

Chandos

DIGITAL

Respighi  
Church Windows  
Brazilian Impressions

GEOFFREY  
SIMON  
conducting  
THE  
PHILHARMONIA  
ORCHESTRA



OTTORINO RESPIGHI's musical reputation rests principally on two celebrated orchestral works – *The Fountains of Rome* and *The Pines of Rome*. To these can be added *Roman Festivals*, providing a 'Roman Trilogy' which has tended to eclipse many of his other equally deserving compositions. Although the two works on this record are not completely unknown, they are nevertheless rarely performed yet contain some of Respighi's most evocative music. And despite their different inspirational origins, they have in common a quality found in much of his music – an underlying thread of nostalgia, which in the present case is for the distant Italian past on the one hand, and for a visit to South America on the other.

In 1919, Respighi married one of his former composition students, Elsa Olivieri Sangiacomo, who had made a special study of Gregorian Chant. Within a few weeks of their marriage she had introduced him to the world of plainsong and this provided him for the rest of his life with a constant source of musical inspiration. The first of Respighi's works to bear these ecclesiastical influences was composed at Capri in the summer of that year and entitled *Three Piano Preludes on Gregorian Melodies*. Elsa later wrote that Respighi's aim in writing music inspired by Gregorian Chorales was "to recast those magnificent melodies in a new language of sounds and free them from the rigidly formal Catholic Liturgy of the Roman Gradual".

The Piano Preludes were published in 1922 and three years later Respighi decided to orchestrate them, adding a further piece so as to make a four-movement symphonic suite. The Respighis had a close friend called Claudio Guastalla, a professor of literature, who listened to the four pieces as the composer played through them whilst they tried to come up with a suitable title for this new orchestral composition. Respighi's first suggestion was "Entrances to a Temple" (*Portali di Tempio*) – an idea which seemed "too colourless" to Guastalla, who suggested instead "Stained-Glass Windows of a Church" (*Vetrata di Chiesa*). This overall title was immediately adopted, and it remained only to provide suitable sub-titles for the individual movements, illustrating them with fanciful texts appropriate to those Biblical or religious scenes which might have appeared on actual stained-glass windows.

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## CHANDOS DIGITAL RECORDING

This recording was mastered and edited on Chandos Complete PCM Digital System. This system is superior to conventional analog (tape recorder) recording in dynamic range, signal to noise and distortion.

### Equipment used:

- Schoeps & Neumann and B & K microphones
- New classical mixing console – State of the Art specification designed and built by Chandos
  - Sony PCM 1610 Digital processor
  - DAE-1100 Digital electronic editor
- Digital information stored in video Hi-Band recorders using BASF Chrome KCA 60 tape.

Extra care is taken in cutting and processing. Disc manufacturing is on high grade 140 gram weight vinyl using DMM (Direct Metal Mastering) by Teldec. Cassettes are produced using superior BASF Chrome tape in high quality housing and are manufactured for Chandos by Ablex using 1" 4-track mastered direct from our Digital PCM 1610.

Although analog tape recorders have been remarkably improved today, they are still limited by a number of drawbacks resulting in distortion and dynamic range limitations.

These limits are inherent in the tape, heads, and other mechanical factors, and it is virtually impossible to eliminate them completely.

Digital recording, including PCM (Plus Code Modulation) is a revolutionary technique to leave these limitations of present analog recorders behind. With digital systems, the sound signal is recorded and transmitted in the form of digital codes and this provides a whole host of features.

### Outstanding among them are:

- Wide dynamic range
- Flat frequency response regardless of input level
- Extremely low distortion
- Superior transient characteristics
- No deterioration when repeatedly duplicated

whether Respighi was bothered by such things we don't know. However, the throw-away ending of the *Canzone e Danza* piece is so deliciously final that one instinctively feels it could hardly have been followed with two further movements. As they stand, then, the *Brazilian Impressions* are delightful and colourful souvenirs of a trip to South America which – rattle-snakes apart – seems to have been a highly enjoyable one.

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**GEOFFREY SIMON** was born in 1946 in Adelaide, Australia. He studied piano, literature and philosophy at Melbourne University and conducting and cello at the Juilliard School and Indiana University. His first appointment was as Music Director of the Bloomington Symphony Orchestra, Indiana from 1969–72. For the following two years he was active in Austria, Germany, England and Holland as an opera coach and orchestral cellist, while studying conducting with Rudolf Kempe, Hans Swarowsky, Igor Markevitch and Franco Ferrara.

