Program Notes
February 27 and 28, 2010
By Chris Morrison

Ottorino Respighi

b. July 9, 1879, Bologna, Italy
d. April 18, 1936, Rome, Italy

Respighi's vivid and colorful orchestral works, particularly the Roman trilogy (*The Fountains of Rome*, *The Pines of Rome*, and *Roman Festivals*), are among the best loved and most frequently performed of the twentieth century. He received his first musical training in his hometown of Bologna, then moved to St. Petersburg, Russia, where he played viola in the city's Imperial Orchestra and studied with Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. He didn't start composing seriously until he was in his twenties. After a few years as a touring violinist and violist, he took a teaching post at the Conservatorio di Santa Cecilia, where he subsequently became director in 1924. But his fame as a composer led him to leave the Conservatorio two years later. From that point on Respighi devoted himself to composition, with the occasional foray into conducting and providing piano accompaniment for singers, including two very successful tours of the United States in 1925-26 and 1932.

***Ancient Airs and Dances* Suite No. 1**
Composed: 1917
Duration: 16 minutes

Along with all his other activities, Respighi was something of a musicologist. Over the last three decades of his life, he prepared modern editions of long-forgotten works by the likes of Monteverdi, Vitali, and Marcello. He also wrote a violin concerto based on Gregorian Chant themes, a piano concerto based on the archaic Mixolyidan mode, and three sets of arrangements of *Ancient Airs and Dances* (from 1917, 1924, and 1932 respectively). The originals of these older works were, in Respighi's time, seldom if ever heard, and his efforts brought this rich period of music back to life for many listeners. As Respighi and a group of nine fellow composers stated in a manifesto, countering the claims of the more dissonant sounds then becoming commonplace in the concert hall: "A logical chain binds the past and the future – the romanticism of yesterday will again be the romanticism of tomorrow."

The Suite No. 1 features arrangements of sixteenth-century lute pieces collected and edited in the 1880s by the musicologist and lute player Oscar Chilesotti. The opening "Balletto detto 'Il Conte Orlando'" is based on a 1599 composition by Simone Molinari (1565?-1615?), music director of the Cathedral at Genoa. Lively music, in which the music grows from a gentle beginning to a rousing climax, leads to a slower central section in the minor, based on the same tune, before a return of the opening music. The second movement "Gagliarda" is an arrangement of a mid sixteenth century piece by Vincenzo Galilei (1520?-1591), father of the astronomer Galileo. A lovely slow section, based on a dance by an anonymous composer, is framed by Galilei's faster, very rhythmic music. The galliard was a dance form from the Renaissance, generally in triple meter, marked by large, sometimes even exaggerated, leaps in the melodic line.

The “Villanella” is a serene piece by an anonymous composer based on the villanelle, a song form (related to, but somewhat simpler than, the madrigal) from the streets of Spain that found great popularity in Italy. Respighi’s delicate scoring here features flute, oboe, harp and strings. Anonymous tunes also provide the basis for the final movement. The opening “Passo mezzo” is a lively dance in 2/4 time, and the “Mascherada” that goes with it refers to another kind of villanelle generally heard during a masked ball or carnival.

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

b. January 27, 1756, Salzburg, Austria
d. December 5, 1791, Vienna, Austria

No reminder is really needed of the unique stature of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in the history of Western music. His vast catalog of compositions – over 600 of them, including some 15 operas, 17 masses, 50 symphonies, 20 piano concertos, 23 string quartets, and so on (the list can go on for quite some time) – epitomizes the German-Austrian Classical style. His music is recognized and loved all over the world for its melodic, harmonic, and textural richness and beauty. The son of a well-known violinist and pedagogue, Mozart was one of the greatest prodigies ever, playing his first public concert at age five and composing his first music at seven. Before reaching the age of ten he had already played recitals in front of the likes of Marie Antoinette and King George III of England. He traveled throughout Europe through his teens. After failing to find a secure post elsewhere, and having grown dissatisfied with his career in Salzburg, Mozart moved to Vienna, where he spent the last decade of his life. While he enjoyed some successes with his new operas and piano concertos, life there grew more and more precarious, leading to his early death at age thirty-five.

