

RESEARCHING RAFF: CONSIDERATIONS AND REVELATIONS

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The paper concerns the research which I undertook for my unpublished book on Joachim Raff (1822-1882) while on sabbatical leave in 1976-77. Considerations concerning the lack of interest and the slow re-acceptance of Raff's music in the 20th century form the basis of my research. The paper begins with a resume of change in attitude in the music world after Raff's death and the causes for his fall in critical evaluation from the status of a master (with Brahms, Tchaikovsky and Wagner) to an object of contempt and derision as a saccharine tunesmith with a single salon hit. It traces the history of Raff's loss of identity in the 20th century and the reluctance of either of his two "fatherlands" to do anything to further the re-evaluation of his contributions. The paper concludes with a stylistic comparison of Raff to certain of his contemporaries and answers, in my opinion, why Raff was regarded so highly in his own day and why he should today be performed as frequently as he was 100 years ago.

The first impulses to research the music of Joachim Raff (1822-82) came earlier than any decision to pursue an advanced degree in musicology and stemmed from love rather than logic. However, even before Raff I had become acquainted with music by Felix Draeseke (1835-1913) and, due to circumstances during my undergraduate years at Syracuse University, my interest in Draeseke became deeper than interest in other neglected composers of the 19th century. Had it not been for the amount of work already expended on Draeseke by the time I started my graduate program at the University of Zürich, I would have done my dissertation on Raff - no regrets, however. Throughout the 1960s, during my European residency and after, especially summers in Rochester, N.Y., I examined every score or set of parts to works by Raff which came my way, neglecting admittedly the voluminous output for piano. The first consideration of Raff that brought any tangible results was a performance of Raff's final numbered symphony, his eleventh, entitled "The Winter" which I conducted with the now defunct California State College Community Orchestra in November, 1969 utilizing parts loaned from the Edwin Fleischer Collection in Philadelphia. It was in connection with the preparations for that performance that I determined to undertake serious study of at least Raff's symphonies and thereby hopefully launch more general consideration elsewhere in an effort to reassess Raff's music and gain perspective for him in relation to his time. Almost immediately after that performance - though I hasten to add, not at all because of it - a number of recordings appeared of major Raff works. By 1972 Raff's Third Symphony (*Im Walde* or "In the Forest") with its Finale considerably truncated, two versions of his Piano Concerto in C minor and the Bernard Hermann recording of the Fifth or *Lenore* Symphony had been issued. In 1971 a candidate for a master's degree at New York University, whose name was Roger Nortman, of Irvington NJ, sent me his seminar paper on Raff's "Winter" Symphony as a kind of thank you for stimulating his interest; he had received a tape of the work and it inspired a cause for him. That cause over the next eight years became for him a crusade to get all unrecorded Raff symphonies performed and taped and I must acknowledge that his efforts in convincing Myron Leavitt and the amateur-semi-professional orchestra of the Brooklyn YMHA to run through nine of Raff's symphonies and let him tape them made my later work considerably more enjoyable and interesting. In 1972 an official Joachim Raff Society was established in the composer's home town of Lachen near Zürich, An employee of the Swiss book and record company, Mario Huber, made contact with me and related his own considerable efforts in promoting performances

of Raff in Switzerland. About a year later, in the summer of 1974, the assistant conductor of the Cleveland Orchestra (at the time of Maazel's tenure) Mathias Bamert telephoned me at my school and invited me for a weekend at Blossom with the declared purpose of wanting to pick my mind about Raff. Among other things from that meeting Bamert made a promise which he has kept: namely, that should he ever be in a position to do so, he would make sure that all of Raff's major works would be recorded. The following year in 1975, Bamert was appointed head of the Basel Radio Orchestra and eventually the entire Music Division of the German and Rätö-romanisch Swiss Radio. Since 1975 either he has conducted or has assigned others to conduct all of Raff's symphonies, suites and concerti and a number of smaller works. With all of this taking place I felt the time was ripe for concentrated study of Raff and I applied for and got a full year's sabbatical on the basis of this research. I spent the year 1976-77 in Europe and although I lived outside Zürich I spent most of my time travelling north to Germany. The book which I finished at the time remains, as far as I can tell, the largest study of Raff to date, though I have heard that others, including Walther Labhart of Zürich, have also been occupied with Raff research. As of 1990 neither I nor anyone else has published significant Raff research.

