

# DIE JAHRESZEITEN SYMPHONY CYCLE

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This article formed part of Alan Krueck's projected book: "Joachim Raff: A biographical documentation and study of his works." The original is a draft and so minor changes have been made to the grammar to produce a finished piece. The text has been preserved in full.

It is necessary to provide introductory comment to the four symphonies following *In den Alpen*, primarily because they have never been treated to extensive analysis but also because of relatively little known circumstances concerning their composition and certainly because of questions relating to the total concept of a series of symphonies intended by the composer as a cycle: Raff's *Die Jahreszeiten* ("The Seasons") symphony-cycle.

The four symphonies which Raff composed between 1876 and 1881 are as follows: Symphony No.8 in A major *Frühlingsklänge* op.205 ("Sounds of Spring"), Symphony No.9 in E minor *Im Sommer* op.208 ("In the Summertime"), Symphony No.10 in F minor *Zur Herbstzeit* op.213 ("At Autumn") and Symphony No.11 in A minor op.214 *Der Winter* ("The Winter"). That is the order of publication of these symphonies dedicated to the seasons but it is not the order of composition. The first symphony in the cycle which Raff composed was the Winter Symphony and this was written during the spring of 1876. The "Sounds of Spring" Symphony followed almost immediately during the summer and fall of the same year; it was the first to be published. In the following year, during the summer and fall of 1878, Raff worked on the Symphony No.9 in E minor, "In the Summertime", which was the second in the line of publication. During the summer and fall of 1879 Raff composed the Symphony No.10 in F minor "At Autumn"; whereas Symphonies 8 and 9 received immediate publication, the Tenth had to wait three years before finding its way to print and when it appeared in October of 1882 Raff was already dead. The Winter Symphony was the last to be published and appeared exactly one year later; the title page of the Winter Symphony bears the legend: Posthumous Work, revised and edited by Max Erdmannsdörfer. While there are no apparent questions about the composition and publication of Symphonies Nos.8 and 9, Symphonies Nos.10 and 11, being the last and first symphonies in the cycle, indicate a number of peculiarities concerning their final state.

Among even the most proselytizing of Raff's admirers there was never any attempt to cover up the fact that the composer was not the most self-critical of musicians. Doubts and revisions were rarely encountered in his output, especially after the success of *An Das Vaterland*, the one glaring example being the Third Suite for Orchestra (E minor) "Italian" which was composed in 1871 and which Raff never allowed to be performed (much less published) during his lifetime. In the period which encompasses the composition of the symphonies in the Seasons-Cycle (1876-79) Raff withheld no less than four major works involving orchestra: the aforementioned Tenth and Eleventh symphonies, the Second Concerto (G major) for Cello and Orchestra and the Fourth Suite in B flat major *Aus Thüringen*. Albert Schäfer reports that the last of these was held back for political reasons; it was ready for performance in 1877 and it is reported that Raff himself estimated it highly among his works and his friend Max Erdmannsdörfer predicted a popularity for it as grand as that accorded the *Im Walde* Symphony. It is known that the work was to be published as op.208 - the opus given to the symphony *Im Sommer* - but it appeared as a posthumous work without opus number. The Second Cello Concerto was published much later and aroused little enthusiasm. The circumstances surrounding the Tenth are interesting if only because, after the first performance (12 November 1880 in Wiesbaden under Louis Lüstner's direction) Raff withdrew the work because he felt that the slow movement (*Elegie*) "... in its broad, pathetic outlines evinced a too independent character and therefore didn't quite fit the limits of the entire symphony" (Schäfer) and composed a

new slow movement, also entitled *Elegie*, which is the movement in the published score. Raff did not destroy the original *Elegie* but published it - without opus number - in 1880 as an independent work.

The *Finale* of the Tenth Symphony was also revised, inasmuch as Raff added a new coda. Raff's reasons for withholding the Eleventh Symphony from publication are not known but there is every reason for us to believe that in this instance he was indeed being self-critical, for the Eleventh Symphony (in its published form) is somewhat awkward in the length and design of its two last movements and the second movement is without title - the only instance in the four symphonies of the Seasons cycle. How much Max Erdmannsdörfer "revised" and "edited" the Eleventh Symphony cannot presently be ascertained since the original manuscript could not be located for this study. It would seem from this that Raff, after the unexpected poor response to the Sixth Symphony and the lack of interest in his Seventh Symphony, did indeed assume a more critical attitude to his large scale orchestral works.

