

Quad City Symphony Orchestra  
**PROGRAM NOTES**  
Masterworks VI: Pines of Rome

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JOHANN STRAUSS, Jr. (1825-1899)  
*Frühlingsstimmen* (“Voices of Spring”),  
Op. 410

**Instrumentation:** Piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, percussion, harp, and strings.

**Premiere:** March 18, 1883 by the Strauss Orchestra, in the Golden Hall of the Musikverein, Vienna, with Eduard Strauss conducting.

**QCSO Performance History:** *Voices of Spring* was previously featured only once on a Masterworks cycle, in April 1966, conducted by James Dixon at the end of his first season as music director. The orchestra also performed the work on pops concerts in 1953 and 1986.

Of all natural events, few can compete with Spring when it comes to inspiring composers and delighting their audiences. Clara Schumann was ecstatic on learning her husband Robert was working on his first symphony, “and a *Spring* Symphony at that!” One of Mendelssohn’s most popular “Songs without Words” is his “Spring Song”, and one of Copland’s most popular ballets is *Appalachian Spring*. Stravinsky had, of course, his *Rite of Spring*, a decidedly less pastoral portrait of the season, but a hit nonetheless. And of Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons*, “La Primavera” is certainly the most admired.

So obviously, such a popular topic couldn’t escape the treatment of one of the most audience-friendly composers of all time, the

Waltz King himself, Johann Strauss, Jr. His *Frühlingsstimmen* was originally composed as a vocal piece for Bianca Bianchi (the unlikely but entirely understandable stage name for soprano Bertha Schwarz), and has ever since occupied a top place among the most-recognizable works of classical music, and a mainstay in advertisements and cartoons.

The splendidly tacky text of the vocal version was written by Richard Genée, who also served as Strauss’s librettist for his most enduring operetta, *Die Fledermaus*. Intended less as a work of profound poetry and more as a vehicle for beautiful singing, the text is perhaps most notable for its heavy usage of that most singer-friendly syllable, “ah”.

Oh, song of the nightingale, sweet  
sound, ah yes!  
Glowing with love, ah, ah, ah,  
sounds the song, ah and the sound,  
sweet and cozy, seems to carry a plaintive note,



The Golden Hall of the Musikverein in Vienna

ah, ah rocks the heart to sweet dreams,  
ah, ah, ah, ah, most gently!  
Longing and desire  
ah, ah, ah lives in my breast,  
ah, if the song anxiously calls for me,  
from afar the stars twinkle,  
ah, ah in shimmering magic like the  
moons beam,  
ah, ah, ah, ah wavers through the valley!

### Voices of Spring Listening Guide

♫ **MELODY:** This waltz contains one of Johann Strauss Jr.'s most-recognizable tunes, a sprightly melody. The first part of each phrase is made of quick, upward-meandering eighth notes, followed each time with slower, downward-trending figures. Although such melodies are common in instrumental music, in its original vocal version the tune is impressively virtuosic.

♫ **FORM:** Like so much dance or military music *Voices of Spring* is arranged in "strains", or relatively even segments of melody. The long-range progression of the piece is very similar to, for example, a Sousa march or a Joplin rag.

♫ **HARMONY:** Strauss usually changes key when a new strain begins, and in this waltz always move to what is called a "closely-related key", or a key with either one more or one fewer flat. Taking away a flat (moving to the "dominant key") has the effect of heightening the excitement, while adding a flat (moving to the "subdominant key") tends to mellow and moderate the mood.

## JENNIFER HIGDON (b. 1962) Viola Concerto

**Instrumentation:** Solo viola, two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons (2nd doubling contrabassoon), four horns, two trumpets, two trombones, percussion, and strings.

**Premiere:** March 7, 2015, Thomas Jefferson Building, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., Roberto Díaz, soloist, Curtis Chamber Orchestra, Robert Spano conducting.

**QCSO Premiere.**

One of American composer Jennifer Higdon's great gifts is writing pieces both elegantly tailored to the particular details of their premieres, and widely useful and appealing beyond the initial performances. In a 2019 interview, she described her approach to the unique circumstances of each commission. "I always think about context, because I'm always writing *for* someone." In the case of her Viola Concerto, among the preconditions were the soloist (the Philadelphia Orchestra's legendary Roberto Díaz), the instrument (a rare and beautiful Stradivarius viola), and the initial venue (the performance hall at the Library of Congress).

"I love the kind of darker color of the viola, so the first movement of the concerto, as a consequence, is very slow and lyrical," said Higdon. But equally important to her was the physical layout of the venue where the work was premiered. "The stage at the Library of Congress is absolutely tiny, so we knew the piece would have to use a much smaller orchestra, but that worked with the viola because the viola tends to be not as bright in tone as a violin."



