



OMAHA
SYMPHONY

Ankush Kumar Bahl, Music Director

program notes

2021/2022 SEASON

Falletta Conducts Pines of Rome

Friday, October 29, 2021 at 7:30 p.m. | Saturday, October 30, 2021 at 7:30 p.m.

Holland Performing Arts Center
JoAnn Falletta, conductor | Blake Pouliot, violin

HECTOR BERLIOZ

The Roman Carnival, Op. 9

PIOTR ILYICH TCHAIKOVSKY

Concerto in D Major for Violin & Orchestra, Op. 35, TH 59

- I. Allegro moderato
- II. Canzonetta: Andante
- III. Finale: Allegro vivacissimo

Blake Pouliot, violin

INTERMISSION

OTTORINO RESPIGHI

The Fountains of Rome, P. 106

- I. The Fountain of Valle Giulia at Dawn
- II. The Triton Fountain at Morn
- III. The Fountain of Trevi at Midday
- IV. The Villa Medici Fountain at Sunset

OTTORINO RESPIGHI

The Pines of Rome, P. 141

- I. The Pines of the Villa Borghese
- II. Pines Near a Catacomb
- III. The Pines of the Janiculum
- IV. The Pines of the Appian Way

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The Roman Carnival, Op. 9

Hector Berlioz

Born: La Côte-Saint-André, Isère, France, December 11, 1803 | Died: Paris, France, March 8, 1869

No single composer, not even Liszt and his "Music of the Future" disciples, was more infused with the spirit of early and extravagant romanticism than Hector Berlioz. A pioneering master of orchestral sonority, he wrote for instruments in a manner that challenged standard usage, often asking musicians to play outside of the "normal" range. He strove to thereby enrich the orchestral palette and to create intentionally strange sounds to evoke shadowy areas of human emotion. No wonder that Mahler, writing more than half a century later, was so strongly taken with Berlioz's imaginative scoring. The nightmarish sonorities of Mahler's eerie scherzos in his 7th Symphony derive from the phantasmagoric world of the *Symphonie fantastique*.

The irony in all this is that while a miracle worker in matters of orchestral color, Berlioz was not especially proficient as a practicing musician. Though in his youth he studied piano with a local teacher, the only instruments on which he could claim proficiency were the guitar and the flute.

By the late 1830s, he had become quite a name in Paris, though one would be hard-pressed to choose which adjective would best describe him: "famous" or "notorious". His hallucinatory *Symphonie fantastique* had put him on the musical map, but his obsessive courtship (today it would be called "stalking") of English actress Harriet Smithson only added to the conception that he had perhaps had one puff too many of the opium ingested by the hero of that quasi-autobiographical symphony.

In 1838, Berlioz experienced a short-lived failure with his opera, *Benvenuto Cellini*. During rehearsals, he fought constantly with conductor François Antoine Habeneck, especially over the tempo for the second act *saltarello*, which Habeneck insisted on leading at a snail's pace. Berlioz kept urging a faster tempo, Habeneck wouldn't budge, and finally left the podium in a huff. Almost predictably, the premiere on September 10th was a fiasco. Five years later, however, Berlioz salvaged the problematic *saltarello* and Benvenuto's first act aria, "*O Teresa, vous que j'aime*" ("Oh Teresa, whom I adore") and composed the stand-alone overture, *The Roman Carnival*. The opera's poor fate has not been shared by the 1843 overture. Indeed, it quickly became part of the standard repertoire where it has remained ever since.

It opens with a dizzying orchestral flourish before settling down to a lovely strain (Benvenuto's aria) scored poignantly for oboe, around which Berlioz wraps the melody in a splash of orchestral color highlighted by deft scoring for triangle (*Andante sostenuto*). The doleful aria eventually yields to the feverish *saltarello* (*Allegro vivace*), which holds sway for the remainder of the piece. Skillfully, Berlioz delays the final presentation of the main theme by releasing it snippet by snippet. Toward the end of the overture, the *saltarello* seems to evaporate, leaving only its rhythmic pulsing in the second violins. But Berlioz is not through with it - or us - as he unleashes the *saltarello* in an orgy of brilliant color, clashing rhythms and manic enthusiasm.

Violin Concerto in D Major, Op. 35

Piotr Ilyich Tchaikovsky

Born: Votkinsk, district of Viatka, Russia, May 7, 1840 | Died: St. Petersburg, Russia, November 6, 1893

Tchaikovsky took a much-needed vacation in 1878 to restore his failing spirits and mental health. After enjoying the blandishments of Switzerland, Paris, Italy and Vienna, he stopped in Clarens, Switzerland, on his way back to the Russian homeland. In Clarens, he read through Eduard Lalo's *Symphonie espagnole* with violinist Yosif Kotik, an erstwhile student of Tchaikovsky. Inspired by Lalo's irresistible lyricism and exotic color, Tchaikovsky soon began composing what would become his much-loved violin concerto. Work proceeded quickly; indeed, he sketched out the entire concerto in 11 days, spending another two weeks working out the details of orchestration.

