

Suite No.2 in C major for Piano Op.71

By Alan H. Krueck

This short description was written by Dr Krueck for one of a series of four CDs issued by his AK Coburg label in 2003 and 2004. The CDs contained all seven of Raff's Piano Suites and his arrangement for piano of J.S. Bach's six Suites for solo Piano, all played by Alexander Zolotarev.

1. *Preludio*
2. *Polka*
3. *Toccatina*
4. *Romanza*
5. *Fuga*

Like its successor, Op.72, Raff's Suite No. 2 in C major, Op.71, was composed in April of 1857 in Wiesbaden and like its predecessor, proved reasonably popular over the years, so much so, that both Op.69 and Op.71 achieved a number of printings, the very last in 1884 being noteworthy for the fact that Raff's lifelong friend and admirer Hans von Bülow newly edited the pieces, adding his own fingerings and performance suggestions. With Op.71 Raff maintains the outline of pieces used in the companion sets: All begin with a prelude, continue with a dance piece followed by a more virtuoso composition, then a slow movement for relaxation and finally a fugue. None of the three first piano suites of Raff exceed 20 minutes and the present performance of Op.71 clocks in at an appropriate 18:18.

The first movement Prelude is marked *Andante*, 4/4 and as expected, is in C major. Though harmonically of its time, there is a visual outline very reminiscent of movements by Bach with a similar title. More in keeping with the 19th century (but also with the Baroque suite as a collection of dances) is the second movement duple time Polka in C minor: a deliciously quirky little dance and perhaps technically the most difficult section of the suite. This Polka seems to have proven popular enough when issued separately that it achieved more printings than the two other sections of the suite issued separately, the *Toccatina* and *Romanza*. The *Toccatina* third movement is marked *Molto vivace*. The evenness in its invention belies the duple meter indication, especially since the left hand plays triplets throughout and the dotted rhythm of the right hand thematic material almost obviates the 2/4 indication. Essentially binary in form, the second thematic group presents contrast with a steady pulse involving quarter notes and half notes. A return of the faster material is short lived, the second theme returns and a quick flourish of the main idea ends the movement. The fourth movement *Romanza* (*Andante non troppo*, 3/4, A minor) is a lovely manifestation of Raff's ingratiating lyricism and perhaps the harmonically most venturesome movement of the work. Syncopation is discreetly used to increase tension and there is a contrasting section in E flat major just after the beginning of the piece which brings in the contrasting second theme and upon return to A minor the music is built to a climactic section, essentially lyrical and relaxed, before ending in the lower bass register. The *Fuga* is Raff's most obvious salute to the Baroque suite in this composition. It begins with a somewhat lengthy virtuoso gesture before the actual fugue theme appears. The episode material, though harmonically contrasting, is rather parallel with the fugue theme. Momentum builds and the movement concludes in true virtuoso manner.