

Ottorino Respighi

(Born in Bologna, Italy in 1879; died in Rome in 1936)

***Invito alla danza* ("Invitation to the Dance")**

P. 67, FOR MEZZO-SOPRANO AND PIANO

Ottorino Respighi was one of Italy's most celebrated composers in the early years of the 20th century, as well as a respected teacher and musicologist (particularly in regard to the study of ancient music). His start in music, however, was a bit fitful. As a child, he was enrolled with music tutors, but he didn't tolerate their pedagogy and showed little promise. Nonetheless, his father discovered that by age nine Ottorino had secretly taught himself to play Robert Schumann's dauntingly virtuosic piano work *Symphonic Etudes*. By age 21, Respighi landed a job as principal violist with the St. Petersburg Imperial Theater in Russia, where he studied composition and orchestration with Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov. Respighi was prolific, rarely without a major musical project to occupy himself, and, though little known, he was a polyglot fluent in 11 languages. He eventually spent most of his career as a music professor in Rome, composing close to 200 works for all genres. His most famous compositions are his wildly colorful tone poems for huge orchestras, *Fountains of Rome* (1916) and *Pines of Rome* (1924).

Yet, with opera all around him in Italy, and having married a mezzo-soprano and composer, Elsa Olivieri-Sangiaco, it's not surprising that Respighi was enamored with song throughout his career. Beginning with his first songs at the age of 17 in 1896 and continuing for 40 years until his death in 1936, Respighi would compose over 60 works for voice, including several operas and cantatas. Within this half century of song writing, 1906 was a particularly fruitful year for Respighi: He composed a cantata and 13 songs, including his very charming *Invito alla danza*. Set to a delightful short poem of the same name by the Italian poet and librettist Carlo Zangarini (1873-1943), Respighi's composition captures the poem's sense of flirtatiousness with a light-hearted lyricism. *Invito* depicts a man inviting a lady to dance with him by grandiloquently using the sea and a sailboat as innuendos of romance.

Invito's opening tune makes a motive of swooping upward and downward, mimicking the rocking of the sea. And, cast in three beats per measure, the song captures the gentle grace of a waltz. After about one minute, the voice sings *Io sono la vela robusta...* (*I am the robust sail that directs ... the journey*). This moment stands out as particularly effective writing by Respighi, as the vocal melody and the piano rise and fall in octave unison, creating the dramatic feeling of cresting swells. A brief suggestion of offering to dance a *gavotta* (an old Baroque dance

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form) changes the meter to a duple feel, but the notion is fleet. The narrator quickly returns to his thinly veiled double entendres, this time with a reference to waltzing, *Volete che il valzer disciolga La larga sua corsa febbrile?* (*Would you have the waltz release the extent of its feverish course?*). Then, this wonderfully lyrical soiree into song and passion slyly comes to a gentlemanly ending.

Invito alla danza – Text and Translation

(ITALIAN)

Madonna, d'um braccio soave
Ch'io cinga l'orgoglio de'll'anca:
Voi siete d'amore la nave,
La vela, madonna, vi manca:
Io sono la vela a vogare
Intorno pel cerulo mare.

Voi siete la mobile fusta
Che il mar della musica sfiora:
Io sono la vela robusta
Che il viaggio dirige e rincora;
La nave risale, discende,
La vela ammaina distende.

Volete che l'onda si svolga
In suon di gavotta gentile?

Volete che il valzer disciolga
La larga sua corsa febbrile?
Io faccio l'inchino di rito,
Madonna, e alla danza v'invito

(ENGLISH)

Lady, with a gentle arm
I clasp with pride your waist:
You are the ship of love;
The sail, my lady, you lack:
I am the sail that can move you
Across the cerulean sea.

You are the lively boat
Which the sea with music brushes:
I am the robust sail
That directs and encourages the journey;
The ship rises, descends,
The sail furls, opens.

Would you have the wave change itself
Into the sound of the gentle gavotte?

Would you have the waltz release
The extent of its feverish course?
I make the bow of custom,
My lady, and to the dance I invite you.