Kotik gave the composer invaluable advice, but Tchaikovsky dedicated the new work to famed violinist Leopold Auer, partly because he feared that people would be suspicious of the composer's relationship with his former student. This turned out to be a mistake: Auer - eventual teacher of violinists Mischa Elman and Jascha Heifetz - declared the work to be un-violinistic and refused to perform it. (Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto also met with initial rejection by its original dedicatee, Nikolaus Rubinstein. Happily, both Rubinstein and Auer came around!)

The opening *Allegro moderato* starts quietly, entrusted to only the first violins. A brief introduction anticipates the main theme; there is no extended symphonic exposition. The soloist presents the songlike initial theme against a simple accompaniment. The pace increases slightly, and with a series of virtuoso flourishes, approaches the second equally lyrical theme marked *con molto espressione*. The development is filled with violin acrobatics and fireworks, culminating in an extremely effective and difficult cadenza. The orchestra returns softly with a recap of the movement's basic theme.

The composer had doubts about the concerto's middle movement, and in only one day wrote a lovely replacement marked *Andante*. (Luckily, he saved the excised movement, later publishing it as *Souvenir d'un lier cher*, Op. 42, No. 3.) His mysterious longtime correspondent and patroness, Nadezhda von Meck, critiqued the *Andante* severely, but Tchaikovsky rightly stuck to his guns; this beguiling movement never fails to charm audiences old and new.

A fiery orchestral introduction to the *Finale* leads to a cadenza anticipating a dance-like, light-footed rondo tune, well suited to symphonic development. Throughout this concluding movement, Tchaikovsky exploits the violin's capacity for brilliance and agility, using the sustained melody of the episodes chiefly as a foil for the dazzling scales and dizzying leaps of the solo. The eminent and powerful Viennese critic Eduard Hanslick dismissed this energetic movement as "brutal and wretched," adding "... for the first time the horrid idea that there may be music that stinks to the ear." Though this attack bothered the composer deeply - he carried the review on his person for months - his vivacious and completely unpretentious Violin Concerto has remained firmly in the Romantic violin concerto repertoire ever since.

The Fountains of Rome & The Pines of Rome

Ottorini Respighi

Born: Bologna, Italy, July 9, 1879 | Died: Rome, Italy, April 8, 1936

Ottorino Respighi was born into a family of musicians and virtually groomed for a life in that field. Blessed with abundant talent, he balanced the demands of a performer (violin and viola) with that of a composer - frequently serving in both capacities. In his early years, he played viola in the orchestra of the St. Petersburg Opera, which gave him the opportunity to study composition with Rimsky-Korsakov, whose orchestral brilliance obviously rubbed off on Respighi - himself a true magician of tone painting. He gained further mentoring from Max Bruch, but it was Rimsky-Korsakov whose influence was most pronounced, enhanced by exposure to Debussy and Richard Strauss.

Because his music was extolled by Mussolini many people assumed that the composer supported the fascist dictator. Not so! He was apolitical, and, though a member of a nominally fascist organization, he ardently supported that supreme anti-fascist Arturo Toscanini, and never dedicated any work to Il Duce (though certain other composers jumped on the fascist bandwagon.) Nonetheless, because the composer's music reflects his love and devotion for his country's great musical tradition, many of his contemporaries were misled by Mussolini's deadly appeal to Italian patriotism. It's taken many decades to correct the historical and personal record of the composer.

Respighi moved to Rome in 1913 and met two Latvian sisters who were students in the "Eternal City." As Respighi later recalled, "Near their little house, which was lonely and remote at that time, one could always hear the murmuring of a fountain. "Listen - how it sings!" one exclaimed. Said the composer, "That was the first of *The Fountains of Rome*." Such was, perhaps, the genesis of the score. Though it did not immediately engage the audience at the premiere in 1917, Toscanini - world-renowned in Italy and abroad - was strongly attracted to the colorful score, conducting it in 1918 to rapturous applause, sweeping aside any objections to this still popular technicolor music.

In the published score Respighi provided his own program notes for the piece, well-worth quoting here:

"The first part of the poem, inspired by the fountain of Valle Giulia, depicts a pastoral landscape: droves of cattle pass and disappear in the fresh, damp mists of the Roman dawn.

A sudden loud and insistent blast of horns above the trills of the whole orchestra introduces the second part, "The Triton Fountain." 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 seahorses and followed by a train of sirens and tritons. The procession vanishes while faint trumpet blasts resound in the distance.