When Raff began the cycle *Die Jahreszeiten* he was at the height of his reputation as a symphonist and relatively unchallenged as the leading symphonist of the day - and about that there is no question - but there were new forces surfacing which within the next three decades were to put Raff's reputation as a symphonist into the period of decline which finally destroyed the importance of his name for the general public. Between the composition and publication of these four last symphonies Johannes Brahms completed three of his four symphonies, Dvorák emerged with his Sixth (D major) and Seventh (D minor) Symphonies, Tchaikovsky won enthusiasm with his Fourth Symphony and a relatively obscure Austrian named Anton Bruckner was beginning to attract attention in his native land. More insidious factors were at work undermining Raff's reputation, primarily in the circle of influence where one would least expect it: among the followers of Liszt. Though Liszt himself seems not have promoted an attitude of ill-regard the so-called "second Liszt school" those men born after 1850 who gathered around Liszt in his later years assumed a most critical attitude towards the older generation of Lisztians. The general discontent was the pose that the earlier composers - like Raff - were not progressive enough. Felix Weingartner did much in this respect to destroy the reputation of the earlier members of the new German school and his philistine attitude was primarily in the service of his own music. Those who were not among the new Lisztians, like Theodor Müller-Reuter (who studied with Raff) simply recognized a greater depth in a symphonist like Brahms and tended to ignore all but the most popular symphonies of his former masters. The last symphonies of Raff, though not ignored as much as the Seventh or as heavily criticized as the Sixth, passed into obscurity by the end of the century. They have never received the critical attention they deserve and have at most received comments of the composer repeating himself, a criticism which is somewhat true in these symphonies but insufficient in its generality for the symphonies of Raff's *Jahreszeiten* cycle contain music of extraordinary beauty and interesting design. In the history of the symphony after Beethoven they are extremely important as an isolated attempt to harness the unity-in-diversity principle in a way different from Beethoven's Fifth, Sixth or Ninth symphonies and the techniques of Berlioz and Liszt. Raff made his last four symphonies into a cycle and a cycle it is, with thematic metamorphosis implicit throughout.

For the 19th century musical concept of unity-in-diversity, a manifestation of the Hegelian principle of thesis-antithesis-synthesis, two works stand as polarities, Beethoven's Symphony No.5 in C minor and Richard Wagner's tetralogy *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, the one a purely abstract work of music and the other an amalgam of all the arts. Between Beethoven and Wagner no composer of stature went uninfluenced by the principle; whether that principle was demonstrated in the realm of song, instrumental music, orchestra music or opera and oratorio, unity-in-diversity emerges as the Romantic factor in the realm of form. *Idée fixe*, characteristic intervals, recurring mottos, thematic metamorphosis, inter-movemental quotation and thematic recall are all implied in

Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, and demonstrated from that point on by Berlioz, Schumann, Liszt and Mendelssohn, Raff endorsed all these principles and came close in the Finale of his Seventh Symphony to being the first symphonist to harness the ultimate form of this ideal, the concept of thematic summary as the concluding stage of Hegel's idea, the synthesis. The model was already there for the two composers who did indeed independently create the final stage of the Romantic symphony - Anton Bruckner and Felix Draeseke - the stage characterized by the appearance of the *Finalsymphonie* which is the application of Richard Wagner's thematic summary in the final scene of *Götterdämmerung* to the more abstract realm of the symphony, thus closing a cycle of endeavor which in terms of the 19th century symphony began with Beethoven and ended with Bruckner and Draeseke. That Wagner's model in the Ring was harnessed elsewhere goes without saying: in Draeseke's *Christus Mystrium*, August Bungart's *Odysseus* cycle among others, Raff did not escape the influence of Wagner's Ring either, but Raff's interpretation of Wagner's message was different, not as consequent, and certainly not as influential as Bruckner and Draeseke in the realm of the symphony. Raff's cycle of four symphonies *Die Jahreszeiten* very obviously corresponds to the four operas of Wagner's Ring. The point that Raff shares with Wagner is the concept of thematic metamorphosis. Raff however has constantly used this principle in all his symphonies except No.2 and the fact that he now makes a cycle in which the symphonies are united to one another adds no new dimension, to symphonic form, only more numbers of examples.

The symphonies of *Die Jahreszeiten* are entities unto themselves. The motives which link the symphonies are generative and not fully developed thematic material; this is a subtlety in Raff's favor for he isn't bogged down by the "now-remember-this" syndrome of the symphonies of so many successors. The most important melodic motive is that of the minor third, which launches major melodies in all the first movements of the symphonies. The second is a rhythmic motive which persists throughout the symphonies. The third is a coloristic pedal motive which is always divided antiphonally between sections of the orchestra and involves chromatic harmonies.

Raff's approach to the use of these motives from symphony to symphony within the cycle seems almost reticent at times but this is so only because the ultimate consideration from each work to the other is to create an independent composition, symphonies in four movements which have their own identifiable mood. In the creation of mood in these works and the realization of independent character Raff is extraordinarily resourceful. As one proceeds through the cycle (recalling that the first composed, was No.11) each symphony seems to exhibit greater depth, with *Zur Herbstzeit* reaching a point of expressive content which makes it the best of Raff's Symphonies after *Lenore*.