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Italian Perspectives

MARTUCCI · RACHMANINOFF · RESPIGHI

BAMBERGER SYMPHONIKER

RICCARDO FRIZZA



ITALIAN PERSPECTIVES

Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873–1943)

5 Études-tableaux (Arr. for Orchestra by O. Respighi)

- 1 No. 1, La Mer et les Mouettes (The Sea and the Seagulls) 8. 15
- 2 No. 2, La Foire (The Fair) 1. 52
- 3 No. 3, Marche funèbre (Funeral March) 6. 32
- 4 No. 4, Le chaperon rouge et le loup (Little Red Riding Hood and the Wolf) 3. 00
- 5 No. 5, Marche (March) 3. 41

Ottorino Respighi (1879–1936)

Trittico Botticelliano

- 6 No. 1, La Primavera 5. 48
- 7 No. 2, L'adorazione dei Magi 10. 01
- 8 No. 3, La nascita di Venere 5. 30

Giuseppe Martucci (1856–1909)

Symphony No. 1 in D Minor, Op. 75

- 9 I. Allegro 11. 58
- 10 II. Andante 8. 07

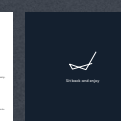
- 11 III. Allegretto 5. 28
- 12 IV. Mosso - Moderato - Allegro risoluto 13. 11

Total playing time: 83. 33

Bamberger Symphoniker
conducted by **Riccardo Frizza**



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Martucci and Respighi have, for many years in Italy, paid the price of being pigeonholed in a creative style that was judged to be too academic, of being considered “different” in the birthplace of opera and, in Respighi’s case, of remaining ensnared in biographical and political matters

(his association with fascism) which have hampered full understanding of his work. It is disheartening for an Italian conductor to see how the rising fortunes of these composers, partly thanks to some of Martucci’s captivating work, are today finding fertile ground mainly outside Italy.

Listening today to Martucci’s compositions reinstates the voice of late-nineteenth-century Italy, a country still inebriated by opera but capable of looking with interest and courage towards the new, bold changes taking place in European symphonic music.

By contrast, listening to Respighi means recognising the unique qualities of the last great poet of music, a contemporary of the avant-garde movement who was nonetheless capable of looking to the past with

a love that is uplifting, all the while expressing a profoundly twentieth-century style; a true successor, capable with his transcriptions of transforming music from the past with devotion and an ultra-modern flavour.

As a result, it is need rather than fortuitous choice that today brings me to conduct Martucci and Respighi. Martucci’s Symphony No. 1 is modern in mood and rigorous in structure. What fascinates me in Respighi’s orchestration of Rachmaninoff’s *5 Études-tableaux* is its dual register, academic and experimental, culminating in the remarkable power of the orchestra’s apotheosis. The *Trittico Botticelliano* remains a masterpiece of Respighi’s symphonic work, merging orchestral colour and poetic expression in unparalleled perfection.

Riccardo Frizza



Ottorino Respighi (1879–1936) remains the only Italian composer since the eighteenth century to have achieved the kind of international renown in the concert hall that generations of Italian composers (Rossini, Donizetti, Bellini, Verdi, Puccini) have achieved in the opera house. His symphonic poems, *Fontane di Roma* (1914–16), *Pini di Roma* (1923–24) and *Feste romane* (1928), are mainstays of the repertory. But Respighi's success did not come out of nowhere. The inclusion on this CD of a major work by the much less celebrated Giuseppe Martucci (1856–1909), Respighi's teacher of composition in his final year of study (the academic year 1900–01) at what was then the Liceo Musicale (now the Conservatorio G.B. Martini) in Bologna, allows us to explore the background to the revival of instrumental composition that was in fact widespread among Italian composers of Respighi's generation.



Sergei Rachmaninoff / Ottorino Respighi: 5 Études-tableaux

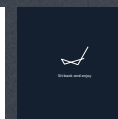
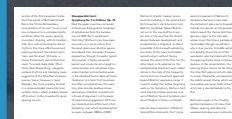
Respighi has always been acclaimed for the brilliance of his orchestration. The story goes that when, in 1929, Sergei Rachmaninoff was asked by the conductor Serge Koussevitsky to orchestrate a selection of pieces from his *Études-tableaux*, Opp. 33 (1911) and 39 (1916–17) for piano, he refused: he was too busy, nor would he trust anyone else with the work. But when Respighi's name was suggested, Rachmaninoff was enthusiastic. Rachmaninoff chose the pieces (in the order Respighi settled on, they are Op. 39, No. 2; Op. 33, No. 4; and Op. 39, Nos. 7, 6 and 9) and in a letter to Respighi, also explained their programmatic backgrounds, reflected in their titles: there are no titles attached to the pieces in their original published form. Respighi's orchestrations are not only colourfully inventive; they are also very respectful

of Rachmaninoff's originals, as the Russian acknowledged in a 1935 letter of thanks. The selection is dominated by slow music: the desolate seascape of the opening piece and the gloomy funeral march of the third, which rises to an overwhelming, bell-dominated climax. The extroverted second and last movements offer only brief contrast. Intriguing in the fairytale fourth piece are the rapid switches of material: the wolf (trombone glissandi) threatening a frightened Red Riding Hood (high woodwind and strings). In Rachmaninoff's telling, the story does not end well.

