

NAXOS

Ottorino
RESPIGHI

Suite in E major

Variazioni sinfoniche • Preludio, corale e fuga

Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra • Adriano



Ottorino Respighi (1879–1936)

Suite in E major · Variazioni sinfoniche · Preludio, corale e fuga

Listening to the early orchestral works of Respighi all recorded here for the first time, one would never suppose the composer to have been Italian. They belong to the earlier period of Respighi's career, before the water-shed of his development, which, in his own judgement, came at the age of 37, in 1916, the year of *Fontane di Roma*. If Respighi had lived no longer than this, posterity would have seen him as a very talented Bologna composer, a former pupil of the violinist Federico Sarti, of Luigi Torchi and, for composition, of Giuseppe Martucci, with a predilection for a form of music largely neglected at that time in Italy: the symphonic. Bologna was, in fact, the centre of German-orientated tendencies, and the whole musical atmosphere of the place, where Respighi, like Toscanini, served as orchestral players, exercised an influence on the composer that deserves further detailed treatment. Respighi had first studied German and French composers even more seriously than he had the Italian masters, writing music that contains more or less overt tributes to the former, in, for example, sonatas, quartets, orchestral suites and songs. These works he eventually put on one side, but never destroyed, although very few were published in his life-time.

Another very important influence on Respighi's early symphonic work came from the Russian school. In 1900-1 and 1902 he accepted a contract from the Imperial Theatres of St Petersburg and the Bolshoy in Moscow as a viola-player for two seasons of Italian opera. This brought him an introduction to Rimsky-Korsakov, who immediately recognised his talent and gave him lessons over a period of five months. In between his two stays in Russia, Respighi took a composer's diploma at the Conservatory of Bologna with his *Preludio, corale e fuga*, his second work for a large symphony orchestra. Other important events in Respighi's early career include the two periods he spent in Berlin, in 1902 as an occasional and somewhat dissatisfied pupil of Max Bruch and in 1908 as a piano coach in the singing-class of Etelka Gardini Gerster. In

1913 he was appointed professor of composition at the Liceo di Santa Cecilia in Rome, where he remained until his death in 1936.

Respighi had his *Symphonic Variations* performed for the first time at the Bologna Conservatory on 24th June 1900 and took the score with him to Russia, where Rimsky-Korsakov was favourably impressed by the work. Still neo-classical in form, the work gives the impression of a tribute to the romanticism of César Franck and Brahms. It consists of a series of passacaglia-like variations, preceded by an introduction and the actual passacaglia theme in D minor, transformed, in various episodes, into a march, an adagio and a scherzo. The climax comes in a fugue, introduced by the organ, leading to a triumphant restatement of the theme in D major. Already Respighi shows a masterly command of writing for brass. The orchestration includes a cor anglais, two harps and organ, with timpani, the only percussion instrument used. The *Variazioni sinfoniche* is still a long way from the *Metamorfoseon* of 1930, but shows the composer's early interest in variation form.

The *Preludio, corale e fuga* is conceived on a larger scale and is double the length, although in a similar style. It was orchestrated in Russia and is dated March 1901. It is possible that Rimsky-Korsakov himself supervised the work, although this is not apparent from the music, which, in any case, was presumably sketched out before Respighi went to Russia. This time there is a touch of Saint-Saëns, with a clear initial reference to the *Organ Symphony*, while we may suspect the ending as a possible reference to Strauss's tone-poem *Also sprach Zarathustra*. The scoring is for a similar orchestra to that used in the *Variazioni sinfoniche*, without the organ, but with percussion. Unlike César Franck's work of the same title, Respighi's work amalgamates the three musical forms into one piece, which develops in a cyclic and almost symphonic way. The *Corale* is dominant and subject to development from its original form to a lyrical episode with violin solo, to re-appear in the final section.

The *Preludio* is built up into a series of chords that form the basis of the *Corale* itself, followed by the actual theme, with its reminiscence of Saint-Saëns, but this last has also a scherzo-like function in the central episode, serving eventually as a development of the *Fuga*. Martucci was sufficiently impressed to declare Respighi not a pupil but already a master.

