



# THE PROMS LISTENING SERVICE

Radio 3's Tom Service proposes onward sonic explorations inspired by the music of tonight's Prom

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**BRAHMS**

## Violin Concerto

When does a concerto become a symphony? Brahms's Violin Concerto, with its refusal to play the game of more conventional concertos by not making the whole piece a showcase for the soloist (not that the solo part isn't one of the most virtuosic in the repertoire – it is!), stands in a rhetorical interzone between genres. **Brahms's** next offering for soloist and orchestra, the **Second Piano Concerto**, takes this idea a stage further: he adds a scherzo movement to create a properly symphonic four-movement work and turns the piano's cadenza into a crucial part of the fabric of the concerto's discourse, right at the opening of the first movement. This sense of generic interplay is even there in his very first work for soloist, the **First Piano Concerto**, which started life as a sonata for two pianos, then turned into a symphony before morphing into a piano concerto, a protracted story of musical genesis whose tortuous machinations you can hear in the sheer scope of its orchestral writing.

And what Brahms began, later composers have explored even more completely. **Prokofiev** and **Britten** made their works for cello and orchestra (both composed for Mstislav Rostropovich) into bespoke genres, **Symphony-Concerto** and **Cello Symphony** respectively, finding their own solutions to the enormous challenge of how you make a solo cello part combine rather than compete with a full orchestra. **Richard Strauss** did something similar in his mercurial **Don Quixote** for cello and orchestra, as did **Berlioz** in **Harold in Italy**, another narrative symphony with soloist, this time a viola. All these pieces, including Brahms's, share a vision of the

relationship between the soloist and the orchestra as one of mutual dependence rather than one-upmanship: paradoxically, that makes them harder rather than easier where their soloists are concerned. Good luck, Leonidas!

**RESPIGHI**

## Fountains of Rome; Pines of Rome

There's precious little orchestral music that's more vivid, immersive or sonically bewitching than Respighi's orchestral pieces in honour of his beloved Rome. And there's something about Italy as an inspiration for pieces of magnificent orchestral opulence, because many non-Italian composers have created their own evocations of Rome and Italy, and some have transcended even Respighi's imagination. **Peter Maxwell Davies** composed his own orchestral love-letter to the Eternal City in 1998, a work palindromically entitled **Roma, Amor**, which uses the full arsenal of late 20th-century orchestral virtuosity to express the depth of Davies's special relationship with the city that formed him as a young composer. Two composers earlier than Respighi also made their own voluptuous orchestral tributes to Italy: **Richard Strauss** composed his symphonic fantasy **Aus Italien** when he was just 22, music that breathes and bathes in the sensual, awed bliss of a precocious composer's infatuation with Italian culture. As does **Elgar's In the South (Alassio)**, a vision of Italy's grandiose military and cultural history that sprang fully formed into his imagination while he was on a winter holiday in Italy in 1903–4. Some people send a postcard; others write a tone-poem!



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