For anyone interested in researching Raff there are two primary sources with which to begin and both are in German. The first is *Joachim Raff, ein Lebensbild* by his daughter Helene Raff, a biography commissioned by the Gustav Bosse Verlag, Regensburg, in 1925 for its series *Deutsche Musikbücherei* and published as Volume 42. The other is the *Verzeichnis der Werke Joachim Raffs* by Albert Schäfer, published in 1888 by Bechtold and Co., Wiesbaden. It is difficult to appraise which as ancillary to the other. Helene Raff's biography is the source for all of the biographical detail found in the international dictionaries and encyclopedias. Talk of its reprint circulated in the late '70s but this has never taken place. For anyone interested in Raff's compositions specifically, the Schäfer catalog is even more important because of its completeness. Not only does Schäfer give a systematic (that is, opus number or publication date) and chronological listing of compositions, he also gives detailed account of movements within works, including meter and key. Lost compositions, unpublished works and even deletions from larger works are listed. One can be grateful that this catalog was reprinted in 1974 by the *Hans Schneider Musikantiquariat*, Tützing. Unfortunately it is at present sold out and a second printing has not been announced.

During my research 1976-77 I discovered some unfortunate news pertaining to Raff's manuscripts: the manuscripts for the works which appeared in print during Raff's lifetime have been scattered. The Raff entry in the most recent Grove's hints at this without directly stating it when we read: "So great was his (Raff's) confidence in posthumous fame that, according to his daughter Helene, he did not provide for his family after his death." It is possible that some of the manuscripts of published works had been left with Raff's publishers and that others in the family's possession might have been sold before the First World War. It was the economic disaster after the war that scattered what remained. Libraries in Wiesbaden, Frankfurt and Stuttgart, the cities where Raff was most active after Weimar, make up the largest holdings but London and Washington D.C. also hold some of these manuscripts. In the case of the symphonies I have been able to locate the manuscripts for less than half of them. Grove's is wrong in stating that the unpublished works are in the Bavarian State Library in Munich. When I went there in 1976 I found only two folders of copies (handwritten, to be sure) of Raff's works and the works themselves are spurious. *Abteilung A* in the music division of the Berlin State Library is the real home of Raff's unpublished works. Switzerland, unless some private collector has them, is utterly devoid of Raff manuscripts.

The major consideration of my book on Raff is the orchestral works, primarily the symphonies and suites. Among the discoveries I made as my research progressed was that, while Raff was a prolific and ceaseless writer, he never wasted anything, never jettisoned material. Both Helene Raff and Schäfer mention a five movement symphony in E

minor (Raff's No.0 if you wish) which was performed at least three times after its composition in 1854. The manuscript is recorded by both as "lost" but Schäfer insists that the third movement March and the fourth movement Scherzo were put into Raff's Orchestral Suite No.1 in C major, Op. 101 from 1865. The other three movements, an *Allegro appassionato*, an *Andante* and the Fugue which forms the finale were very likely reused, either as originally written or revised.

In general I discovered that the frequent criticism of Raff, that he was not sufficiently critical of his material, is true. Toward the end of his life however, there is evidence that the composer was taking this criticism seriously, particularly in regard to important works. In his last completed symphony, his 10th in F minor titled *Zur Herbstzeit* or "At Autumn Time", part of the cycle of symphonies dedicated to the seasons (and a work which I hold to be one of his most perfect symphonies and among his greatest works) Raff actually removed the original slow movement. This was included in the premiere of the work on Nov. 12, 1880 but Raff was dissatisfied with it - Helene Raff gives no reason why - and he composed an entirely new slow movement which is the one in the published score. Raff also published the original slow movement as well, separately under the title *Elegy for orchestra and without opus*. The manuscript of this *Elegy* is one of the few held by the Bavarian State Library in Munich. The new slow movement is in every way a superior piece and it has a passage in it which might make you perk up your ears. [Here AK played a recording of a passage almost identical to a familiar one in Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony] That music was composed in 1881, seven years before Tchaikovsky penned his Fifth Symphony. If you think that is coincidental I might remind you of this passage from the Finale of the 3rd Symphony, *Im Walde*. [Here AK played a recording of a passage very similar to one in Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* Symphony]. I have no doubt that Tchaikovsky allowed such influence of Raff. There are other passages I wish I could play but I have no tapes of the pieces. These two examples might also help you to understand why Raff and Tchaikovsky are so often mentioned in the same breath by music books at the turn of the century.

