

SYMPHONY No.6 IN D Minor Op.189

Gelebt: Gestrebt, Gelitten, Gestritten – Gestorben - Umworben

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. Other omissions have also been noted.

During the summer and fall of 1873 while Raff was working on the Symphony No.6 in D minor op.189, he had every reason to believe that his time of recognition as a leading symphonist had arrived and that his value to posterity was assured. The *Vaterland* Symphony was still receiving a goodly number of performances (no doubt aided by sentiment aroused through the victory of the Franco-Prussian War and the recent unification of Germany as an imperial nation), the Symphony *Im Walde* was already repertoire, the G minor Symphony competed with its predecessor creditably and the Lenore, barely a year old, was enjoying one triumphant performance after another; only the Second Symphony seemed to be languishing for lack of attention. Raff was indeed at the height of his creative powers from 1869 to 1873 and this is evinced not only by the symphonies but by a collection of major efforts in other genres contemporary with them. Between the Lenore and the Sixth Symphony Raff also wrote in other forms, from which one may select the Sextet in G minor, the Variations for Piano on an Original Theme and the Concerto in C minor for Piano and Orchestra as being as accomplished and satisfying as anything produced before them. It could very well be the case that the Piano Concerto was Raff's last fully satisfying composition.

Almost contemporary with the Piano Concerto Raff composed his *Sinfonietta* for 10 Wind Instruments; two more dissimilar works one cannot imagine and the differences rest not only in the forces involved. The melodic invention, the harmonic manipulation, the piano writing, orchestral coloration and the beautiful balance of the formal scheme in the Piano Concerto find little parallel in the *Sinfonietta*. To be sure Raff imagined the *Sinfonietta* as a lightweight work, a divertimento-like composition in which homage is paid to works for similar forces by Mozart, Haydn and their contemporaries: Raff even provides four contrasting movements in which no thematic inter-relationship is evinced to underscore the classical nature of the work. Though the work is certainly of interest to wind players there is little which holds the listener's attention and if one judges Raff's *Sinfonietta* as competitive with Gounod's *Petite Symphonie pour instruments a vent* it's a consideration based on recognition that neither are much more than 19th century examples of *Gebrauchsmusik* for a type of ensemble neglected at the time. Though one may believe Helene Raff's report that the *Sinfonietta* "provided its creator with undivided joy", the work is a mellifluous bore and distressingly so since it is barely 20 minutes long. Considering the lack of recordings of Raff's important music (of all types) it is most regrettable that the *Sinfonietta* is available to the uninitiated and presents the possibility of unfair assessment of Raff's genius, an assessment which might prevent further investigation into Raff's more important efforts.

Within the year that saw the realization of the two antipodal efforts represented by the Piano Concerto and the *Sinfonietta* for Winds, Raff embarked on yet another large-scale work, his Symphony No.6 in D minor op.189. It is not so much that the Sixth Symphony wavers between its two predecessors as far as achievement is concerned, it is the fact that Raff finally succumbs, in his symphonic undertakings, to a fatal lapse in judgment concerning the materials devised. In this respect the Sixth Symphony is the crisis work in Raff's output as a symphonist.

Nowhere is Raff less than a master of musical techniques. In all of the symphonies up to No.6 Raff was able to show himself a master of musical maneuver: even if he provided no harmonic surprises nor overwhelmed with orchestral panoply, he was satisfying; there was spontaneity, there was directness of a type which few composers since Schubert could claim. The Sixth Symphony certainly exhibits all the technical mastery usual with Raff, and, as will be recorded shortly, he was extremely proud of the design of the Sixth Symphony. Unfortunately the idea of spontaneity, particularly in the first and last movements, gives way to surface motion with a momentum which seems self-willed rather than natural.