***Il Tramonto* ("The Sunset") P. 101A, FOR MEZZO-SOPRANO AND STRING QUARTET**

Musically for Respighi, 1914 was a year devoted to two large orchestral works, one opera, and this one song, *Il Tramonto*. As the world barreled headlong into war, artists became increasingly preoccupied with worry and the specter of death. So, too, was Respighi. He turned, as he often did in his career, to the beautiful and poignant verse of one of his favorite authors, the extraordinarily gifted Romantic poet, Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792-1822).

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Respighi was particularly drawn to one of Shelley's most beloved poems, *The Sunset*, written in 1816. When Shelly wrote this poem, he was deep in the throes of angst and scandalous melodrama: He had had an extramarital affair with a teenager, Mary Godwin, and this union produced an infant daughter who died within weeks of her birth. Soon after that, his wife, Harriett Shelley, committed suicide. *The Sunset* reflects Shelley's wrestling with these deaths and their aftermath.

The poem follows two young lovers who meet on a walk in the country while trying to find a quiet place to view the setting sun. They fall immediately in love, but after a night of soul connection and lovemaking, the young woman, Isabella, wakes to find her new lover has died in his sleep. Isabella spends the rest of her life in a state of quiet and merciless mourning. Respighi first composed *The Sunset* (translated into the Italian as *Il Tramonto*) for mezzo-soprano and orchestra (P. 101) in 1914. Later that year, however, he revised the song for mezzo-soprano and string quartet (P. 101a), which is the version performed in our concert. This reduction of an orchestra to chamber strings seems almost more appropriate, even more intense for its spare sonics and keen capturing of the story's intimate grief. And yet, in a remarkable way, Respighi makes this small work into an almost miniature opera with its recitative-like passages dispersed throughout the song and its ever-changing temperaments conveying the beauty of love, deep grief, and internal psychological drama.

Il Tramonto opens solemnly with just the string quartet setting the stage for the poem's tragic tale. The mezzo begins to sing in recitative (a kind of sing-speaking operatic device used to relate information), setting out the story in a "once, long ago..." manner. As the lovers meet in the "unreserve of mingled being," Respighi creates a magical duet between the mezzo, who sings *Quando la sua dama...* ("When, with the lady of his love..."), and the first violin one bar later, evoking their mingling in the ecstasy of falling in love. When the golden sunset arrives about one minute later (*Ora è sommerso il sole...*), the mezzo melts into a chromatically lush and lyrical aria – a song that remarkably blends the intimacy of a Schubert lied with the chromaticism of High Romanticism. But death breaks this intimacy apart. With long, accented, and angry chords in the strings, Isabella cries out *al mattin gelido e morto ella trovò l'amante* – "but when the morning came the lady found her lover dead and cold.")

The anger subsides with passages of subdued musical chromaticism that feature some of Respighi's most poignant writing – depicting the internal upheaval of Isabella's shock, then grief, then finally her lusterless *follia* ("madness") of resignation. The end of the tale is heartbreaking. At about seven and a half minutes into the work, the tempo is marked *calmo e lento* (calm and very slowly), and the strings

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begin a downward floating motive, timeless and darkly serene, while the first violin echoes the initial love duet, but now as a conjuring of the dead lover's ghost. The mezzo sings *Ho tal retaggio...* ("Inheritor of more than earth can give..."), marked to be sung *dolcissimo* (very sweetly). The music fades into an increasing quiet that echoes Isabella's inexorable gloom, ending with tender, sad chords.

Il Tramonto – Text and Translation

(ITALIAN)

Già v'ebbe un uomo, nel cui tenue
spirto
(qual luce e vento in delicata nube
che ardente ciel di mezzo-giorno
stempri)
la morte e il genio contendeano. Oh!
quanta tenera gioia,
che gli fè il respiro venir meno
(così dell'aura estiva l'ansia talvolta)
quando la sua dama, che allor solo
conobbe l'abbandono
pieno e il concorde palpitar di due
creature che s'amano,
egli addusse pei sentieri d'un
campo,
ad oriente da una foresta
biancheggiante ombrato
ed a ponente scoperto al cielo!
Ora è sommerso il sole; ma linee
d'oro
pendon sopra le cineree nubi,
sul verde piano sui tremanti fiori
sui grigi globi dell' antico smirnio,
e i neri boschi avvolgono,
del vespro mescolandosi alle ombre.
Lenta sorge ad oriente
l'infocata luna tra i folti rami delle
piante cupe:
brillan sul capo languide le stelle.
E il giovine sussura: "Non è strano?