Manuscript versions of the *Suite in E major* survive from 1901 and 1903. Of the former there is no record of performance, while the *Adagio* of the second version was given on 23rd May 1907 under the direction of Pietro Cimini. It seems probable that the second version was at some point played in its entirety, since the original orchestral material contains markings and corrections by the musicians. The first version of the *Suite* has in brackets the additional title *Sinfonia*, a description perhaps rejected for reasons of modesty, since Respighi's only work of this kind is the *Sinfonia drammatica* of 1914. It is tempting to retain the title 'Symphony' for the second version, in the orchestral material of which (and not in the score) some inappropriate movement titles appear - *I. Nella foresta*, *II. Visione*, *III. Danza* and *IV. Eroica*. The work may be seen as a particularly elaborate example of the symphony, with appropriate movement key relationships of E major, D flat major, B minor / B major and E major. It is in fact only the second movement that is characteristic of a traditional suite, an arrangement, in the same key, of a love-duet from the first act of the opera *Semirâma*, a work that Respighi withdrew after its first performance. Some more music of *Semirâma* can be heard in this Suite. There is considerable musical interest in the scherzo, with its trio of Russian character, while the first and last movements are clearly linked to the music of Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov and, even more, to that of Dvořák. Nevertheless, whatever his debt to these composers, Respighi uses a more advanced technique of development. Apart from a short excursion into the pathetic before the affirmation of the march in

the finale, the work is optimistic.

The period of three years between the *Suite* and *Burlesca* saw the composition of two more suites, both for string orchestra, one with organ and the other with solo flute, and the comic opera *Re Enzo*. The stylistic differences between these works and *Burlesca* are obvious and it is tempting to regard the latter work as the beginning of Respighi's impressionism. It had its première in Bologna in May 1906. Contrasting elements in the form of *scherzoso* interventions, which Respighi intended as justification of the title, serve this purpose, while sustaining the development of the lyrical main theme. Allusions to other composers may be fewer, but there is already a tendency towards the symphonic poem, with suggestions of the sounds of water to be heard later in *Fontane di Roma* and passages anticipating the comic mood of *Belfagor*. The work is scored without trombones, but with four French horns and double wind, and delicate writing for celesta and harp.

In 1913 Respighi appeared as a conductor of his own works in ten different Italian cities. In the same year he started work on the *Sinfonia drammatica* and his third opera *Marie-Victoire*. *Ouverture carnevalesca* was first performed under the direction of the composer in Bologna on 19th April of the same year. This work is in form the most Italian of Respighi's early orchestral compositions, using as it does the *Saltarello*, although the secondary theme has a Russian touch. The work is scored for large orchestra, with tuba, glockenspiel and drums. In spite of its rather dense harmonic structure, the instrumentation never becomes overloaded, providing an admirable work for an enterprising orchestra. An earlier version of the ending has been restored for the present recording, showing the composer in an almost indecently hilarious mood.

Abridged from original notes by Adriano

Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra

The Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra, the oldest symphonic ensemble in Slovakia, was founded in 1929. The orchestra's first conductor was František Dyk and over the years it has worked under the direction of several prominent Czech and Slovak conductors. The orchestra has made many recordings for the Naxos label ranging from the ballet music of Tchaikovsky to more modern works by composers such as Copland, Britten and Prokofiev. For Marco Polo the orchestra has recorded works by Glazunov, Glière, Rubinstein and other late romantic composers.

Adriano



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Strings and Percussion and an *Abysmal Saraband for organ, timpani and strings*. His instrumental adaptations include song-cycles or songs by Johannes Brahms, Modest Mussorgsky, Hugo Wolf, Ottorino Respighi, Othmar Schoeck, Jacques Ibert and Johann Strauss II.



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This release presents a fascinating survey of the early orchestral works of Respighi written before 1916, the year of the first of his vivid symphonic poems, *Fontane di Roma*, for which he is today best remembered. Although the influence of Rimsky-Korsakov, Dvořák, Saint-Saëns, and others is readily discernible, these works also demonstrate Respighi's growing mastery of a form of music - the symphonic - that was largely neglected at that time in Italy. The large-scale *Suite in E*, which initially bore the title *Sinfonia*, is a work of considerable musical interest and an elaborate example of the symphony. The *Burlesca*, with its suggestions of the sounds of water to be heard in *Fontane di Roma*, may be seen as an early impressionistic symphonic poem.

Ottorino
RESPIGHI
 (1879–1936)

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|---|---|--------------|
| 1 | Variazioni sinfoniche * | 12:20 |
| 2 | Preludio, corale e fuga | 17:44 |
| 3 | Burlesca | 7:23 |
| 4 | Ouverture carnevalesca | 8:41 |
| | Suite in E major | 32:52 |
| 5 | Adagio – Allegro vivo | 9:03 |
| 6 | Adagio | 8:05 |
| 7 | Allegretto vivace | 5:10 |
| 8 | Allegro energico – Marziale e sostenuto | 10:34 |

**Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra • Adriano
 Ferdinand Klinda, Organ ***

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