The fourth part, the Fountain at the Villa Medici, is announced by a sad theme which rises above the subdued warbling. It is the nostalgic hour of sunset. The air is full of the sound of tolling bells, the twittering of birds, the rustling of leaves. Then all dies peacefully into the silence of the night."

After achieving notable success with *The Fountains of Rome*, Respighi composed *The Pines of Rome* in 1923. The composer provided a useful guide to *The Pines of Rome* in a brief program note written in the third person:

"While in his preceding work, *The Fountains of Rome*, the composer sought to reproduce by means of tone an impression of nature, in *The Pines of Rome*, he uses nature as a point of departure, in order to recall memories and visions. The centuries-old trees which dominate so characteristically the Roman landscape become testimony for the principal events in Roman life.

According to the composer, the *Villa Borghese* section captures the energy and irreverence of children at play. The second part, solemn and mysterious, aptly reflects its setting near a catacomb. The lovely third section utilizes the sound of a nightingale heard against the caressing atmosphere of a moonlit night. The finale begins in misty pre-dawn quiet, then effectively builds to an enormous and colorful orchestral explosion of triumphant sonority."

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Blake Pouliot, violin

Violinist Blake Pouliot has joined the upper echelons of brilliant soloists, establishing himself as a consummate 21st century artist with the rigor and passion to shine for a lifetime. At only 25 years old, the tenacious violinist has been praised by the Toronto Star as "one of those special talents that comes along once in a lifetime."

Highlights of the 2019-20 season included Pouliot's debuts with the Atlanta, Asheville, Sarasota and Madison symphonies and a collaborative experience as the featured soloist for the first ever tour of the European Union Youth Orchestra and National Youth Orchestra of Canada.

The tremendously successful 2018-19 season included his debuts with the Detroit, Dallas, Milwaukee, San Francisco, and Seattle symphonies, dazzling audiences by "[surging] onstage in rock star pants... [presenting] Brahms as a composer of great passion. It was compellingly - indeed, irresistibly done." (*The Dallas Morning News*.)

In September 2019, Pouliot's debut album featuring the works of Ravel and Debussy was released (Analekta Records), earning a five-star rating from *BBC Music Magazine* and a 2019 Juno Award Nomination for Best Classical Album. Adding to his accolades, Pouliot won both the Career Development Award from the Women's Club of Toronto and the Virginia Parker Prize from the Canada Arts Council.

Pouliot has twice been featured on CBC's "30 Hot Canadian Classical Musicians Under 30." He's also hosted CBC's *This is My Music*, was featured on Rob Kapilow's *What Makes it Great?* series, and was NPR's *Performance Today* Artist-in-Residence during the 2017-18 season in Minnesota.

As Grand Prize winner of the 2016 Orchestre symphonique de Montréal Manulife Competition, Pouliot toured across South America during the summer of 2017 as soloist with the YOA Orchestra of the Americas performing Astor Piazzolla's *Four Seasons* with conductors Carlos Miguel Prieto and Paolo Bortolameolli. He later returned to Montreal where he was featured in recital at the Montreal Symphony's La Virée Classique. A prolific recitalist and chamber musician, Pouliot has performed in Chicago, Los Angeles, Montreal, and Toronto, and performs at Pepperdine University, the Isabel Bader Center in Kingston, and the Ottawa Chamber Music series in the 2019-20 season.

Since his orchestral debut at age 11, Pouliot has regularly performed with the orchestras of Aspen, Calgary, Edmonton, Pacific, Toronto, Vancouver, and the National Arts Centre. Internationally, Pouliot has performed as soloist with the Sofia Philharmonic Orchestra in Bulgaria, and Orchestras of the Americas on their South American tour. He has collaborated with musical luminaries such as conductors Sir Neville Marriner, David Afkham, Pablo Heras Casado, David Danzmyer, Nicolas McGegan, Brett Mitchell, Vasily Petrenko, Alexander Shelley, and Hugh Wolff.

Pouliot studied violin in Canada with Marie Berard and Erika Raum, and completed his training as an associate of The Royal Conservatory of Music in Toronto. He graduated from the Colburn School Conservatory of Music, where he studied with Robert Lipsett, the Jascha Heifetz Distinguished Violin Chair.

Pouliot performs on the 1729 Guarneri del Gesù, on generous loan from the Canada Council for the Arts Musical Instrument Bank as First Laureate of both their 2018 and 2015 Competitions.



JoAnn Falletta, conductor

Grammy-winning conductor JoAnn Falletta serves as Music Director of the Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra and as Music Director Laureate of the Virginia Symphony Orchestra, Principal Guest Conductor of the Brevard Music Center, and Artistic Adviser of the Hawaii Symphony Orchestra. Hailed for having "Toscanini's tight control over ensemble, Walter's affectionate balancing of inner voices, Stokowski's gutsy showmanship, and a controlled frenzy worthy of Bernstein," she is a leading force for the music of our time.