(ENGLISH)

There late was One within whose
subtle being,
As light and wind within some
delicate cloud
That fades amid the blue noon's
burning sky,
Genius and death contended. None
may know
The sweetness of the joy which made
his breath
Fail, like the trances of the summer
air,
When, with the lady of his love, who
then
First knew the unreserve of mingled
being,
He walked along the pathway of a
field
Which to the east a hoar wood
shadowed o'er,
But to the west was open to the sky.
There now the sun had sunk, but lines
of gold
Hung on the ashen clouds, and on
the points
Of the far level grass and nodding
flowers
And the old dandelion's hoary beard,
And, mingled with the shades of
twilight, lay

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Io mai non vidi il sorgere del sole,
o Isabella. Domani a contemplarlo
verremo insieme."
Il giovin e la dama giacquer tra il
sonno e il dolce amor
congiunti ne la notte: al mattin
gelido e morto ella trovò l'amante.
Oh! nessun creda che, vibrando tal
colpo,
fu il Signore misericorde.
Non morì la dama, né folle diventò:
anno per anno visse ancora.
Ma io penso che la queta sua
pazienza, e i trepidi sorrisi,
e il non morir... ma vivere a custodia
del vecchio padre
(se è follia dal mondo dissimigliare)
fossero follia. Era, null'altro che a
vederla,
come leggere un canto da
ingegnoso bardo
intessuto a piegar gelidi cuori in un
dolor pensoso.
Neri gli occhi ma non fulgidi più;
consunte quasi le ciglia dalle
lagrime;
le labbra e le gote parevan cose
morte tanto eran bianche;
ed esili le mani e per le erranti vene e
le giunture rossa
del giorno trasparia la luce.
La nuda tomba, che il tuo fral
racchiude,
cui notte e giorno un'ombra
tormentata abita,
è quanto di te resta, o cara creatura
perduta!
"Ho tal retaggio, che la terra non dà:

On the brown massy woods – and in
the east
The broad and burning moon
lingeringly rose
Between the black trunks of the
crowded trees,
While the faint stars were gathering
overhead.
"Is it not strange, Isabella," said the
youth,
"I never saw the sun? We will walk
here
To-morrow; thou shalt look on it with
me."
That night the youth and lady
mingled lay
In love and sleep – but when the
morning came
The lady found her lover dead and
cold.
Let none believe that God in mercy
gave
That stroke. The lady died not, nor
grew wild,
But year by year lived on – in truth I
think
Her gentleness and patience and sad
smiles,
And that she did not die, but lived to
tend
Her aged father, were a kind of
madness,
If madness 'tis to be unlike the world.
For but to see her were to read the
tale
Woven by some subtlest bard, to
make hard hearts
Dissolve away in wisdom-working
grief;

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calma e silenzio, senza peccato e senza passione.

Sia che i morti ritrovino (non mai il sonno!) ma il riposo,

imperturbati quali appaion,

o vivano, o d'amore nel mar profondo scendano;

oh! che il mio epitaffio, che il tuo sia: Pace!"

Questo dalle sue labbra l'unico lamento.

(Italian Translation: Roberto Ascoli)

Her eyes were black and lusterless and wan:

Her eyelashes were worn away with tears,

Her lips and cheeks were like things dead – so pale;

Her hands were thin, and through their wandering veins

And weak articulations might be seen Day's ruddy light. The tomb of thy dead self

Which one vexed ghost inhabits, night and day,

Is all, lost child, that now remains of thee!

"Inheritor of more than earth can give,

Passionless calm and silence unproved,

Where the dead find, oh, not sleep! but rest,

And are the uncomplaining things they seem,

Or live, a drop in the deep sea of Love;

Oh, that like thine, mine epitaph were – Peace!"

This was the only moan she ever made.