Jennifer Higdon

But aside from acoustic and logistical considerations, it was also the symbolic importance of the Library of Congress as a venerable American institution that provided an animating principle for the music. “Musicologists and critics have often written that my musical language sounds American and, while I don’t know exactly how to define that, I am sure that they are right.” Plenty of have tried to describe the details of what makes any particular piece of concert music “American” (usually with reference to the works of Aaron Copland and Leonard Bernstein), pointing to such features as panorama-evoking harmonies built on open fourths and fifths; rhythmic vocabulary rooted in Ragtime, Jazz, and Blues; and grand, Hollywood-style orchestration. But Higdon is characteristically unconcerned about the theoretical details. “I don’t analyze this stuff,” she said, “Let people doing dissertations do that kind of thing.”

*Higdon Viola Concerto*  
**Listening Guide**

**First movement**

♪ **INSTRUMENTATION:** Higdon begins her concerto in the low register of the viola. The lowest string on the viola is a “C” string, one octave below middle C. Though rich and colorful, the low

register of the viola is easily buried by other instruments, so notice how Higdon holds back on the intensity of the accompaniment until the viola reaches a higher register.

♪ **RHYTHM:** Another method Higdon uses to keep the acoustics of the viola at the forefront is to make the solo part highly active rhythmically, contrasted with a still-dynamic but slower-moving accompaniment.

**Second movement**

♪ **RHYTHM:** Higdon contrasts the relatively-beat-centered rhythm of the first movement with a more “syncopated” second movement. Syncopation is simply applying rhythmic emphasis away from the predominating beat.

♪ **ORCHESTRATION:** While the viola is firmly at the forefront of the texture for most of the second movement, notice how at the movement’s conclusion, the instrument joins the ensemble.

**Third movement**

♪ **AFFECT:** The long introduction of the third movement recalls the melancholic affect of the first. Eventually Higdon breaks out of the somber atmosphere into an energetic and active mood, though the solemn opening atmosphere is never far away.

**SAMUEL BARBER (1910-1981)**

**Symphony in One Movement, Op. 9**

**Instrumentation:** Piccolo, two flutes, two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, tuba, timpani, percussion, harp, and strings.

**Premiere:** December 13, 1936, Augusteo Orchestra, Rome, Bernardino Molinari conducting.

**QCSO Performance History:** James Dixon led the first Masterworks performance of Barber Symphony No. 1 in 1988, on a concert that also featured the work of Respighi (but the *Fountains*, not the *Pines*). Since then it has appeared twice on Masterworks cycles, with Donald Schelicher conducting the work in 2003, and Mark Russell Smith in 2009.



*Samuel Barber as a young man.*

Ever since Beethoven added a piccolo and a contrabassoon and wrote the first 70-minute symphony, the story of the nineteenth century orchestra was largely one of expansion and enlargement. This trend reached its apex with Gustav Mahler's symphonies, all of which require extremely large forces (most especially the Eighth, with the barely-exaggerated subtitle "Symphony of a Thousand") and only one of which (the relatively "modest" Fourth) clocking in at less than an hour.

But after the death of Mahler in 1911, and particularly following the First World War, composers largely abandoned the massive ensembles and durational opulence that had characterized the works of late Romanticism. The reasons suggested for this consolidation include mass casualties in Europe (reducing the number of available performers), and the fading of Romanticism's exploratory sense of artistic optimism, which gave way instead to the chastened nostalgia of Neoclassicism. The West was, in a sense, rebuked by the horrors of modern warfare, and this resulted in a much-delayed consolidation, a paring-down of art.

Thus, by the time American composer Samuel Barber undertook his first symphony in 1936, a great contribution to the symphonic repertoire was not necessarily a grand one. About a decade before, Jean Sibelius had made waves by fashioning his final symphony (the Seventh) as more modest than monumental, running a mere 22 minutes and utilizing only double woodwinds and the basic complement of brass. Barber composed his *Symphony in One Movement* in a similar vein, with a governing principle of economy over grandiosity. Though he employed all the formal markers of earlier symphonies, Barber did so in a condensed and "efficient" manner.

Although beginning in 1937 the work would enjoy a vibrant performance life among American orchestras, its world premiere was actually in Rome, with the orchestra of the St. Cecilia Academy, near the end of 1936. The conductor for the premiere was none other than Bernardino Molinari, the same conductor who had premiered Respighi's *Pines of Rome* in 1924.

### *Barber Symphony 1* Listening Guide

- ♩ **METER:** Among the many devices Barber uses in the piece's opening to build a turbulent and torturous texture, most unsettling may be the constant changes of meter. Meter is a pattern of regularly-occurring strong and weak beats; to change meter constantly, particularly at a fast tempo, can have a disturbing or disorienting effect.
- ♩ **TEXTURE:** When the fateful, constantly shifting mood of the opening finally draws to a close, by contrast Barber initiates a sprightly passage in steady 6/8 time: quicker, more transparent, and

more amiable. Although this is technically a “Symphony in One Movement”, this passage is considered the piece’s “Scherzo.”

♫ **INSTRUMENTATION:** The slow “movement” begins with a long oboe solo, beginning nearly at the bottom of the instrument’s range.