The title of the Sixth Symphony, *Gelebt, Gestrebt, Gelitten Gestritten, Gestorben Umworben* is the best known item concerning the work. It is an unfortunate circumlocution for more succinct expressions as "Destiny", "Eroica" and "Pathétique" and has earned the Sixth Symphony unfortunate notoriety. Even for the poetic sentiments of 1873 the motto borders on the ridiculous. What is important about the title is that Raff once again indicates his symphony to be in a three-section design consisting of four movements. Albert Schäfer presents the title as Raff intended it - *Gelebt: Gestrebt, Gestritten, Gelitten - Gestorben-Umworben*, in other words, the first movement and scherzo form an entity presenting (poetically speaking) the musical description of three elements of Life; the second section, a funeral march, obviously refers to the *Gestorben* and the *Finale*, triumph and vindication. The idealization of the symphony remains the struggle-to-victory concept implicit in Beethoven's *Eroica* and Fifth and Ninth Symphonies. There is every reason to believe that the Sixth Symphony was intended as Raff's attempt to equal Beethoven and once again we witness a late 19th century composer assuming the cloak of Beethoven only to find it ill-suited to him.

The first movement of the Sixth Symphony (D minor, 3/4, *Allegro non troppo*) opens with the sound of *pizzicato* strings playing what is really an augmented form of the main theme: Ex.1 [not extant], which contracts to: Ex.2 [not extant] until at letter A the theme is revealed in its principal form: [not extant]. There is no denying that the very opening of the movement has a certain amount of harmonic tension as well as resourceful instrumental color and, just before Ex.3 [not extant] is presented, Raff manages the subtle maneuver of presenting (also in augmented form) a phrase which later becomes important as a second subject: Ex.4 [not extant] and finds its ultimate form as: Ex.5 [not extant]. It doesn't take much consideration to conclude that Raff, in attempting to equal Beethoven, intends to emulate him: Ex.3 is obviously designed with the opening motive of Beethoven's Symphony No.5 in mind. Where Beethoven's motive is pregnant with possibility, Raff's motive is recalcitrant to the point of being still born and its design has a truly fatal flaw, the interval relationship between leading tone and tonic which, considering the brevity of the motif, is too cadential a sound to provide variety and sustain true development. In this Raff is at the opposite extreme of Beethoven in the first movement of his C minor symphony for all the potential of the motive is used in its initial presentation and even through sequence, augmentation, diminution and contrapuntal manipulation the primary outlines remain and secondary or tertiary manifestations are unidentifiable. Since Raff brings back this theme to introduce the *Finale* and then, in the coda to that movement, as a final peroration, the listener goes away with the sensation of having listened to the rhetoric of musical epic without having experienced musical epic. The miscalculation of selecting this theme (Ex.3) is hardly offset by the addition of subsequent materials even if they are indigenously more interesting or capable of greater manipulation. Raff's reliance on sequence is not only apparent in the treatment of his themes, it is the basis for the actual design in all the themes of the first movement. The result is a short windedness not noticeable in any of the first movements in Raff's symphonies up to the appearance of No.6. It has often been complained that many 19th century symphonists (Schubert, Mendelssohn and Tchaikovsky) could be four-square in their thinking; were it the case with Raff in this movement, the music might present more of a symphonic argument. It is not only the reliance on sequence which mars the themes it is also that the elements treated sequentially are themselves so short and complement themselves without lending contrast. One notes in Ex.3 that theme is essentially a sequence of a two measure phrase with the rhythmic outline: [not extant].

In Ex.5 it is again a two measure phrase, this time with the rhythmic outline [not extant] which in combination with itself doesn't offer much contrast: Ex.6 [not extant], nor does the end phrase: Ex.7 [not extant], also two measures in duration and treated sequentially, provide the necessary balance to the melodic design. All this is introduced at letter C with an extremely abrupt transition of only two measures.

Some 16 measures before letter D, in the midst of the treatment of Exs.6 and 7, Raff introduces in the background a new rhythmic element in dialog between woodwinds, horns and strings: Ex.8 [not extant] which, at D bursts forth in all its glory: [not extant]. This is the most immediately satisfying passage in the first movement, though it too is built from two measure sequences. The fact that it is the most memorable part of the movement most likely stems from the diatonic materials being answered by a chromatic line, the sudden and delightful change in tone color and the addition of the scalar passage first in triplets and upon second repetition, in the dotted rhythm of Ex.10: [not extant]. At this point attention should be called to the fact that nowhere in the Sixth Symphony is Raff anything less than his usual master of orchestration. The passage beginning at letter D (Ex.10) is compounded of instrumental touches which again are proleptic of Tchaikovsky, particularly the dialog between flutes and violins on the triplets which is reminiscent of passages in the *Valse Scherzo* of the Fifth Symphony of Tchaikovsky. Raff doesn't rely only on this exposed sound alone, for in the background the cellos and horns in thirds add an upward chromatic line which lifts the passage to among the best in the Symphony.