Ms. Falletta has guest conducted over one hundred orchestras in North America, and many of the most prominent orchestras in Europe, Asia, South America and Africa. In 2019-20 she guest conducted orchestras in Ireland, Sweden, Germany, Mexico, Brazil, and across the United States.

Upon her appointment as Music Director of the Buffalo Philharmonic, Falletta became the first woman to lead a major American ensemble. Celebrating her twentieth anniversary with the Buffalo Philharmonic this season, she has been credited with bringing the Philharmonic to an unprecedented level of national and international prominence. The orchestra has become one of the leading recording orchestras for Naxos and returned twice to Carnegie Hall, first in 2004 after a twenty-year absence, and again in 2013 as part of the Spring for Music Festival. In 2018 the BPO made their first international tour in three decades to perform at Warsaw's prestigious Beethoven Easter Festival where Falletta made history as the first American woman conductor to lead an orchestra at the Festival. She and the BPO have been honored with numerous ASCAP awards, including the top award for Adventurous Programming. Other accomplishments include the establishment of the orchestra's Beau Fleuve label, the founding of the JoAnn Falletta International Guitar Concerto Competition in partnership with WNED, four successful tours to Florida, and the national and international broadcast of concerts on NPR's *Performance Today*, SymphonyCast, and the European Broadcasting Union.

During the 2019-20 season, JoAnn Falletta concluded a long and successful tenure as Music Director of the Virginia Symphony Orchestra. Since her appointment in 1991, the VSO has risen to celebrated artistic heights, performing world premieres by such composers as Kenneth Fuchs, Behzad Ranjibaran, Michael Daugherty and Lowell Liebermann, forgotten gems of the classical repertoire, as well as classics, pops, and family concerts in Norfolk, Virginia Beach, Newport News, and Williamsburg. Under her direction, the Orchestra made critically acclaimed debuts at the Kennedy Center and Carnegie Hall, was honored with an ASCAP Award for Adventurous Programming, and released eighteen recordings including discs on the internationally acclaimed Naxos label, Albany Records, NPR, and the orchestra's own Hampton Roads label. Virginians have honored her with a star on Norfolk's Legends of Music Walk of Fame, the Virginia Women in History Award, Norfolk's Downtowner of the Year, and the 50 for 50 Arts Inspiration Award from the Virginia Commission for the Arts. JoAnn assumed the title of Music Director Laureate beginning with the 2020-21 season.

With a discography of over 115 titles, JoAnn is a leading recording artist for Naxos. In 2019, JoAnn won her first individual Grammy Award as conductor of the London Symphony in the category of Best Classical Compendium for *Spiritualist*, her fifth world premiere recording of music of Kenneth Fuchs. Her Naxos recording of John Corigliano's *Mr. Tambourine Man: Seven Poems of Bob Dylan* received two Grammys in 2008. This season, she and the BPO release three new recordings for Naxos, including the world premiere of Danielpour's *Passion of Yeshua*, *Salome* by Florent Schmitt, and *Poem of Ecstasy* by Scriabin, as well as two recordings on the BPO's Beau Fleuve label, BPO LIVE: Prokofiev *Romeo and Juliet* and Brahms' Piano Concerto #2 with pianist Fabio Bidini, and *Forgotten Treasures* featuring five rarely played orchestral works. Falletta's other recent releases on Naxos include Respighi's *Roman Trilogy*, Wagner's *Music from the Ring*, and Kodaly's *Concerto for Orchestra*, each with the BPO; and Franz Schreker's *The Birthday of the Infanta* with the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra. In the past year, the BPO also released *Built for Buffalo 2*, featuring three world premieres, and *Treasures of Poland*, and the VSO released a world premiere recording of Michael Daugherty's *Night Owl*.

Falletta is a member of the esteemed American Academy of Arts and Sciences, has served by presidential appointment as a Member of the National Council of the Arts during the Bush and Obama administrations, and is the recipient of many of the most prestigious conducting awards. She has introduced over 500 works by American composers, including well over 100 world premieres. In March 2019, JoAnn was named *Performance Today's* 2019 Classical Woman of The Year. The award, which was given for the first time, honors the women who have made a lasting impact on classical music. In June 2018, Classic FM listed JoAnn among the world's top 10 women conductors, citing her "extraordinary musicality."

Ms. Falletta has held the positions of Principal Conductor of the Ulster Orchestra, Principal Guest Conductor of the Phoenix Symphony, Music Director of the Long Beach Symphony Orchestra, Associate Conductor of the Milwaukee Symphony Orchestra, and Music Director of the Denver Chamber Orchestra and The Women's Philharmonic.

She received her undergraduate degree from the Mannes School of Music, and her master's and doctorate degrees from The Juilliard School. When not on the podium JoAnn enjoys writing, cycling, yoga, and is an avid reader.