Franz Schubert

(Born in Vienna in 1797; died in Vienna in 1828)

***Die Forelle* ("The Trout"),**

OP. 32, D. 550, FOR VOICE (MEZZO-SOPRANO) AND PIANO

Schubert spent almost all his adult musical life in search of both a stable income and recognition for his astounding compositional gifts. He had to contend, of course, with the heralded legacy of Mozart, as well as the daunting musical achievements of his contemporary Beethoven. But like Mozart's and Beethoven's,

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Schubert's compositions seemed to glow brighter in inspiration and mastery as he aged. Indeed, he created many of the burgeoning Romantic era's most important works in the last 15 years of his much-too-short life, and especially important in his oeuvre are his lieder (art songs).

Schubert is rightly nicknamed the "Prince of Song." He astoundingly wrote over 600 songs in his brief life, based on the work of over 150 poets. A friend, Josef van Spaun, described Schubert's brilliance with lieder thusly: "In this category [he] stands unexcelled, even unapproached ... Every one of his songs is in reality a poem on the poem he set to music..." What set Schubert's songs apart was foremost his legendary gift for melody and lyricism – his ability to catch the sense of a poet's text with uncanny magic. Equally important was his talent with the text's musical accompaniment, which magnifies the meaning of the text itself, and often adds subtext. Together, these unique abilities transformed the genre of the lied into a musical form of bedazzling importance. And, though Schubert had indeed struggled to gain acclaim during his career, his songs, at least, were celebrated during his lifetime by a growing number of Viennese admirers. Such was certainly the case with his song *Die Forelle* ("The Trout"), written in 1817.

One of those many authors who attracted Schubert's admiration was the German poet, composer, and social critic, Daniel Schubart (1739-1791), the author of a 1782 poem entitled, "Die Forelle." In early 1817 Schubert set that brief poem for solo voice and piano (the voice is for mezzo-soprano in our concert's version). The poem is narrated in three verses by a person who is enjoying a pastoral scene of "a happy fishlet playing/ In lucid brooklet bright" but finds that scene destroyed by the appearance of a fisherman who breaks the calm "with crude impatience" and eventually catches the fish. Schubert's 1817 *Die Forelle* quickly became extremely popular within his circle of Viennese fans and beyond.

The song's introductory bars are played by the piano and immediately set us into a pastoral setting with a delightfully playful motive of quickly rising notes that evoke the wiggly trout and babbling brook – one of Schubert's most lyrical and memorable melodies. The first two verses are cast in the major key with the babbling-brook motive running through every bar. But at about one and a half minutes, the key changes to the minor as the fisherman appears, the water becomes "stirred and muddied", and the trout is confused into biting the hook. As the trout fights the rod, the musical accompaniment now changes dramatically with violent, short, and quickly repeated chords. At the end, the narrator laments, *Und ich, mit regem Blute / Sah die Betrogene an* ("Oh, how my heart was burning/ Betrayed were fish and brook"), the babbling-brook motive returns, and the song finishes with a fading, bittersweet touch.

Die Forelle – Text and translation

(GERMAN)

In einem Bächlein helle,
 Da schoß in froher Eil
 Die launische Forelle
 Vorüber, wie ein Pfeil:
 Ich stand an dem Gestade,
 Und sah' in süßer Ruh
 Des muntern Fischleins Bade
 Im klaren Bächlein zu.
 Ein Fischer mit der Ruthe
 Wol an dem Ufer stand,
 Und sah's mit kaltem Blute
 Wie sich das Fischlein wand.
 So lang dem Wasser Helle,
 So dacht' ich, nicht gebricht,
 So fängt er die Forelle
 Mit seiner Angel nicht.
 Doch endlich ward dem Diebe
 Die Zeit zu lang; er macht
 Das Bächlein tückisch trübe:
 Und eh' ich es gedacht,
 So zuckte seine Ruthe;
 Das Fischlein zappelt dran;
 Und ich, mit regem Blute,
 Sah die Betrogne an.

