

SYMPHONY No.4 IN G Minor Op.167

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. Several passages exist in alternative text and in these cases what appears to be Dr Krueck's latest version has been used..

During the production of the *Im Walde* Raff also worked on his comic opera Dame Kobold based on Calderon's play of the same name, making the two works his major efforts for the year. The opera was a success when performed and contains orchestral music which could be extracted to form a short concert suite - the delectable overture and the ballet music Dance Divertissement in Hungarian Style both of which exhibit the high level of inspiration already noted in the *Im Walde* Symphony. Whether the opera in itself is stage-worthy today cannot be answered unless a contemporary production is enacted. In the two years which followed this opera and symphony, Raff produced two large scale suites for piano, two piano trios and the truly unjustly neglected Violin Concerto No.1 in B minor which, with the later Piano Concerto, is the best of all his music in concerto form. In the spring of 1871 Raff commenced work on his Fourth Symphony in G minor, completing it in late summer of the same year. It was given its first performance under Wilhelm Jahn's direction in Wiesbaden 8 February 1872 and the second performance, with the Leipzig Gewandhaus conducted by Raff himself, followed on October 31st the same year.

In Raff's symphonic output the Symphony No.4 in G minor occupies a unique position. It is the shortest of all his symphonies - barely a half hour in performance - and utilizes the smallest orchestra of the symphonies, eliminating trombones and, as in the C major symphony, limiting the percussion to tympani alone. Except for four horns instead of two the orchestra is the same as late Haydn and Mozart. The brevity of the work and its limited orchestration no doubt contributed to its success and numerous performances but these alone become extraneous observation when one examines the score. The G minor Symphony of Raff is a masterpiece from start to finish. If it doesn't have the extraordinary coloristic elements of the *Im Walde* or the voluptuous melodic contours of the *Lenore* it holds its own very nicely in a perfect balance of materials and development; a perfect specimen of form and content, of discipline and emotion.

The lack of a title no doubt helped to launch the G minor Symphony in circles adverse to program music - and any title was automatically accepted as indicative of such. Actually the G minor Symphony is far more modern than any of its predecessors in the developmental processes involved, for it is truly neo-classical in its disassociation from title and the employment of genuine thematic metamorphosis in linking the movement; characteristic intervals and thematic recall (present in the *Vaterland* Symphony) are primitive in comparison with what Raff achieves in the Fourth Symphony as far as the unity-in-diversity principle is concerned. The Fourth Symphony remains the single most accomplished and sophisticated of Raff's entire series in this respect. From their very first encounter von Bülow, Rheinberger and Vieuxtemps (among others) greeted the work with understandable enthusiasm, Even when Raff's star began to pass from the scene the G minor Symphony received almost as much attention as the *Lenore* and *Im Walde*. In his introduction to the Forest Symphony Theodor Müller-Reuter could write in 1894: "To more general recognition are, with the exception of the already mentioned Fourth, really only the Third *Im Walde* and Fifth *Lenore* to be reckoned." As late as 1926 Wilhelm Altmann could write: "But the Fourth is the best of all."

Raff's Fourth Symphony opens with immediate presentation of the main theme in celli and double basses: Ex.1 [not extant], to which is added a typical transitional motive: Ex.2 [not extant]. Ex.1 is worked up throughout the orchestra with many (too numerous for quotation) counterpoints individually almost as arresting as the main theme itself. A general orchestra climax introduces at letter A an important motive: Ex.3 [not extant], given an important extension in Ex.4 [not extant] (flutes and clarinets) which, in the midst of another crescendo is lost only to remerge at letter B as accompaniment to the long cello theme (*Cantando, dolce espressivo*) Ex.5 [not extant] which in its denouement contains the germ of another theme revealed fully only at letter C: Ex.6 [not extant], accompanied by a florid, rather Mendelssohnian figuration. Ex.6 is then extended in richer orchestration acquiring a truly exuberant appendage (celli and horns) at its climax: Ex.7 [not extant], whereupon the outlines of Ex.4 return and Ex.6 is sung somewhat plaintively by oboe, answered by bassoon. A transitional passage ensues moving into B minor. Fragments from the various themes are encountered. F# minor is suddenly introduced against a syncopated idea in the strings; the syncopation gives way to a triplet accompaniment (itself syncopated) when the music moves into C# minor and with a shift into G# minor (letter D) the triplets give way to a sixteenth note pattern not unlike that encountered in the development section of the *Im Walde*. Eventually this pattern emerges (at letter E) as an altogether new element Ex.8 [not extant] - which is given (at this point rather inexplicable) development, being treated to a rather lengthy (but not at all superfluous) section in which elements of Ex.1 become ever more apparent. Ex.8 and Ex.1 emerge as the major components of this very strange if nonetheless effecting development section. Eventually the semiquaver motion reverts to triplets then to a syncopation - a reverse order of appearance from first encounter. With the home key of the movement fully established the recapitulation begins and there is essentially a repeat of the exposition up to letter J at which parts of Exs.1, 3 and 8 are combined - a rather mysterious combination but most effective, as is the sudden end to the movement, with its jolting cadence leaving one to expect C minor instead of what the ear senses as the dominant!

