

# SYMPHONY IN E MINOR WOO.18

By Alan H. Krueck

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, including its references to musical examples, which could not be included as they were not found in Dr Krueck's surviving papers.

The first symphony which Raff wrote was completed in 1854 and performed for the first time on April 20, 1855 in a concert made up entirely of his own works. Raff conducted an orchestra assembled for the purpose in the Grand Ducal Theatre in Weimar. From all accounts it is known that the symphony was in E minor and consisted of five movements: *Allegro appassionato*, *Andante*, March, *Scherzo* and Fugue. It is not clear whether the last two movements were intended to be played together - the Scherzo being used as an introduction to the Fugue. Helene Raff assumed them to have been separate and Albert Schäfer's summary of the work doesn't clarify the matter.

When the E minor Symphony was performed it was a success and repeated its success thereafter on January 29, 1856 in the second concert of the *Cäcilienverein* in Wiesbaden conducted by J.B. Hagen. On April 11 of the same year Raff himself once again conducted the work, this time with orchestral forces of the Court Theatre in Gotha. From all that can be ascertained this was the last performance of the symphony. Despite its continued success Raff withdrew the symphony. Had he published it the opus number would have been in the 60's; this is calculated on the fact that two works, the concert Aria *Traumkönig und Sein' Lieb* (Voice and Orchestra) and the Concert Piece for Violin and Orchestra *La Fée d'amour* bear the respective numbers opp.66 and 67 and were given their first performances on the same concert program in Weimar as the lost E minor Symphony. What became of the manuscript of the symphony was not known even at the time of Schäfer's research for the *Werkverzeichnis*, although a fourth work from the same concert as *La Fée d'amour*, *Traumkönig und Sein' Lieb* and the symphony - Psalm 121 for Soli Chorus and Orchestra - was also withdrawn, though the manuscript remained among Raff's collection during his lifetime and eventually found preservation in the Prussian State Library. It seems likely that Raff destroyed the manuscript eventually, but not before 1863 for it was in that year that he completed his Suite for Orchestra No. 1 in C major op.101 which contains, according to Albert Schäfer, the Scherzo and March of the E minor Symphony as the last two movements. Where Schäfer got his information is not clear and Helene Raff merely repeats Schäfer's assertion. It is possible, assuming the correctness of Schäfer on the transfer of movements from symphony to suite, that other material from the E minor Symphony found its way into the suite, perhaps in the first movement of the Suite which in its major part is a fugue.

The reviews of the symphony in E minor were generally favorable. At the first performance the Leipzig *Signale* reported: "From Weimar one writes of a concert by Raff: a manifold and fully formed artist, rich in ability and constantly striving - Joachim Raff, who has been living here for a number of years and has demonstrated his creative talent to the greatest praise during this time by multiple examples such as his opera King Alfred, his music to the tragedy Bernhard of Weimar, several overtures, a *Te Deum* and different chamber music works, gave a concert on the 20th of April in the court theatre consisting of a series of large scale compositions (all manuscript) under his own direction. Above all mention should be made of his grand *Symphonie* in five movements, an instrumental composition of such unusual magnitude and artistic construction that the likes of which has been rarely encountered among recent works of art. The thematic working is masterful."

The second performance was reported in the *Rheinische Musikzeitung* as follows: "The second of the Union Concerts introduced us to a new composer, Joachim Raff, via his Symphony in E minor. This is a work not without importance; Raff shows himself to be particularly able in the matter of instrumentation, the coloration is exceptionally brilliant though the train of thought in some of the movements is not always logical, the expression of his thoughts not simple enough. The symphony contains five movements."

These were not unfriendly words. Evidently Raff himself was not satisfied with the resultant work, perhaps sensing in it a lack of weight or a design not in keeping with that of a symphony, although the next symphony - *An das Vaterland* - would retain the five movement outline of this E minor symphony. Of the movements in the E minor Symphony retained in the C major Suite op.101 only the *Scherzo* has a parallel in the later D major Symphony, *An das Vaterland*. They are quite different in character and also in orchestration; that of the E minor (cum C major Suite) piquant and lightweight, that of the D major symphony, forceful and opulent though both are characterized by a spontaneity most characteristic of Raff.

The *Scherzo* to the E minor Symphony (as it appears in the C major Orchestra Suite) is spare in its orchestration, eschewing trombones. Marked *Vivace* and cast in A minor the metrical indication shows a peculiarity of Raff which is a preoccupation with the composer in the D major symphony, namely the double indication of 2/4, 6/8 or double and triple meter. There is nothing complicated in this as far as agogics are concerned and Raff does indeed make use of the two metric elements in combination during the course of the movement. The *Scherzo* begins with the following themes Ex.1 [not extant], which provides the main interest up to letter B when the strings in unison present a second idea, almost a variant of the first: Ex.2 [not extant] with the woodwind counterpoint adding significantly to the progress of the music. Letter C brings a forceful contrasting idea in the woodwinds in duple time: Ex.3 [not extant], which remains the delectable property of the woodwind contingent. Letter D brings a variant of Ex.1 and there is a combination of duple and triple ideas accompanied by accents from the horns and trumpets. At the double bar the music moves into A major and a trio section is introduced with the following idea: Ex.4 [not extant], again the exclusive property of the woodwinds throughout. A short modulatory passage based on a fragment of Ex.1 leads from the trio into letter F at which commences a repeat of the *Scherzo* materials but not a *da capo*. Ex. 2 returns with its characteristic accompaniment and occupies the music until letter G when Ex.3 returns. At letter H we have the return to A minor and only then a literal repeat of a previous section, this time that section which formed the transition to the trio. Letter brings a reminiscence of the trio melody (Ex.4) which introduces a short coda and Ex.1 returns to bring the movement to its conclusion on three staccato full orchestra chords, forte.