The final thematic element of the exposition commences after a short pizzicato passage ends the play with Ex.10. At letter E oboes and clarinets introduce the first part of a melody taken up and extended by the first and second violins; though the counterpoint is remarkable on paper the actual sound isn't: [not extant] [not extant]. It's at this point one senses the lack of true contrast between the lyrical melodies and the motivic development. Ex.11 [not extant] is once again a melody compounded of two measure materials treated sequentially and the tail of the theme is nothing more than another version of the elements already experienced in Ex.7.

This material is treated to a good deal of harmonic shifting, not the least interesting of which is a chromatic line in which Ex.1 shows its outline. The actual end of the exposition brings the following passage: [not extant]. Whether intentional or not the two final measures before the double bar contain figuration which, in the Finale, emerges independently as a major developmental motive.

The development section opens with a curious but nevertheless effective bit of orchestration of Ex.2 which remains the possession of the woodwinds until it is given over to the strings which utilize it in dialog against the woodwind play on the *Kopfmotive* of Ex.9, the tail end of which (triplet motion) is introduced finally at letter G. The basic recalcitrancy of Ex.2 is nowhere more in evidence than in the thirty-five measures which make up the period between letters F and G; there is barely a measure in which it isn't utilized in one manner or another. While the modulatory progressions provide some interest the repetition of Ex.2 remains just that: from an aural standpoint it is irritating and from a technical standpoint a poor start for what should be the most important part of a sonata form movement. What follows at letter G is a passage based almost exclusively on the use of the triplet phrase from Ex.7. There is great harmonic unrest throughout promoted by modulatory sequences. The orchestration at this point once again provides the major interest and Raff works up a truly Tchaikovskian fury by the time he reaches letter H, at which point we are treated once again to Ex.2, this time in its original form and fortunately, only one time through. At this climactic point Raff manages a gesture of dramatic import which marks the high point of the development section; having been treated primarily to modulatory material concerning Exs.2 and 7 and a swell of orchestral sound culminating in the high woodwind proclamation of Ex.2, the listener, five measures after letter H, is suddenly confronted with the low sonorities of the strings and the recall of Ex.?. Though not indicated in the score the violins

could easily play the music *sul G* and should. This momentary and happy inspiration is all too shortlived and Raff soon commences a passage in which Ex.2 and Ex.5 are combined. There is a great deal of cleverness in the writing and the eye delights in the inversions, augmentations, diminution and the multiple and simultaneous combinations of these forms of the themes. The ear is weary of the material however and no matter what skill is evinced in the modulatory scheme the fact remains that both thematic elements emphasize the tonic note and are far too brief to be pitted against one another. At letter J elements of Ex.? begin to emerge and there is a final modulatory passage (based mainly on a pedal A) which brings the music out of the key of F into D major, firmly established at letter K. From this point on there is an almost note-for-note repetition of the passages from the exposition. It comes as a surprise then that one must recognize that Raff is beginning the recapitulatory final section to the movement. When, at letter L, Ex.10 appears one realizes that it has not been accorded any part in the development section.

Two measures after letter M the dotted rhythm version of Ex.? returns and soon the entire secondary version of that material is being used for a transitional passage of modulatory sequences until at letter N the outlines of Ex.2 join the progression and the music moves relentlessly forward until the brass contingent (supported by bassoons) interject an entirely new bit of material and announce the beginning of the coda. In this recapitulation (probably since it was given so much treatment) Ex.? has been left out.

