colosseum.

Despite initially cool receptions, these works have become staples of the repertoire, beloved by musicians and audiences alike for their rich orchestral textures, evocative world-building and thrilling, dramatic flourishes.

John Wilson is one who shares that enthusiasm. The English conductor has spent a lot of time with Respighi recently — in August 2020 he and his orchestra the Sinfonia of London released a recording of the trilogy to great acclaim: winner of several awards and nominated for several more, it was described as “massive, audacious and vividly played” (*The Observer*) and “a listening treat” (*Limelight*), “a high-voltage interpretation, virtuosically played and strong on detail and drama” (*Gramophone*) possessing “a truly cinematic swagger” (*The Spectator*). The highest praise of all came from *BBC Music Magazine*, which in awarding the album 2021 Orchestral Album of the Year, wrote, “there are dozens of versions of Respighi's ‘Roman Trilogy’ available, but I’ve heard non better that this. The orchestral playing is magnificent, and its joy and exuberance are a tonic.”

“COME AND LISTEN TO THE NOISE THAT IT MAKES.”

Unsurprisingly, since then Wilson has been invited to perform these works around the world, and now it is Sydney's turn. For Wilson, even after performing them so often of late, Wilson is always thrilled to get to do them again — especially all three in the one concert.

“I've done them quite a lot over the years,” says Wilson. “And it was great to put them under the microscope, because in the moment of recording them you are analysing things as you go, and you are listening intently, and you discover things. I did them on the record in quite a different way to how I've ever done them in concerts.

“They sit so well together. There is so much contrast between the *Festivals*, *The Fountains* and *The Pines*. *The Pines of Rome* is the most famous, with its great final march, and *The Fountains* is full of some of the most beautiful, ravishing music.

“But I really, really have a lot of time for *The Festivals*, which is the least-played of the trilogy. It's definitely, technically, the hardest one to pull off, and it's the most harmonically acerbic of the three. But it gets more and more interesting every time you listen to it. And it has a sense of real mastery about it.”

The three works are programmatic, meaning they are telling a specific story rather than being pure, abstract music. Respighi not only gave each movement in these works an evocative title, but he wrote descriptions of the scenes in *Roman Festivals* that were published with the score — you can read the annotations in the ABOUT THE MUSIC section of our printed program.

“COME AND LISTEN TO THE NOISE THAT IT MAKES.”



Rome's Trevi Fountain, completed in 1762
Photo by David Iliiff. License: CC BY-SA 3.0

Even without the descriptions, the music is incredibly evocative. Respighi studied briefly with Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, and the two composers share a talent for lush, sweeping orchestrations. In discussing that connection, Wilson highlights something that would only be apparent to musicians playing the work rather than to listeners: both composers extract maximum impact from comparatively few notes.

“*Scheherazade* is a masterpiece,” says Wilson emphatically. “And the economy of means that Rimsky-Korsakov employs with which to deliver some of the most earth-shattering moments in that piece – you look at the score, there's nothing on the page!”

“There are moments in *The Pines of Rome* where there is a lot less going on [on the page] than it sounds. Respighi took from Rimsky-Korsakov what you need to do to actually make an orchestra sing. It's complete technical mastery.”

Respighi knew that he was throwing everything at these pieces — after completing *Roman Festivals*, he wrote, “I have achieved the maximum of orchestral sonority and colour, and with the present constitution of the orchestra it is impossible to achieve more.”

“COME AND LISTEN TO THE NOISE THAT IT MAKES.”

Wilson agrees with Respighi's assessment.

“I can see why he would struggle to get more notes on the page!

“They are written with such skill,” he continues.

“He is such a clever orchestrator, and they are really concise pieces, crammed full of great ideas — and of course, written on such a huge canvas that he could always make it sound like a million dollars.

“But they are more than mere flashy showpieces for orchestra – there is a personality that sounds like Respighi. There's a sound, and there's a layout, his harmonic fingerprints are all the way through them.”

Wilson also takes great pains to ensure that the subtleties of these work come through in his readings of them, not just the bombast and scale.

“My approach to those pieces is very much led by detail,” he says. “[And] there's so much detail to be had. If Respighi took the trouble to write it all in, we've got to get it all out.”

For all his focus on the minutiae, Wilson never loses sight of what it means to be a musician, and to perform for an audience.

“Is there anything more thrilling than hearing over a hundred people make music as one? The sound of a great orchestra playing great music is the most remarkable achievement of mankind.

“And to share that in a room, to be pinned to the back of your seat by this great symphonic achievement... The sound of the orchestra — and Sydney is a great orchestra — is my deepest need as a musician. And I always say to people who have never been to a concert, just come and listen to the noise that it makes.”

John Wilson conducts the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and pianist Sir Stephen Hough in Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No.2 and Respighi's Pines of Rome (11 & 13 May) and in Rachmaninov's Piano Concerto No. 1 and Korngold's Symphony in F-sharp (17-20 May). He also conducts the Orchestra in Respighi's Roman Trilogy (12 May).

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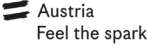
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