As in the *Vaterland* and *Im Walde* symphonies, Raff places his *Scherzo* for the G minor symphony in second place. The gesture which begins the movement (*Allegro molto*, E flat 4/4) is very reminiscent of the opening of the first movement: a unison tonic note and the immediate introduction of the major thematic element: Ex.1 [not extant]. This theme is not only a relative to Ex.8 from the development section of the first movement but linked as well to Ex.3 from that movement. Letter A introduces a secondary theme, Ex.2 [not extant], which lends necessary contrast to the foregoing and somewhat later on, in the woodwinds, a developmental motive is contrived: Ex.3 [not extant]. A short coda to all this takes the movement up to a repeat sign (which absolutely must be observed). After the music has been played through once again there is a transitional passage moving the music into A flat and the beginning of the trio. The main theme of the trio is Ex.4 [not extant]. Its accompaniment, barely noticed when it enters, adds the necessary contrast: Ex.5 [not extant]. When the music moves to C major some bars later Ex.5 is fragmented into a delicious arabesque and there is a section entirely based on color (winds and strings alternating) which serves as a contrasting section to the material of the trio, which is then repeated when the tonality of A flat returns. Ex.5 then takes on certain contours of Ex.1 and the music returns for a repeat of the *Scherzo* proper. The coda which concludes the movement is singularly exciting and the very ending is as abrupt and arresting as that to the first movement.

From a formal standpoint the third movement (*Andante non troppo mosso*, C minor 3/4) is one of the most interesting movements in all Raff; from an historical standpoint in post-Beethovenian symphonism it is a landmark and one of the few movements in Raff which actually points to the future, though this latter point is coincidental. As mentioned before the G minor Symphony of Raff is truly neo-classical, fusing as it does a number of Romantic devices within a basic classical regard for the term symphony. There is little doubt in these quarters that Raff has a definite model in mind, as far as symphonic movements are

concerned; the *Poco allegretto* of the Beethoven Seventh Symphony, But Raff is not slavishly imitative and therein lies the quirk of genius, if not the intention.

The *Poco allegretto* of Beethoven's Seventh symphony features an *ostinato* figure which permeates the entire movement. Over it music of the greatest emotional importance is laid and the inevitability and intensity of the movement is the marvel of Beethovenian invention. The idea of such construction was not new in the history of music prior to Beethoven though the expression certainly was. In Beethoven's *ostinato* is to be found a culminating point for a host of forms which had evolved over the centuries and passed out of mode: the so-called *gebundene Formen* of Passacaglia, Chaconne, Sarabande and a host of stylized dance forms which provided recognizable rhythmic schemes as starting points for melodic overlay. At the heart of the most noble of them, the Passacaglia and Chaconne, is the idea of a variations movement. It is generally accredited to Brahms that, at least in the realm of the symphony, the Passacaglia was revived, in the monumental finale of his Symphony No.4 in E minor. Felix Draeseke, without any knowledge of what his contemporary Brahms was doing, had at almost the same time set the second movement of his unjustly neglected *Symphonia Tragica* in the form of a chaconne. These two compositions were written within the two year period between 1884-86. In the third movement of his Fourth Symphony Raff predates both of them in the resurrection of these baroque forms and must be accounted as the true link between Beethoven and composers like Brahms and Draeseke, for the third movement of Raff's Symphony No.4 in G minor is indeed a variations movement on a ground bass derived from a dance movement of the baroque (Sarabande). The choice of this form marks Raff as a composer in the vanguard of advanced musical thinkers of the time.

The movement opens with the variations theme: Ex.1 [not extant], given out by the string body. Sixteen measures in length it is repeated pizzicato, at letter A with the bassoon intoning this mournful phrase above the *ostinato*: Ex.2 [not extant]. At letter B the strings present a highly contrapuntal version of Ex.1 while the oboe is permitted a new idea: Ex.3 [not extant], and this leads to a general increase in sonority in the orchestra, in basses and woodwind. Ex.1 is heard in lyrical guise against broken chord accompaniment in the strings. The fourth variation brings a highly syncopated passage for full orchestra in which the second measure stress of the theme is weakened: Ex.4 [not extant]. An oboe counterpoint at the end of this variation hints at a new theme and at letter E the ear is confronted with: Ex.5 [not extant]. At this point the Sarabande theme seems lost completely but it isn't, as in the highly rhythmic variation just before E one hears a weakening of the second measure stress. It is now in the new variation the first measure stress which is lost, although the second measure stress is indeed weak. What ensues at the end of the exposition of the melody in Ex.5 is one of the most ingenious and subtle maneuvers in all Raff: the basses, which have been the last hangout for the pulsation of the second measure stress of the Sarabande theme now introduces the pulsation of the first measure of the theme. As if pre-ordained the second measure is now heard as the final phrase in the second violins which is taken up immediately by the first violin and from that point is heard in the bass once again. At letter P the melody of Ex.? is expanded throughout the orchestra over the pulsation of the first measure of Ex.1. Hidden in the harmony are the outlines of Ex.? and a short passage prior to letter G brings a coda to this variation and at letter G Raff embarks on a double canon introducing a semiquaver idea against Ex.1: Ex.? [not extant]. This is a section which aroused the admiration of Altmann who, nevertheless failed to recognize the uniqueness of the form in the movement. The general crescendo to which this leads introduces the triple pulsation of the first measure of Ex.1 (augmentation) against a syncopation which, by its very nature, contains the stress of the second measure of Ex.1: Ex.? [not extant]. Just before a general peroration proclaiming Ex.1 in brass and woodwind, Raff even brings his Sarabande theme to its ultimate diminished form: [not extant].