The coda occupies as much time (in realization) as does the recapitulation and for that matter must be accounted lengthy. It begins with a final recall of Ex.? and this is soon followed by Ex.? accompanied by the ubiquitous and seemingly inescapable Ex.2. There is a general orchestral crescendo from letters P to Q which culminates in a climax of Brucknerian proportions in which Ex.2 is proclaimed in augmented form by unison brass and a *stretto* of great rhythmic and harmonic motion leads to a sudden cut off on two chords (6/4 inversion tonic chord and a simple dominant) *ff* throughout the orchestra. A one measure GP follows and then, *pp*, a passage of great agitation (*un poco piu mosso*) based on a sequence from Ex.2, and very reminiscent of the conclusion of Verdi's Nabucco Overture, brings the movement to a fine finish - sealed off, one might add, by a last reference to Ex.2 in the final measures.

As in the First and Fourth symphonies Raff places his *Scherzo* in the position of second movement. It is the highpoint of the symphony and one of the most brilliant and exciting movements in all Raff. It is cast in B flat major and the general tone hardly conveys a sense of "*gelitten*" or, for that matter, "*gestritten*." The movement begins with a bustling theme that veers to Schumannesque reminiscence (Second Symphony): [not extant] and is curiously similar to the Scherzo theme in Felix Draeseke's Symphony No. 1 in G major, almost contemporary with Raff's symphony. Shedlock complains in his analysis for the Monthly Musical Record that the Scherzo is long and somewhat labored. This pronouncement seems strange since the movement is barely 5 minutes long and as spontaneous as one might wish - though Shedlock was probably judging the length and effect of the work from the point of piano performance. This theme is of interest since it consists of eight measures with no apparent sequential writing within its construction. It stands therefore in great distinction against the materials of the first movement, all of which have not only sequence within their construction but consist primarily of two measures phrases repeated sequentially. The scherzo exhibits immediate breadth of design despite the fact that it's one third as long as the opening movement. Ex.1 [not extant] is given extensive treatment with color as the major diversifying agent. At letter A the following accompanimental pattern intrudes: Ex.2 [not extant] which, after repetition, culminates in another of those typically Raffian gestures so often ascribed to Tchaikovsky: [not extant] and this in turn leads to a general orchestral crescendo, written with euphoric abandon, deliciously giddy when it peaks in the general restatement of Ex.1.

At letter C a new idea is introduced: [not extant], which has been hinted at in the *dénouement* of the preceding climactic passage. Via this Raff proceeds to what may be called a

developmental section in which the Tchaikovskian roudades of Ex.3 [not extant] are passed from the flutes to the strings. As the pattern descends from one string contingent to another it acts as accompaniment to a short but very clever fugal passage based on a distension of Ex.1 (letter E: *ff*). Letter F marks a climax for the entire orchestra on Ex.4 [not extant] and there is a somewhat lengthy modulatory based on its outlines. Letter G introduces the roudade figure of Ex.3 (flutes pitted against Ex.1 in the home key of B flat (Raff, realizing the possibility of difficulty supplies an alternative simplification in the actual flute part, though this is not indicated in the score itself). The roudade is passed to the first violins and soon dissolves in interplay among the orchestral forces leading the listener to a restatement of the general orchestra crescendo cited previously.

At letter I out the orchestral bustle a sudden quietude ensues and as the music moves to E flat Raff introduces Ex.5 [not extant]. This chorale-like melody signals the beginning of the trio section. Its first appearance marks also the first genuine lyrical relief in the symphony thus far. Immediately after its statement Raff interjects yet another theme, much related to the material of the *Scherzo* proper: Ex.6 [not extant]. The flutes pick up a shortened version of Ex.5, repeat it once and then twice in diminution which leads to letter K and indeed another full length statement of the trio theme, but this time, in diminished form. Ex.5 is heard again and at letter L we encounter Ex.1 in a weird distortion in the woodwinds, answered once again (letter M) by Ex.5. Immediately the woodwinds (C major) give out the recognizable form of Ex.1 while in the strings, the limping augmented form of the theme encountered at M serves as accompaniment. At letter N Ex.1 is given to lower woodwinds, the accompaniment of the augmented form of Ex.1 continues, and as further counterpoint the flutes present Ex.5 in its diminished form. Raff's mastery of the art of diversity and combination is at its peak here. Letter O brings back Ex.2 throughout the orchestra and with it a recapitulatory section which is in no way a simple repetition of the music up to letter I. Four measures before letter P there is a jolting unison G flat which introduces a short coda utilizing Ex.2. The G flat is nothing more than a delayed cadence leading back to a the home key of B flat and a final statement of Ex.1 which culminates in an ending somewhat reminiscent, but nonetheless effective, of the *Scherzo* in Schumann's C major symphony.

