

ITALIAN ODYSSEY

Friday 26 February, 5.30pm and 8.30pm
Federation Concert Hall, Hobart

Johannes Fritzs conductor
Emma McGrath violin
Stuart Thomson double bass
Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra

WOLF (arr. Drew) Italian Serenade (7')
BOTTESINI (arr. Rofe) Gran Duo Concertante (14')
RESPIGHI (arr. Ledger) Pines of Rome (20')

Austrian composer Hugo Wolf (1860-1903) is best known for his songs. His collected works include more than 300 Lieder (songs) for solo voice and piano. Wolf's Italian Serenade, which dates from 1887, was written for string quartet (performed here in an arrangement for string orchestra) in the space of only three days. Around the time Wolf composed the Serenade, he was working on a setting of a poem by Joseph von Eichendorff ('Der Soldat I') about a soldier on horseback making overtures to a maiden in a castle. Thematic links have been drawn between Wolf's setting of the Eichendorff poem and the Italian Serenade and the rhythmic gesture at the start of the latter (which pervades much of the work) may well suggest the soldier's cantering horse. Somewhat later in the Serenade a solo cello delivers three declamatory phrases marked 'Recitativo'. A case of unspoken words being uttered?

The Gran Duo Concertante by double bass virtuoso, conductor and composer Giovanni Bottesini (1821-1889) dates from around 1880. This single-movement double concerto for violin and double bass takes the form of an operatic scena: a continuous piece of music falling into several distinct sections each with its own tempo, key, mood and thematic material. We start with a moment of high drama – a short, tense introduction in the style of accompanied operatic recitative. This gives way to an extended lyrical episode in moderate tempo (Andante cantabile) where the two solo instruments take up the principal melody in turn (commencing with the violin) before 'singing' together. The declamatory music from the opening makes a brief reappearance before we move into the quick final episode (the cabaletta part of a scena) which is itself in various parts. Here, the solo violin performs extensive double-stopping (two notes at once) over a double bass accompaniment which extends to the top of the double bass register. Further show-stopping effects are called into play in the closing paragraph, which has the appropriate marking of Brillante.

Stone pines (also known as umbrella or parasol pines) are a distinctive feature of the landscape of the Eternal City. Pines of Rome, which was composed by Ottorino Respighi (1879-1936) in 1924, is a musical love letter to the composer's adopted home (Respighi hailed from Bologna). It consists of four interconnected movements: Pines of the Villa Borghese, Pines near a Catacomb, Pines of the Janiculum and Pines of the Appian Way. The first movement is boisterous (evidently Respighi wished to capture the mayhem of a children's playground in the Villa Borghese park); the middle two movements are subdued and reflective, the latter being a night-piece or nocturne (listen out for the recording of the nightingale in the closing bars); and the finale traces a long, grand and almost deafening crescendo (the pictorial cue here is an Ancient Roman army advancing ever closer on the fabled Appian Way). Pines of Rome is heard in this concert in an arrangement for wind, brass and percussion (and lone double bass and harp) by Perth-based composer and arranger James Ledger.

Robert Gibson, Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra, © 2021

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