(ENGLISH)

A brooklet soft and gentle,
 rushing on with glee
 A trout like arrow darting
 so playfully and free:
 And standing by the brook-side,
 I gazed in pure delight
 At a happy fishlet playing
 In lucid brooklet bright.
 A fisherman with rod stood
 watching from nearby,
 He followed fishlet's movements
 With cold and scheming eye.
 "So long stays clear that brooklet"
 I thought, with comfort sure
 "He cannot trap my fishlet
 Or catch it with his lure."
 But soon with crude impatience
 He broke the calm
 He stirred and muddied all that
 water:
 And just as I had feared,
 He tugged upon his rod;
 And dangled my fishlet on his hook;
 Oh, how my heart was burning,
 Betrayed were fish and brook!
 (*Translation*: © Shula Keller)

Piano Quintet in A major, "Trout Quintet," Op. 114, D. 667

1. Allegro vivace
2. Andante
3. Scherzo. Presto – Trio
4. Andantino – Theme and Variations
5. Finale – Allegro giusto

In the summer of 1819, two years after he composed his song *Die Forelle* ("The Trout"), Schubert had been studying privately with Mozart's famous rival, Antonio Salieri (1750–1825), feverishly composing and working as a schoolteacher to make ends meet. Many nights he could be found behind a piano at Viennese society gatherings performing his own works. But none of his works had yet been performed in a formal concert, and he was desperately trying to make a name for himself. And then the famous opera baritone, Johann Vogl, who was an early admirer of Schubert, invited him as his guest for a summer in Steyr, the picturesque art colony nestled in the Austrian Alps. The grandeur of the mountain countryside dazzled Schubert, who had never been outside Vienna. But more importantly, there were also weekly musical salons sponsored by a wealthy patron, Sylvester Paumgartner, and the young composer soon became the center of attention at these. It was perhaps the most enriching and enchanting summer of his life, and when Schubert returned to Vienna, he wrote the *Trout Quintet* in one week's time as a thank-you gift for Paumgartner, who was an amateur cellist.

Schubert set the quintet for piano and four strings, using a slightly different arrangement from a standard string quartet: violin, viola, cello, and string bass (instead of the typical second violin). By adding the bass, Schubert could explore new sonorities, and by giving the bass-line role to the string bass instead of the cello, he allowed the cello (and thus his cello-playing dedicatee, Paumgartner) to participate more fully in the melody making. Beyond its inventive arrangement, what is most enduringly remarkable about this lovely quintet is its vitality and lightness of spirit. Every movement tingles with an infectious cordiality — a snapshot, no doubt, of Schubert's blissful experiences in Steyr.

The first movement, *Allegro vivace*, begins with the freshness of an Alpine morning, clear and crisp and tender. After a short introduction, the music spirals off into a wonderful and uplifting melody — over the pulsing of the viola and cello, the violin soars like a lark in a broad and lyrical song. From this point forward, the entire movement follows a winsome recipe: Introduce a beautiful tune; linger around it with each of the instruments; modulate the key and introduce a new and lyrical tune; repeat (five lovely themes in all). Schubert dazzles us even further with his richly sonorous ensemble writing, as well as

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generously treating each instrument as a soloist.

The second movement, *Andante*, is a splendid balance to the first movement, tempering the former's festiveness now with gentleness, but with no less melodic brilliance. The intoxicating writing has the feel of an affectionate lullaby.

The jovial and almost prankish third movement, *Presto*, appears to bring us further into Schubert's cavorting and enjoyment of his summer, about which he wrote his brother, "Nearly all the girls here are pretty."

The fourth movement, *Andantino* — *Theme and Variations*, is a remarkably clever addition to the work and is the movement for which the quintet was nicknamed because of its incorporation of *Die Forelle*. Of the many songs Schubert had written, *Die Forelle* had become quite popular in Vienna, and Paumgartner was fond of it. So Schubert cleverly reworked it into his quintet as a gift to his admiring patron. The song's lyrically lovely melody is heard outright, and is then followed by a short set of five delightful variations. The memorable and ingenious piano accompaniment to the art song — the dainty little run over the keys depicting the trout's swishing in the babbling brook — is teasingly saved for the ending section.

The fifth movement, *Finale*, begins with a kind of striking of a bell from the piano, viola, and cello, as if to rouse us from the pastoral serenity of the previous set of variations. A tuneful stateliness follows, and at just about two minutes into the movement, the piano echoes the babbling-brook motive from *Die Forelle*. After several minutes of rich music making, this masterpiece closes with a genuine feeling of gratitude.

—*Program notes* © Max Derrickson