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Ancient Airs and Dances



Photo © Paul Kolnik

Music Ancient Airs and Dances (1917-1931) by Ottorino Respighi



Choreography Richard Tanner

Premiere May 29, 1992, 1992 Diamond Project, New York City Ballet, New York State Theater

Original Cast Valentina Kozlova, Heather Watts, Wendy Whelan, Philip Neal, Jock Soto, Damian Woetzel

Average Length 26 min.

The choreographer in discussing this work has said, "I've chosen excerpts from orchestral suites by Respighi. I love that music. It's so beautifully arranged. Although Respighi based his themes on Renaissance melodies, I'm using no steps from that period. I tried putting a few into the ballet, but they just stuck out." Ottorino Respighi (1889-1936) was born in Bologna, Italy, and died in Rome. Before permanently settling in Rome in 1913, he studied in Russia with Rimsky-Korsakov and in Berlin. He was the most widely known Italian composer of his generation, due in part to the advocacy of Toscanini and other conductors, and to the success of his symphonic tone poems, *The Fountains of Rome* and *The Pines of Rome*. Respighi was interested in the music of the past and his arrangements of early music reflected this influence, incorporating Gregorian motifs and suggestions of 17th century madrigals. After Respighi's death in 1936, the lute piece of *Ancient Airs and Dances* was used several times as the basis for new ballets. The first, was created by the composer's widow, Elsa, and received its premiere at La Scala in 1937. In 1941 the American choreographer, Agnes de Mille, created *Three Virgins* and a *Devil* for Ballet Theatre using the same score; and, in 1950, Michael Somes, the English dancer and ballet director, set his only ballet, *Summer Interlude*, to the same music.

"WHAT ATTRACTS ME VERY MUCH TO THE COMPANY IS THAT THERE ARE REALLY NO SET RULES."

— Peter Martins

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