Ottorino Respighi: Trittico Botticelliano

Respighi's suitability to the task of orchestrating Rachmaninoff's *Études-tableaux*, a title which already suggests responses to visual cues, is underlined by this triptych of original

compositions. In the more famous Roman tone poems, Respighi creates atmospheric musical visions of various locations (both present-day and historical) in the Italian capital; here in his *Trittico Botticelliano* (1927), he again writes visual music, responding to three paintings by the Renaissance artist Sandro Botticelli (c. 1445–1510) that hang in the Uffizi gallery in Florence. The music is scored for a chamber orchestra: single wind and upper brass with strings and harp, along with both piano and celesta – and a triangle. The following year Respighi would re-use the tinkling combination of harp and celesta in his suite *Gli Uccelli*; as in that suite, and the three sets of *Antiche danze ed arie* (1917, 1923, 1931), so in the *Trittico Botticelliano*, Respighi makes use of musicological discoveries in the archives: the music introduced by a trio of woodwinds in the central



section of the first movement dates from the period of Botticelli himself. But in the *Trittico Botticelliano*, incorporation of ‘ancient’ music is just one component in a complex stylistic synthesis. After the joyous opening invocation of spring, with its Vivaldian trills, horn calls and energetic dance rhythms, the more reflective second panel quotes both the advent hymn, ‘Veni, veni Emanuel’ (O Come, o Come, Emmanuel) and a Christmas carol, ‘Tu scendi dalle stelle’ (From Starry Skies Descending), alongside *siciliano* rhythms and tramping music suggestive of the Wise Men’s arduous journey. Venus, however, is ‘pure’ Respighi, the music pressing forward in a single extended crescendo to an ecstatic climax, which suddenly breaks off to return to the movement’s quiet opening sounds.



Giuseppe Martucci:
Symphony No. 1 in D Minor, Op. 75
 Most European countries can boast at least one distinguished composer of symphonies from the decades around 1900. But a symphonist from Italy? Martucci may have been unusual in a musical culture that favoured opera over all other genres. Considered from a broader European perspective, though, he seems typical of his period: a highly successful pianist and conductor who taught in conservatories and composed large-scale chamber and orchestral works in the standard Austro-German forms. ‘Academic’ is a term that musicians too often use pejoratively. The word may also connote positive virtues: seriousness, attention to detail and richness of argument, not to speak of passionate engagement. All these are characteristics of Martucci’s First Symphony, over which he laboured for six years, between 1889 and 1895.

Martucci’s stylistic models, as one hears immediately in the sonata form first movement, are Schumann and Brahms; the Italian follows Brahms not just in the sound of his music, but also in the way that the formal division between development and recapitulation is disguised, so that it is possible to find oneself welcoming the return of the (very hummable) second subject without having noticed the return of the first. On the other hand, in its vehemence, the extraordinarily dissonant, even violent climax in the coda of this frequently stormy D minor movement goes well beyond Brahms’ expressive range; it is worth noting that before beginning work on the Symphony, Martucci had conducted the Italian premieres not just of Brahms’ Second Symphony but also of Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*.

Like the slow movement of Brahms’ Second Piano Concerto, the F major

second movement of Martucci’s Symphony features a solo cello: the instrument spins out a rhapsodic melodic line almost as if improvising. Violins repeat the theme, and then give way again to the solo cello, whose music this time is perhaps less memorable (though we will learn why in due course). A middle section is marked by the entrance of the woodwind, who treat elements from the opening theme amid contrapuntal textures. In the recapitulation, the opening theme returns to the strings, this time first violins and tutti cellos in unison. Meanwhile, woodwind have the cello’s second theme, which we now realise was never really a theme at all, but a counter melody to the first.

Brahmsian again is the (mostly) gentle intermezzo in D minor that follows, opening with delicate woodwind phrases over a pizzicato



bass. But there are surprises here, including some surprisingly spiky outbursts, which in the centre of the movement give rise to a brusque tutti with trumpet fanfares. In the coda, there is more spikiness, answered by lyrical music deriving from the opening theme: it leads to a brief cadenza for the first violins. Martucci ends with an enigmatic flourish.

The finale, like the first movement, is in sonata form: there is even an exposition repeat. The stormy character of the Symphony's opening is now replaced by music that is heroic and confident, the prevailing key now D major rather than minor. But that is far from the whole story. The finale's slow introduction opens dramatically with a harmony that recalls the first movement; the coda that follows the recapitulation suddenly becomes chromatic and builds to a return of some of the first

movement's stormiest music. For a moment, it seems as if the Symphony might end in tragedy, but no: lyrical music from the opening movement reappears and the mood lightens. A brief return to the finale's material rounds off the work in high spirits.

Ben Earle

Acknowledgements

PRODUCTION TEAM

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