After this climax there is a new melodic variation of Ex.1 against yet another diminished form of the basic rhythm Ex.? [not extant], and there leads to what seems to be a

restatement of the material from letters E to G. Raff has accomplished a fusion of sonata form and Passacaglia!

Letter J brings yet another variation with a clever displacement of the second measure of Ex.1 against itself: [not extant]; theme in the low woodwind, displacement in the strings. There follows almost immediately a new variation in C major in which the melodic line is given important extension. A new form of Ex.1 serves as a short transition to the final orchestral outburst. The coda to the movement, recognizable by the pizzicato strings on Ex.1 brings no less than six different versions of Ex.1. The technical wizardry of Raff, as admirable as it is on paper, is completely subject to the emotion engendered in the movement when actually heard. The encounter is first class orchestral satisfaction.

The *Finale* (*Allegro*, G major 4/4) starts off with a quotation from the opening of the first movement (G minor 3/4) and after a short recitative in the celli (inevitably recalling the opening to the *Finale* in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony) the music moves swiftly into common time and the major mode. After a few bars of prelude, a cheeky tune is announced gaily on the oboes Ex.1 [not extant], which is passed on to the bassoon for repetition. It is taken up by the string contingent at letter A in inversion and it is here that one recognizes that this main theme is actually a metamorphosis of Ex.1 from the first movement - hence a possible reason for the quotation at the beginning of the *Finale*. The first violins, joined by flutes, then add this important extension to the theme: Ex.2 [not extant]. Piquant orchestration accompanies violas and bassoons when they bring back Ex.1 in its original form, and soon this is taken up by the full orchestra accompanied by a strange pulsation in tympani and trumpets which finally erupts at letter B into a syncopated accompaniment to a new theme: Ex.3 [not extant]. The music which follows is utterly irresistible in its spontaneity and buoyancy; it is one of the most joyous passages in all Raff. The momentum achieved at letter B is not allowed to falter when Raff introduces some lyrical contrast - in actuality an appendage - and makes a gradual transition (letter C) to a new melody in which chromatic coloration and instrumental interplay feature prominently: Ex.4 [not extant], which bursts forth radiantly throughout the orchestra accompanied by a magnificent counterpoint in oboes clarinets and horns: Ex.5 [not extant], which culminates in a return of the syncopations heard with Ex.3. The following unison scalar passage which follows in the string and acts as transition to the development section has an intensity about it which brings another parallel to Tchaikovskian gesture, and for a moment the listener might mistake himself to be in the *Finale* of Tchaikovsky's Fourth Symphony rather than Raff's!

When Ex.1 returns at letter D the form of the *Finale* becomes finally apparent, it is a Rondo, albeit with a certain amount of alteration. After Ex.1 has been twice repeated Raff introduces a new idea in clarinets and bassoons with a simple running accompaniment in the strings which has an important end phrase: Ex.6 [not extant]. A repetition of this material leads to letter E where the material is broken up and combined; a general crescendo ensues and the orchestra gradually fills out until finally the listener is once again swept off his feet by the exuberance of the proceedings. The denouement to this is a modulatory passage which introduces, at letter F, the key of A flat major. The ensuing section is a double fugue based on the materials of Exs.3 and 1; it gives the impression of being a development section. In reality it is Raff's way of telescoping the obligatory repetition of sections associated with these themes. At letter H Ex.4 is repeated, there is a shortened repetition of the passage heard at letter ? and the music suddenly moves into C minor, (*listesso tempo*) and the meter changes to 3/2: the horns intone the main theme of the first movement and the music modulates to G major with a return of duple meter. The ensuing coda makes Raff's invention seemingly inexhaustible: Ex.1 of the *Finale* is now transformed into triplet ideas: Ex.7 [not extant].

Ex.6 returns in augmentation against itself and via this material a *Stretto* ensues which brings a headlong rush to the final affirmative G major chords with which the symphony concludes.