He won a major prize in the 1974 John Player International Conductors' Award, which led to invitations to conduct in England and, from 1975–79, the Music Directorship of the Australian Sinfonia. Since 1978 he has spent a substantial part of each year in America, first as Music Director of the orchestras and opera at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and recently in a similar post at North Texas State University.

In 1978 Geoffrey Simon was invited by Chandos Records to conduct their inaugural recording, Bloch's *Sacred Service* (ABR 1001), with the London Symphony Orchestra and the Zemel Choir. Its success led to concert invitations from the LSO and to further recordings with Chandos, notably the series of rare and original Tchaikovsky scores which has attracted international attention and high critical acclaim.

Geoffrey Simon is a regular guest conductor with the English Chamber Orchestra and other orchestras with which he has appeared include the Munich Philharmonic, Milwaukee Symphony, St. Louis Symphony, Bournemouth Symphony and Sinfonietta, Netherlands Radio Chamber Orchestra, Oxford Pro Musica, and the major orchestras of Australia.

The slow and stately first movement, with its constantly forward-moving accompaniment, suggested to Guastalla "the passing of a chariot beneath a brilliant, starry sky". What better, he said, than to call it *The Flight into Egypt*, and enlarging on a verse in St. Matthew's Gospel, he concocted an 'anonymous' attribution to be inserted in the score: "... the little caravan proceeded through the desert in the starry night, carrying the Treasure of the world". Written in 5/4 time and composed in the quasi-oriental Phrygian mode, this is the most overtly 'romantic' of the four scenes, both in its conception and in the heady quality of its orchestration.

The original Piano Preludes are by no means easy for the keyboard soloist to play, and in transcribing the second of them Respighi particularly requires the utmost orchestral virtuosity. To Guastalla, this tumultuous music suggested "a clash of weapons – a battle in the skies" and so the title *Saint Michael Archangel* was given, taken this time from the Revelation of St. John the Divine (but misattributed in the score to St. Matthew): "And a great battle was made in the Heavens: Michael and his Angels fought with the dragon, and fought the dragon and his angels. But these did not prevail, and there was no more place for them in Heaven". The main theme is announced *allegro impetuoso* in the orchestral bass to a fearful, upward-rushing accompaniment, and is followed by a second subject introduced on the horns and taken over by arpeggiated strings. A restatement of the opening theme subsides into a tranquil section where the principal melody is played at half-tempo by an off-stage trumpet. After a shortened reprise of the second subject, Satan's banishment from heaven is spectacularly realised by a triple-fortissimo crash on the largest available tam-tam.

The third "Church Window" was to prove more difficult than the others to interpret with a sub-text, since Guastalla felt that something essentially "mystical, pure and convent-like" was needed: "That little silver bell made me think of nuns in holy orders flocking like swallows to a bird-call." After he and Respighi had racked their brains trying to think of a suitably chaste saint, the idea finally came to them: the episode recounted in the thirty-fourth chapter of *The Little Flowers of St. Francis* which told how the ailing and disconsolate St. Clare, founder of the Franciscan Order of Nuns, was "miraculously borne by the angels from her sick-bed to the Church of St. Francis, in order to be present at the entire

Holy Service of Matins". This piece finds Respighi's musical talents at their most sensitive, for as one Italian critic noted, "it is full of intimate, meditative poetry, a translucent recollection of Gregorian melody, redolent of the cloister". The scoring here is supremely delicate, with Respighi providing a perfectly refined balance of sonorities between winds and harp, bells and celeste.

For the final piece, a kind of Papal Coronation in sound, Respighi wrote a massive *fantasia* on the *Gloria* from the Mass of the Angels. After a solemn introduction depicting the tolling of bells, the Gregorian chorale is first intoned on distant, muted horns. The music rises to a great climax whereupon the main theme is suddenly reintroduced in an imposing organ solo. After a brief reference to some of the opening material, the brass take up the *Gloria* motif and bring the whole work to a conclusion of the utmost splendour. Such grandeur and solemnity, Guastalla proclaimed, should depict St. Gregory, the great sixth-century reformer of Roman Catholic Church Music, and the score duly carries the superscription: "Ecce Pontifex Maximus! . . . Bless the Lord . . . Sing the Hymn to God. Alleluia!"

Whilst the Roman Trilogy had consisted of compositions specifically inspired by the sights and sounds of the Eternal City, each with four linked and indivisible sections, this new orchestral work of Respighi's featured separate and purely abstract pieces, each with its own construction. Guastalla described as "shallow" those who simply bracketed *Church Windows* with the Roman Tone-Poems and failed to notice the substantial poetic differences. And in view of the fact that the various titles were added *after* the music was written, it remains to be noted with some amusement the statements of those commentators who would have us believe that "the work was inspired by religious events depicted in stained-glass windows in various churches in Italy". Nothing, as we have seen, could have been further from the truth!