Piano Concerto No. 21 in C major, K. 467
Composed: 1785
Duration: 28 minutes

Early in 1785, Leopold Mozart traveled to Vienna to look in on his son, who had recently married Constanze Weber and was experiencing one of his most successful and busiest times, both personally and professionally. Leopold stayed from February 11 to April 25, and received a detailed portrait of what life was like for his son. Mozart’s schedule was frantic, as Leopold described in a letter to his daughter (and Wolfgang’s sister) Nannerl: “Every day there are concerts; and the whole time is given up to teaching, music, composing and so forth ... It is impossible for me to describe the rush and the bustle.” The number of concerts Wolfgang was performing would by itself be enough to tax most musicians; at another point Leopold wrote of his amazement as he repeatedly watched his son’s valuable Walter piano being transported from his home to a concert venue, several times a week.

Vienna seemed to value Mozart’s piano playing above all else, and he responded with a brilliant series of piano concertos, which were normally premiered with Mozart himself as soloist in subscription concert series he arranged for his own benefit. He wrote no fewer than eight piano concertos between February 1784 and March 1785 (with four more arriving before the end of

1786), taking no longer than a few weeks to compose each. The Piano Concerto No. 21 in C major was written during Leopold's Vienna visit, and was premiered just days after it was completed at a benefit concert at the National Court Theater on March 10, 1785.

The profusion of melodic ideas in the Concerto's first movement can almost stand as a metaphor for the non-stop activity of Mozart's life at that time. The movement starts with a quiet march theme in the strings, answered by a more lyrical theme and a brief fanfare for the wind section. The march theme then become accompaniment for a new idea, which leads to yet another one, a sighing motif for the brass. The march returns before the pianist enters – not heroically, as is typically the case, but gently, introduced by the oboe, bassoon, and flute – with a solo cadenza. Another passage switches dramatically to the minor mode, calling to mind Mozart's Symphony No. 40 of three years later. The development section proper deals with only a couple of these many ideas, but the themes seem to be in constant evolution anyway.

Feelings of reverie and gentle melancholy pervade the second movement, which is in tripartite form. The opening section is for the orchestra, with strings muted as the violins present a delicate, lyrical melody over gently pulsating accompaniment. The subsequent section adds the piano, which repeats the opening theme while adding its own material. The spare piano writing suggests that Mozart may have added his own improvisations and embellishments to the piano part as he played, a common occurrence during that time. After exploring a range of key signatures, the music returns to the opening idea. A now largely forgotten Swedish film, *Elvira Madigan* (1967), provided the nickname that is still sometimes associated with this concerto; the film used this second movement as the accompaniment for a languid boat ride.

Coming as it does after the gentle flow of the slow movement, the high spirits and earthiness of the Finale are quite a contrast. A joyous theme gets things started, with the piano first following up with a short cadenza, then elaborating on what has already been played with a flurry of runs and display. Piano and orchestra frequently engage in "call and response" exchanges. Mozart here moves quickly and playfully from geniality to high drama (with the latter, however, Mozart always seems to have an ironic twinkle in his eye). A short cadenza for the pianist leads to a repeat of the opening theme, and an exciting series of upward scales brings the work to a triumphal close.