The movement is simple, the themes bordering on the trite, but it is immensely pleasing and effectively written for the orchestra. The *Scherzo* is small scale; short, uncomplicated in its harmonic structure (it rarely strays from tonic-dominant ideas) and easy to follow in its formal (but somewhat irregular) structure, it proved to be a deadly popular piece and was subjected to a number of arrangements, none of which (alas) made its way to long playing records. Anyone who encounters this *Scherzo* without knowledge of Raff's other movements in the form are likely to proclaim it to have been influenced by Mendelssohn. Actually there is only a lightness about it which is comparable to Mendelssohn; the rest is characteristic Raff, albeit Raff of the salon. If Raff did anything to alter the two movements of the E minor symphony included in the First Orchestral Suite we shall probably never know.

It is difficult to conceive that the symphony concluded with a fugue following the march which is contained in the orchestral suite. The march has a sense of finality about it which seems difficult to follow with such a strict movement as a fugue. From the consideration of

form the march is relatively simple, A-B-A-coda, although the coda is a magnification in terms of sonority of the B section. The instruments absent in the scherzo (piccolo, trombones and tympani) are returned (re: the Suite in C major) in this final movement of the suite. The march (*Deciso, Allegro 4/4 C major*) opens with the following brusque gesture: Ex.1 [not extant], which is a fanfare leading to the main theme of the march proper: Ex.2 [not extant], a rather Schubertian idea containing some gestures proleptic of the march in the *Lenore* Symphony. At letter A a secondary theme, Ex.3 [not extant], enters of somewhat more spacious character. The accent on the second note of the measure is a typical Raff gesture and one which plays a great role in the succeeding *An das Vaterland* Symphony, Ex.1 returns prior to letter B and Ex.3 is given fuller orchestration. Again Ex.1 intrudes, this time to herald the return of Ex.2, which is worked up to a climax. At the double bar a short modulatory passage ensues and at the appearance of F major the following hymn-like melody is announced, by the first violins to delicate pizzicato accompaniment from the remainder of the string body: Ex.4 [not extant] and we recognize the beginning of the trio. At letter C, in the course of the development of Ex.5 [not extant], a transitional passage of exceptional charm is introduced, a marvel of simple counterpoint and tonality, music satisfying as a result: Ex.6 [not extant]. After this has been repeated twice the music moves back to C major via Ex.1 and we have essentially a repeat of the march proper up to letter E. The coda begins at that point and Ex.4 is presented in rich orchestral dress with 16th note arpeggiation in the strings adding considerable momentum. Ex.4 proceeds, acquiring richer harmonies and even more brilliant orchestral garb. At letter F Raff reintroduces Ex.3, likewise in full orchestra and finally Ex.2 is brought back just before a fanfare passage announces the final stretto. The movement concludes with a reference to Ex.1 and a delightfully nonconformist final cadence.

When these movements appeared in the Orchestral Suite they were usually singled out by the critics. One of the delicious ironies concerning the Suite is that it was assembled after the *Vaterland* Symphony and given the later Opus Number 101. It appeared in print at roughly the same time as the first symphony, 1865, and most people assumed it was a later work. Typical of the somewhat smug attitude toward "new" works of the time is Eduard Hanslick's review of the first Vienna performance under Wilhelm Braumüller (1870): "Raff's Orchestral Suite op.102 (sic!) comprises five movements. The first is a broad, pompous Introduction and a very dry fugue with an extreme lack of physiognomy in the thematic material and a jerky development. A *Menuett* follows, unimportant in its themes, but of a graceful disposition and piquant details. Similar things may be said of the two following movements, the best of the suite - the one a songful *Adagietto* and a truly dainty *Scherzo*, somewhat elfin in its chit-chat. The *Finale*, which in comparison to its predecessors is inferior to them; it is a marvel of not very original inspiration but very effective in the workmanship. Among the orchestral works of the New German School and among those of Raff especially the Suite assumes a noteworthy position. Compared to the Prize symphony of the same composer the Suite seems to us to exemplify happy progress; it renounces tiring length and padding as well as all too strong harmonic and rhythmic tortures. Raff has acquired in the Suite greater clarity and simplicity, therefore turned on a path for which we can only congratulate the composer."

The Orchestra Suite in C major op.101 received its first performance on February 26, 1864 in Karlsruhe under the direction of Johann Wenzel Kalliwoda, almost a full decade after the completion of the E minor symphony and three years after the Symphony No. 1 in D major, op.96, *An das Vaterland*.