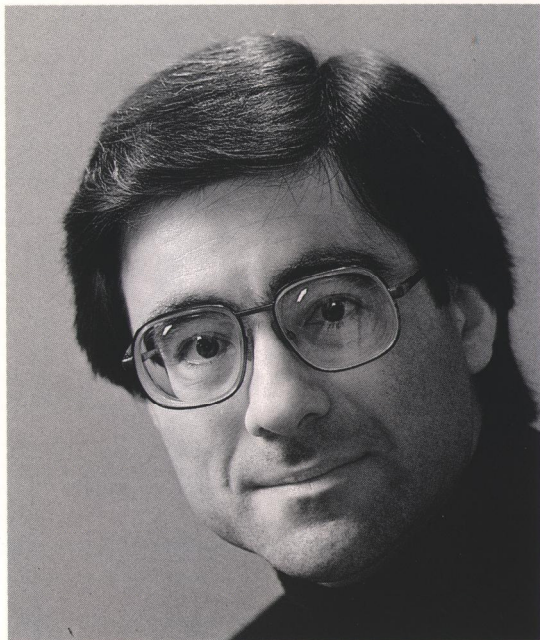
The score of *Church Windows* was completed and first performed in 1927, and in May of that year the Respighis made their first recital tour of Brazil which concluded with concerts in Rio de Janeiro where the composer had to work hard with an orchestra not used to playing symphonic music. Nevertheless, such was Respighi's success that he was invited to return the following year, and since he

had taken a great interest in the native folk-music of the country, he promised to bring a specially-composed five-movement Brazilian Suite. The European concert season of 1927/28 took Respighi on a hectic tour which left him little time to fulfil his promise and he managed to produce only three movements. He did so, however, with considerable good humour and was later to say that he had written the music "for fun and relaxation".

Back in Rio in June, he gave the *Brazilian Impressions* their first performance and had just as much difficulty with the orchestra as on his first trip. The opening movement is an extended and deeply atmospheric 'nocturne', with half-lit recollections of dance-rhythms and folk-songs heard in the distance on a warm, tropical Brazilian evening, made especially picturesque by the exotic charm of Respighi's scoring.

The second piece recalls a visit the Respighis made to the Butantan Reptile Institute just outside São Paulo where thousands of snakes of every variety are collected for the production of serum. This 'Snake-Farm' was founded at the turn of the century and has long been a tourist attraction (the snakes are milked for the benefit of interested onlookers at various times between 10 am and 4 pm, except Monday mornings), whilst a large notice reads: "To Throw Stones at the Serpents is an Indication of Bad Character". Here the reptiles – poisonous and otherwise – co-exist in their enclosures by sliding over each other in the grass, wriggling in the water, or simply dozing in the trees. Respighi's music graphically depicts these treacherous creatures with woodwinds which squeak and crawl up and down the stave (the score is actually marked *strisciante* – meaning "slitheringly") and as an added effect the angry whirring of the rattle-snakes is reproduced by a tambourine played with side-drum sticks. The macabre quotation of the *Dies Irae* from the Mass for the Dead shows just how traumatic an experience Respighi's visit to Butantan really was.

It is with some relief that Respighi turns away from the horrors of the snake-pit and reverts in the third section to the songs and dances of Brazil. Here is a recollection of Carnival-time, or a visit to some night-club where the clientele are dancing the 'samba'. A present-day guide-book warns unwary visitors to São Paulo to "have a good look round before sitting down in one of the many night-spots since they are interspersed with gay bars and transvestite shows" – though



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# OTTORINO RESPIGHI

(1879–1936)

## CHURCH WINDOWS (*Vetrata di Chiesa*) (TT = 26:17)

Four Symphonic Impressions

- 1 The Flight into Egypt (*La Fuga in Egitto*) (5:31)
- 2 St. Michael Archangel (*San Michele Arcangelo*) (6:39)
- 3 The Matins of St. Clare (*Il Mattutino di Santa Chiara*) (5:24)
- 4 St. Gregory the Great (*San Gregorio Magno*) (9:32)

## BRAZILIAN IMPRESSIONS (*Impressioni Brasiliane*) (TT = 18:30)

Suite for Orchestra

- 5 Tropical Night (*Notte Tropicale*) (9:22)
- 6 Butantan (*In a snake-garden near São Paulo*) (4:46)
- 7 Song and Dance (*Canzone e Danza*) (4:01)

## PHILHARMONIA ORCHESTRA

leader, Raymond Ovens

conducted by

**GEOFFREY SIMON**



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