Ludwig van Beethoven

b. December 16, 1770, Bonn
d. March 26, 1827, Vienna

One short biographical sketch on Beethoven begins "The events of Beethoven's life are the stuff of Romantic legend, evoking images of the solitary creator shaking his fist at Fate and finally overcoming it through a supreme effort of creative will." Those biographical details, however, such as the deafness that plagued his last three decades of life, his stormy love affairs and his famous ill temper, are dwarfed by his artistic output, which is one of the monuments of music history. He literally mastered and transformed all the musical forms of his day, and extended the range and depth of expression available to composers. Beethoven was no Mozart-like prodigy, although even in his teens he was composing and playing in orchestras. But by his twenties –

after studies with the likes of Franz Josef Haydn and Mozart's legendary nemesis Antonio Salieri – both his compositions and piano playing had garnered considerable attention. It was around the age of 30 that Beethoven first noticed his encroaching deafness, but soon thereafter began the second, or "middle," of his creative periods, which included groundbreaking works like the "Eroica" Symphony, the "Appassionata" and "Waldstein" piano sonatas, and the opera Fidelio. After a period of relative musical inactivity in the late 1810s, he entered his so-called "late" period, highlighted by the Ninth Symphony and the late string quartets and piano sonatas, in which his music gained a new, very personal depth and freedom.

Symphony No. 2 in D major, Op. 36
Composed: 1801-1802
Duration: 36 minutes

The years 1801 and 1902 were two of the worst of Beethoven's life. It was in 1801 that he noticed the onset of his deafness. Visits to several doctors were of no avail; their unanimous conclusion was that the deterioration of his hearing would likely be gradual but permanent, and within a few years his hearing would be completely gone. One of his doctors suggested that, to give his ears a rest and perhaps to alleviate some stress, Beethoven should leave noisy Vienna for a time. So he moved for six months to one of his favorite retreats, the little town of Heiligenstadt just outside Vienna. He rented a small peasant house on the outskirts of the village, isolated from his neighbors, where he did most of the work on his Symphony No. 2. Begun in 1801, but largely written during the summer and early fall of 1802, the Symphony was completed in October 1802, the very same month that he wrote the famous, despairing Heiligenstadt Testament to his brother in which he wrote of his hearing loss, the apparent hopelessness of his situation, and his desire for a quick end to his life. Oddly enough, in the midst of that depression, Beethoven was not only able to appear cheerful to those few friends and visitors he encountered, he was also able to write the exuberant Second Symphony.

Finally able to move on with his life and career, Beethoven conducted the premiere of the Symphony No. 2 in a remarkable concert in Vienna on April 5, 1803. Beethoven had an unusual penchant for sponsoring very long programs of his work, and along with the Second Symphony, this marathon Vienna concert featured the first performances of the Piano Concerto No. 3 and the oratorio Christ on the Mount of Olives, along with the recently completed First Symphony. The three-and-a-half hour long performance was received lukewarmly by the critics, but much enjoyed by the audience and a financial success for the composer.

Interestingly, in the midst of the despondency reflected in the Heiligenstadt Testament, Beethoven was simultaneously experiencing a new vigor and readiness for work. He wrote in another letter of the time, "Every day I come closer to my goal, which I can sense but don't know how to describe." The revolutionary nature of Beethoven's subsequent Symphony No. 3, the "Eroica," has often been mentioned. But the Symphony No. 2 also marks quite a change and advance from its predecessor. One can hear this in the Symphony's initial moments, the slow Adagio molto prologue to the first movement. In two parts, the drama, forceful attacks, and tension of these opening minutes look forward to the comparable beginning of his Symphony No. 9 of two decades later. With a swirl of energy Beethoven launches into the first theme of the vigorous Allegro con brio. The second theme introduces a note of light-hearted sweetness. The

stormy development section extends into the recapitulation, with its excitement and dramatic dynamic contrasts.

A sudden calm descends with the second movement Larghetto. There is a bit of tongue-in-cheek humor in the continued dynamic contrasts, as well as some more passionate moments, but for the most part the music remains serene. The third movement marks a definite change for Beethoven, as he moves from the traditional Minuet of the First Symphony to the more energetic, forceful Scherzo. Ruggedly playful outer sections frame a more pastoral central section with lovely oboe coloration. The general mood of the Scherzo continues into the Finale, which moves with unflagging power. There is more than a little comedy in how Beethoven stretches the coda, which for most composers is little more than a final flourish in a movement, until it encompasses nearly a third of the finale. It is great fun, and makes the final climactic gesture that much more of a payoff.