♫ **FORM:** The emotional climax of the slow “movement” leads directly in to the piece’s closing passage. This passage is designated a “passacaglia”, a type of piece where a bassline (in this case, of seven measures’ length) is repeated many times in succession, while everything above it changes constantly. Pachelbel’s Canon in D is also a passacaglia, as is the final movement of Brahms’s Fourth Symphony.

## OTTORINO RESPIGHI (1879-1936) *Pini di Roma* (“The Pines of Rome”)

**Instrumentation:** Three flutes (3rd doubling piccolo), two oboes, English horn, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons, contrabassoon, four horns, three trumpets, four trombones, six flugelhorns, timpani, percussion, organ, piano, celesta, harp, and strings. The work also features a pre-recorded nightingale song.

**Premiere:** December 14, 1924, Augusteo Orchestra, Augusteo Theatre, Rome, Bernardino Molinari conducting.

**QCSO Performance History:** *The Pines of Rome* has been frequently featured on Masterworks concerts since it was first programmed in 1957, conducted by Charles Gigante. Gigante would conduct the work again in 1961 (on a gala concert that welcomed guests Aaron Copland and William Warfield). The work was a favorite of former music director James Dixon, who led performances in 1968, 1975, 1986, 1990, and 1993. Finally, Mark Russell Smith led the most recent performance of the work, in 2009.

Russian composer Nicolai Rimsky-Korsakov was one of his era’s greatest teachers of composition, particularly in the field of orchestration. But he was clear about the limits of his ability to develop true artistry in his students. “I have tried to show the student how to obtain a certain quality of tone, how to acquire uniformity of structure and requisite power,” he wrote in his treatise on orchestration. “Nevertheless I do not claim to instruct him as to how such information should be put to artistic use... To orchestrate is to create, and this is something that cannot be taught.”

Reflecting the truth of this sentiment, it is possible for listeners to hear the influence of Rimsky-Korsakov’s methods in the works of his most successful students, while also observing that his sure-fire techniques of orchestration are merely tools for demonstrating deeper, more individual artistry. This is certainly the case with the Italian composer Ottorino Respighi, who as a young man spent several years in Russia as a violist while studying composition with Rimsky-Korsakov on the side. After returning to his native Italy, his first major international success with the 1916 premiere of *The Fountains of Rome*, the first of three works in a trilogy of opulent orchestral pieces which also included the blockbuster work *The Pines of Rome* (1924) and the less-often-performed *Roman Festivals* (1928).

Respighi enjoyed a long and highly successful international career, and although he is most-often noted for his magnificent, sometimes over-the-top orchestrations, he also wrote a considerable body of chamber music. Ironically, despite his many triumphs, one feat he was never able to conquer was

composing a successful opera, that most Italian of genres.

### *Pines of Rome* Listening Guide

#### **Pines of the Villa Borghese**

♪ **ORCHESTRATION:** Often excellent orchestration is built on contrasting colors. In this case, Respighi combines the exuberant timbre of multiple glissandos (piano, harp, and celeste) with the brittle, almost edgy combination of trumpet and clarinet.

♪ **MELODY:** Respighi is said to have modeled the playful melodic material of this movement on the playground songs of children.

#### **The Pines Near a Catacomb**

♪ **FORM:** Just as the first movement is reaching its exultant climax, the quiet slow second movement begins without transition.

♪ **MELODY:** Many of the melodies in the second movement share characteristics with Gregorian chant: modal, somber, and rhythmically inexact. As an active musician in Rome, Respighi was intimately familiar with the musical language of Roman Catholic worship.

#### **The Pines of the Janiculum**

♪ **INSTRUMENTATION:** The third movement begins with a mellifluous piano gesture, followed by a calm and serene clarinet solo. Like a signal, the clarinet returns multiple times throughout the movement.

♪ **TEXTURE:** This movement is full of many long, high and slowly drifting violin melodies. To keep the momentum going even amid these floating tunes, Respighi uses near-constant undulating accompaniment.

♪ **TECHNOLOGY:** In one of the earliest uses of recording technology in symphonic music, Respighi directs that a recording of a nightingale be played at the movement's conclusion. Notice how the color of the orchestration changes with this avian interjection.

#### **The Pines of the Appian Way**

♪ **TEXTURE:** The last movement begins with a constantly-repeated dissonant interval ("tritone") in the bass. This kind of repetitive gesture is called an "ostinato". This ostinato persists for the entire movement, though the interval eventually changes to a more-settled-sounding perfect fifth.

♪ **ORCHESTRATION:** Like the clarinet in the previous movement, the English horn provides much of the animating energy in the beginning of this movement. The English horn is very similar to the oboe but longer and with an onion-shaped bell. Masterworks subscribers will recall that this season also began with an English horn feature in the Largo of Dvorak's Ninth.



*Respighi (left) with Dutch conductor Willem Mengelberg and fellow Rimsky-Korsakov student Igor Stravinsky.*