It doesn't take much associative power to understand that the term *Gestorben* is manifestly related to the third movement *Marcia funebre (Larghetto, C minor)*. If Raff was attempting in his first movement to equal the Beethoven of the Fifth Symphony then it's obvious that in this funeral march he is making a similar attempt to equal the master of the funeral march of the *Eroica*, Raff certainly didn't succeed in his first movement and he doesn't succeed in the funeral march either though the results leave a more positive impression.

The movement begins with the portentous sounds of Ex.1 [not extant], the D minor tonality firmly established. There is a hollow sound to the music however, maintained just long enough to fail in establishing any definite character; when the main theme is revealed, the preceding measures seem superfluous in the memory: Ex.2 [not extant]. Though simple in design there is a certain stateliness and solemnity to the music particularly when the harmony changes from D minor to F major and back again. The echo of Beethoven's *Eroica* is heard in the accompaniment of the strings: Ex.3 [not extant], as Ex. 2 is carried forward by woodwinds and horns; the violins have a peculiarly static counterpoint valuable only as a color device. Ex.4 [not extant].

The opening of the movement is echoed just before letter B and at B the music moves from D minor to B flat major to present the second major theme. This theme stands, not only from the standpoint of mode and key, in great contrast to the preceding materials, but in expressive intent. Its appearance is another of the admittedly few highpoints of the symphony and the music acquires a lovely elegiac quality as it proceeds, particularly in the turn to D minor and the insertion of subtle chromatics in the melodic line: Exs. 5 and 6 [not extant].

With a return to Ex.1 (in the major mode) Raff introduces a new idea: Ex.7 [not extant] and, two measures after C, a march pattern: Ex. 8 [not extant]. While there is much motion, harmonically speaking, and a general sense of building to a climax, neither is sufficiently striking to the ear. Both seem to be developmental motives being played off against one another and the 20 measures during which this takes place adds a dimension of diffuseness. It is only at letter D that the gestures of Ex.7 and 8 take on meaning for it is at this point that Raff reintroduces the main theme (Ex.2) and the developmental section of the movement ensues. The orchestral score has a very busy look about it and Raff's ability to combine (Exs.2, 3 and 7) themes is demonstrated once again as is his sense of orchestration. The elegiac tones of Exs.5 and 6 return at letter F and there is an almost literal repetition of the passage between letters B and C (though in D major). At letter G there is a disturbingly vacuous play on Ex.1 with the accompanimental pattern from Ex.5 retained. At letter H Raff combines Ex.2 with Exs.5 and 6 in the background Ex.1 persists as an accompaniment: this marks the first appearance of Exs.5 and 6 in the minor mode. At letter J ensues a passage which, though obviously transitional, turns out to be pure padding. Ex.1 returns and acts as a basso ostinato through J, providing material for a coda. It is at J that Raff lets his thematic metamorphosis of Ex.2 from the first movement assert itself in the examples: Ex.9, Ex.10 and Ex.11 [not extant]. The last of these ushers out the *Marcia funebre*.

The *Finale* (3/4, D major) opens with Raff's beloved pyramidal gesture this time with a sustained dissonance extended step-wise through the strings culminating in the entrance of the flute on Ex.1 [not extant], which is immediately echoed by the bassoon. This is thematic recall from the first movement (Ex.2 there) and intended as a link both to that movement and to the funeral march. The ambiguity of tonality, coming as it does between the minor mode of the funeral march and the approaching major mode of the main part of the *Finale* may be interpreted poetically as the transition from death to immortality implied in the title.