As I mentioned, the Tenth Symphony is chronologically his last symphony, since the Symphony No.11, *Winter*, had actually been composed right after the first of the symphonies in the seasons' series, No.8, *Frühlingsklänge* or "Sounds of Spring" in 1876. In the program notes which I wrote for the 1969 performance of the 11th which I conducted, I made the erroneous assumption that since it was the last to be composed, Raff did not live long enough to oversee its publication. It is an error easy to understand since the score clearly states "revised and edited by Max Erdmannsdörfer" on the title page. It is my subsequent conclusion that Raff had the intention of revising the 11th Symphony, perhaps of replacing one or more movements. The score had lain dormant in his drawer for almost six years. How much "editing" or "revising" Erdmannsdörfer found necessary after Raff's death is a question which cannot be answered until the manuscript surfaces. The last information as to its whereabouts came to me in 1980 when I was told by a representative of the now defunct Alexander Broude company that it is in the hands of an American collector who, at that time, did not wish his identity to be revealed. I find it difficult to believe Henry Goepf in his 1911 book "The Symphony" that the *Winter* Symphony was the most popular of the four in the seasons' cycle. I consider not only the weakest in relation to its companions but only marginally above the 7th, *In den Alpen* which I consider the weakest of all.

When listening to a Raff symphony one senses little surprise in formal design, either from the symphony as a whole or in individual movements. Raff considered it adventurous to place scherzi in second spot and this gesture is found in all four of the symphonies for the seasons' cycle as well as in his prize-winning First, *An das Vaterland* (To the Fatherland) and in the 6th with its notorious title *Gelebt: Gestrebt, Gelitten, Gestritten - Gestorben - Umworben* (Lived: Striven, Suffered, Fought - Died - Chosen). If this doesn't strike one as exciting it nevertheless led me to consider something which nobody seems to have noticed regarding the relationship of poetic intent in Raff's titled symphonies to movemental

outline. In symphonies 3, 5, 6, and also 8 through 11 the works are poetically tripartite while remaining traditionally four movements in musical contrast.

The first symphony to show this, *Im Walde*, No. 3 from 1868 portrays musically a full day in the forest. Despite the four movements the day is actually described in terms of three periods. The first movement is entitled "Daytime; Impressions and Sensations". The slow movement and scherzo form a single poetic unit and are entitled respectively "In the Twilight" and "Dance of the Dryades" (meaning the dance takes place at twilight). The fourth movement is the third poetic component and carries the legend: "Night; the Wild Hunt and Dawn". As the wild hunt disappears Raff brings back music from the first movement to announce daylight and give a bow to the cyclic principle.

This element of the poetically tripartite is exploited again in the *Lenore* Symphony of 1871. In his Fifth Symphony Raff clearly outlines the first and second movements as bearing the exposition of his poetic first part *Liebesglück* or "Love's Bliss" Allegro and Andante quasi larghetto). The second poetic part *Trennung* is taken up by the famous march. Part three of the poetic ideal is the fourth movement entitled "Reunion in Death" or *Wiedervereinigung im Tode*. It is in this *Finale* and only here that the Ballad *Lenore* by Gottfried August Bürger is relevant. The *Finale* becomes, cyclically speaking, a thematic summary and also a symphonic poem unto itself wherein the *Finale's* indigenous material is developed along with the materials already used in the preceding sections. It is uncanny, if one bothers to take the Bürger Ballad in hand, to note the absolutely literal stanza, by stanza musical derivation or, if you will, pictorialization, accomplished by Raff.

In the cumbersomely entitled 6th Symphony we encounter the same poetic tripartite intent among the four movements. The first movement is called *Gelebt* (Lived), the second movement scherzo encompasses life's activities (*Gestrebt, Gelitten, Gestritten* or "Striven, Suffered, Battled") while the third movement, an overlong funeral march, is *Gestorben* (Died). The *Finale* is a paean to heaven's, acceptance (Chosen) and needless to say what has gone before is resurrected. All of the symphonies in the cycle dedicated to the seasons exhibited the same poetically tripartite intent among the four movements.

