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# RESPIGHI

## Piano Concerto in A Minor Toccata • Fantasia Slava

Konstantin Scherbakov, Piano  
Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra (Bratislava)  
Howard Griffiths, Conductor



## Ottorino Respighi (1879 - 1936)

Piano Concerto in A Minor

Toccata for piano and orchestra

Fantasia Slava for piano and orchestra

Respighi is best known for his colourful pictures of Rome in the symphonic poems, the *Fontane di Roma*, *Pini di Roma* and *Feste Romane*. Born in Bologna in 1879, the son of a musician, he was taught the piano by his father and later entered the Liceo Musicale in Bologna, where his teachers included Federico Sarti, and, for composition, Torchi and Martucci. An engagement as a string-player in St Petersburg in 1900 and 1901, and a return there in 1902-3, allowed him to embark on study with Rimsky-Korsakov, before his return to Bologna, where he took his diploma in composition. For five years, from 1903 to 1908, he was a member of the Quartetto Mugellini. He then spent some months in Berlin, where Nikisch conducted some of his transcriptions of earlier music, including Vitali's *Chaconne* and Monteverdi's *Lamento di Arianna*, tokens of his continuing interest in earlier periods of Italian music. He was also able to take lessons from Max Bruch. In 1913 he took a position as teacher of composition at the Liceo di Santa Cecilia in Rome, later the Conservatorio, and in 1924 was appointed director of the same institution. In 1919 he married Elsa Olivieri Sangiacomo, his pupil and herself a singer and composer. In 1926 he resigned his position as director of the Conservatory and for the last ten years of his life devoted himself more fully to composition.

Respighi was certainly one of the most important Italian composers of his time and won for himself an international reputation in concert tours throughout Europe and in America. The first of the Roman symphonic poems, the *Fontane di Roma*, was completed in 1916, with *I Pini* completed in 1924 and the *Feste romane* in 1928. His *Piano Concerto in A minor* is a relatively early work, completed in 1902, and it is therefore natural that other influences should be apparent, elements that suggest earlier musical practices as much as contemporary, although it was some years before his interest in Gregorian

chant found direct expression in his *Concerto gregoriano* for violin and orchestra, completed in 1921, and his *Concerto in modo misolidio* for piano and orchestra, completed four years later. The *Piano Concerto* opens with a grandiose flourish, before more lyrical material is introduced. The piano-writing is often florid, idiomatic and demanding, in music that is thoroughly romantic in character, moving to a calmer central section, its serenity shattered by the outburst that marks the final section of the work, a dramatic finale, that brings its own moments of repose and of bravura.

Respighi's *Toccata* for piano and orchestra was written in 1928, the year of *Feste romane*, three years after the *Concerto in modo misolidio*. There is an impressive opening that has inevitable echoes of the Baroque in its abruptly dotted rhythms, with the introduction of a less characteristic melodic element, notably from a solo cello in dialogue with the piano, followed by material of a clearly modal nature. There is a passage of deeply felt melancholy at the heart of the work, before the brilliant piano sequences that introduce the vigorous final section, with its cadenza and figuration suggesting a transmutation of Baroque sequential passage-work.

The *Fantasia Slava* for piano and orchestra was completed in 1903 and might naturally be supposed to reflect something of Respighi's stay in St Petersburg and the brief period of study with Rimsky-Korsakov. The *Fantasia* opens with a typically Slav melody, before the entry of the solo piano. Dance elements appear, in interplay between piano and orchestra, with more histrionic material and passages of pianistic display, over which the spirit of Rachmaninov sometimes hovers.



### Konstantin Scherbakov

Konstantin Scherbakov was born in 1963 in Barnaul, Siberia, where he received his first piano instruction. In 1978 he began study with Irina Naumova at the Gnesin School in Moscow and from 1981 to 1986 was a pupil of Lev Naumov at the Tchaikovsky Conservatory. He has won prizes at the Montreal International Competition, the Busoni Piano Competition in Bolzano and in 1983 won first prize at the Moscow Rachmaninov Competition. Other awards include second prize in 1991 at the Concours Géza Anda in Zurich and Géza Anda Television Prize for his interpretation of Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto. In

the same year he won second prize at the International Competition Premio Valentino Bucchi in Rome, a competition dedicated to music of the twentieth century. Konstantin Scherbakov has given concerts in over a hundred cities in Russia and also has regular engagements in France, Switzerland, Italy, Germany and Czechoslovakia. His recitals in Italy have included a cycle of Prokofiev piano sonatas at a festival devoted to the work of that composer and a four recital cycle of piano music by Rachmaninov. He has recorded extensively at home and abroad and in addition to his concert activities is a member of the teaching staff of Moscow Conservatory, where he is an assistant to Lev Naumov.

## Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra (Bratislava)

The Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra (Bratislava), the oldest symphonic ensemble in Slovakia, was founded in 1929 at the instance of Milos Ruppeldt and Oskar Nedbal, prominent personalities in the sphere of music. Ondrej Lenárd was appointed its conductor in 1970 and in 1977 its conductor-in-chief, succeeded recently by Robert Stankovsky. The orchestra has given successful concerts both at home and abroad, in Germany, Russia, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Spain, Italy, Great Britain, Hong Kong and Japan. For Marco Polo the orchestra has recorded works by Glazunov, Glière, Miaskovsky and other late romantic composers and film music of Honegger, Bliss, Ibert and Khachaturian as well as several volumes of the label's Johann Strauss Edition. Naxos recordings include symphonies and ballets by Tchaikovsky, and symphonies by Berlioz and Saint-Saëns.





## Howard Griffiths

The British-born Howard Griffiths studied music at the Royal College of Music in London and was awarded a scholarship by the British Council to study conducting with George Hurst. He continued these studies with Erich Schmid in Zurich and Léon Barzin in Paris. In 1981 he settled in Switzerland where he has conducted the Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra, the Basle Radio Symphony Orchestra and the Lucerne and Winterthur Symphony Orchestras. Other engagements have brought concerts with prominent orchestras throughout Europe, with broadcasts and recordings, and notably in Turkey, where appearance at the 1991

Ankara Festival with the Northern Sinfonia has led to a series of important recordings. Howard Griffiths is director of the Strings of Zurich and is artistic director of the Allensbach Music Festival in Germany. In 1994 he was appointed Principal Guest Conductor of the Zurich Chamber Orchestra and has recently accepted a similar appointment with the Oxford Orchestra da Camera.





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STEREO

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 Playing  
 Time:  
 51'04"

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## Piano Concerto in A Minor Toccata • Fantasia Slava

Konstantin Scherbakov, Piano  
 Slovak Radio Symphony Orchestra (Bratislava)  
 Ivan Tvrđík, Cello\*  
 Howard Griffiths, Conductor

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- |   |   |         |
|---|---|---------|
| 1 | Concerto in A Minor for Piano<br>and Orchestra (1902) | (20:14) |
| 2 | Toccata for Piano and Orchestra (1928)*               | (21:36) |
| 3 | Fantasia Slava for Piano and Orchestra (1903)         | (9:00)  |
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Recorded in the Concert Hall of the Slovak Radio at Bratislava,  
 from 19th to 22nd September 1994.

Producer: Emil Niznanský  
 Engineer: Hubert Geschwandtner  
 Music Notes: Keith Anderson

English Text /  
 Deutscher Text /  
 Texte en français

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