The basic gesture of the opening measures is repeated three times and the harmony shifts ever closer to the dominant of D major; celli and double-basses enter with a transitional motive which is later seen to be part of the main theme when it is announced at letter A in the home key of D major: Ex.2 [not extant]. The introductory passage up to A is quite reminiscent of the beginning of the *Finales* in both the G minor Symphony and the Piano Concerto in C minor: it is the last time in his symphonies at least in which Raff employs such thematic recall a la Beethoven's Ninth. It might be recalled that the *Kopfmotive* in Ex.2 was already seen as part of Ex.? of the first movement and it is used to produce a great deal of momentum throughout the movement. Shedlock calls attention to the consecutive fifths in the last bars of the theme. This material is repeated twice, the second time around with interesting rhythmic shifts in the inner voices as the music proceeds to letter B and the introduction of the secondary theme: Ex.3 [not extant]. As with its companion of the first movement there is not much lyrical contrast in the contour; the across-the-bar shift in the third measure is probably intended derivation from the aforementioned motion of the inner voices noted in the accompaniment to Ex.?. Letter C brings the happiest inspiration of the *Finale*: [not extant]. Presented by oboes and violas the contrast effected is immediate and appealing and at letter D there is an equally happy appendage, Ex.? [not extant], which lends the music a genuine spontaneity. The transition from these motives to the development section involves recall of basic elements of the preceding themes without however fully stating them; once again the rhythmic interest in the inner voices presents itself: there is perhaps no movement in all the other Raff symphonies that utilizes so many syncopations or other accent shifts.

The developmental section begins, as expected, with a statement of Ex.2. Before long however the all too familiar outlines of Ex.2 of the opening movement (with one interval change) is introduced. For 92 measures (letters E-G) Raff plays off this motive against Ex.2 of the *Finale*. This is the absolute nadir of the symphony (and probably the duller passage of any Raff symphonic movement): Raff's insistence on employing Ex.2 (first movement) is understandable from the standpoint of cyclical principles and thematic relationships, but the

actual choice of the theme remains simply another indictment supporting the claim that the composer was not critical in his choice of materials; he seems here not only not critical in his choice of material but also blind to the fact that what didn't work in the first movement doesn't work in the last. The development of these two themes relies very much on sequence and interchange; though the modulatory scheme is acceptable the impotence of the materials produces a barren landscape in which even the orchestral coloration seems opaque, if not drab.

The re-establishment at letter H of D major introduces the recapitulation which, until letter L, is almost a note-for-note repetition of the music heard already between letters A to E. Unwilling to conclude his symphony at this point, Raff creates what is a double recapitulation in which the passage between E and H reasserts itself. Ex.2 (*Kopfmotive*) provides the momentum and is combined with an augmented version of the ubiquitous Ex.2 of the first movement, On paper this combination of themes - judged particularly from the fullness of orchestration represents the apotheosis of the materials. At letter P there is a general orchestral crescendo marking the beginning of the coda; Ex.2 of the Finale is once again employed for momentum; flutes, trumpets and first violins proclaim Ex.2 of the first movement in a final D major peroration; there is a brief reference to the brass passage at letter ? of the first movement and the symphony closes on a tonic chord of D major for full orchestra.

The critical reaction to Symphony No. 6 was, as might be expected, disheartening. After the successes of his other symphonies this must have been something of a shock for Raff and he reacted with uncharacteristic defensiveness: "The Berlin papers with their *scherzo*-enthusiasm are only partly correct as this piece was written with the most refined contrapuntal art, through which is delivered proof for all time that this highest of all forms has an appropriateness surpassing anything which they had thought. Uniquely, the symphony has its value in the unity by which the content was constrained (and of which the Gentlemen wanted to understand nothing), through the relation of the last to the first part and the way the relationship was laid out." The critics were not unappreciative of the technical devices in the symphony and were merely giving their honest emotional reaction to the music: the *Scherzo* is the best music of the symphony, the formal aspects which interested Raff himself were sensed by others (Shedlock for example) as deteriorative.