The considerations given to Raff during my period of research were made with the purpose of laying some initial bases for value judgments which necessarily must exist if dialectical assessment of his music is to take place. His contemporaries chronicled his achievements for their time; succeeding generations have presented their antithetical ideas and it is time to judge Raff's worth in terms of a present day synthesis. My first pronouncement in this direction is that Joachim Raff is the most important European symphonist between Robert Schumann and Johannes Brahms if only for the fact that when Raff launches his series of symphonies, the series begins only a few years after the completion of Schumann's Rhenish Symphony and Raff has completed all but two of his symphonies when the First Symphony of Brahms begins its triumphant course through the concert halls. For two decades, roughly 1855-75, I see Raff as the leading symphonist and it is this which I would wish accepted in music history. Joachim Raff is the major symphonist of this period but not as a pathbreaker. He is a transitional figure who musically endorses his older contemporaries Mendelssohn and Schumann but poetically endorses the new school of Liszt and Berlioz.

An enticing question remains concerning Raff's reputation after his death. There is really nothing in the history of music which parallels such a rapid loss in esteem and the virulent reaction as that against Raff. Raff was a celebrated composer and teacher when he died. Many of his works were taken for granted as repertoire. He even figured indirectly though prominently in one of the most successful musical novels ever penned, Jessie Fothergill's "The First Violin". Yet the reaction of younger musicians was quick after his death. Felix Weingartner in his *Lebenserinnerungen* of 1928 disdainfully recalls sitting through a hopelessly old-fashioned (the performance was 1882) Piano Concerto of Raff while in the

presence of the aged Liszt. During the performance Liszt is supposed to have murmured to the young Weingartner, "*Raff - braver Junge - aber kühl - langweilig - stört mich*" (Raff - a good boy - but cool - boring - gets to me) whereupon Liszt is supposed to, have slumbered (Bd.1,S.185). There are lots of such anecdotes to be found in musicians' writings after the turn of the century. One American writer in 1925 stated that MacDowell's talent had been ruined because of study with Raff. No one seems to have wanted Raff after the First World War. It is remarkably macabre that even the Nazis didn't attempt to reinstate him at the expense of masters like Mendelssohn or Mahler since Raff had no Jewish blood in him and had been highly regarded by the two scions of the Nazi musical hierarchy, Wagner and Liszt. It is only in the past twenty years that the Swiss have begun paying attention to their foremost composer of the 19th century but they still have a long way to go. I was really quite amazed when the Swiss embassy in Washington D.C. sent me a series of books to peruse in 1982. They had all been published in 1975 and were intended to serve as an introduction to facets of Swiss society. I noticed that the section on music had been written by my mentor in Zürich, Prof. Kurt von Fischer. There was not a mention of Raff anywhere, although von Fischer had included the German born and trained Hermann Goetz who had lived in Winterthur during Raff's heyday. I understand that the omission has been rectified in the 1985 updating of the series.

In preparing this paper I have researched the bibliographical entries under Raff back to 1978. Discounting record reviews there have been five entries treating the composer, none of which attempt to make value judgments or seriously study aspects of Raff's personality. Admittedly record companies have released a reasonable amount of material by Raff in the past five years especially. The program notes for those recordings (and I believe I have them all) generally share the same information about Raff culled from the major international music encyclopedias.

One of the most important endeavors in aiding a Raff revival has not yet even begun; that is the reprinting of scores and parts. Until that happens the intermediary, the performer, will have no opportunity, either out of personal curiosity or from a sense of mission, to easily study Raff's works. Then also, conductors of rank might become interested, for though one does not disdain an only recording of a particular work by any composer, regional radio orchestras and provincial philharmonics with dutiful *Kapellmeister* do not always bring sympathetic results. It is my hope that someday Raff will finally be on his way to regaining a place in music history which I assess to be properly his: next to Dvorak, Saint-Saens and Tchaikovsky, if not with Brahms and Bruckner. That is my final consideration.