

# Symphony No.8 in A Major Op.205

## *Frühlingsklänge*

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 Symphony No. 8 in A major was first performed in Wiesbaden on March 15 1877 in a concert of the civic orchestra under Louis Lüstner. The critical reception was particularly friendly, though the Finale seemed to please the least. The work found a particularly good response in the United States where it was promoted by Walter Damrosch - as late as 1902 Stanley Upton in his *Standard Symphonies* placed it with the *Im Walde* and *Lenore* as repertoire. Hans von Bülow placed it on his list of preferred works by Raff and the work was indeed performed fairly often, particularly around Berlin.

The "Sounds of Spring", since Raff chose to publish it first, must be regarded as the beginning of the cycle, even [though] the *Der Winter* lay completed in his desk. The first movement bears the inscriptions *Frühlings Rückkehr*, Spring's Return, (A major, 4/4 *Allegro*) and opens with a gesture which is probably intended as a reminiscence of winter: *Der Winter* Symphony is in A minor and the very opening of the Sounds of Spring is also in A minor. The music is built entirely from the *Ur*-motive of a minor third, first established in the a-c pedal point of the lower strings (va, vc & cb) and then as a melodic fragment on the horn: Ex.1 [not extant].

It is possible to detect in the rhythmic outline of the horn call a relative of the second motive which permeates the cycle, although this motive comes through even more clearly in the course of the exposition of one of the major thematic elements in the movement. As Ex.1 is passed from instrument to instrument the "frosty" tones of A minor are gradually dispelled and in a manner reminiscent of the beginning of the *Finale* in the *Lenore*, the music modulates slowly to G major where a sudden rustling motion enters the music and the ear hears what seems to be a thematic entity echoed between first violins and solo horn: Ex.2 [not extant]. Lovely in its own right it is ultimately revealed as purely introductory material of coloristic importance and never returns after the beginning of the *Allegro* proper. At letter A (where one would expect A major to finally dominate) the listener is instead taken to the theoretically distant realm of E flat major and more agitation enters the music via a rhythmic motive in the first violins; the music moves into C# minor and Ex.2 is brought back in a most arresting guise: Ex.3 [not extant], which is twice repeated before Raff begins the general orchestra crescendo leading to the dominant of A major. At letter B exactly the basic tonality of the symphony is finally established and the main theme of the first movement is announced in joyous manner: Ex.4 [not extant]. It will be noted that it begins with the interval of a minor third.

The transition to a second thematic element in this section is accomplished via Ex.B [not extant] of the cycle motives: Ex.5 [not extant], which is rounded off with a restatement of Ex.4 at the conclusion of which comes a strange passage for the bassoons in parallel 5ths! Letter C introduces D flat major and three important motives, the first of which features Ex.B in its contours: Ex. 6 [not extant]. This motive is then expanded into a melody by the violins: Ex.7 [not extant] in which turn in the 4th measure later becomes adopted as a developmental motive. Ex.8 [not extant] is an independent motive which appears in all the sections of the movement. Letter D brings an orchestral crescendo (C major) reminiscent of the final crescendo of the *Finale* in the *Winter Symphony*; but this crescendo does not lead to an

orchestral outburst but rather a transition to the major lyrical theme of the *Allegro* at letter E. This transition is itself important because in it is a recognizable combination of Exs.B and C [not extant] of the cycle motives: Ex.9 [not extant] It is to the accompaniment of this that the lyrical materials between letters E and F are presented. This material is a complex of three basic entities. The first: Ex.10 [not extant] launches the section and is immediately varied in the following independent manner: Ex.11 [not extant].

Elements of both these melodies are combined and the section reaches its climax in the following beautiful extension: Ex.12 [not extant]. This is Raff at his most resourceful and satisfying with an intimacy of writing with few parallels. At letter F Ex.10 is treated in diminution and soon a new crescendo ensues which culminates in the following full orchestra statement: Ex.13 [not extant] which is joltingly interrupted to bring back Ex.9, at which point one senses something new is about to happen. That something new should begin at letter G, namely the beginning of the traditional development section. The ear certainly senses this when the contours of Ex.4 return a few measures after letter G, but two orchestra crescendi between H and I simply bring a great deal of disquiet. Upon perusal of the score it can be seen that the music from G to I is based on a conflict of Exs.A and B with Ex.4, a conflict which is not resolved in favor of the latter until some measures after letter I. What then ensues is a recapitulation of materials (A major) from letter B to C. Letter K begins with a restatement of the material from letter C (Exs.6 and 7) but then turns into a fugal section carried through to letter N which delays the entry of Ex.8 and the full statement of Ex.7. At letter O Ex.8 takes over for a build up almost identical with that between letter D and E. At letter Q (for some reason letter P is not indicated in the score) to B there is indeed a repetition of the materials E to G. At letter S there begins a fugal section of great harmonic unrest the materials of which are almost completely scalar in nature; eventually this gives way to a broad orchestral crescendo at letter T and at letter U the listener is plunged into the chilling tonality of F# minor: against the ghostly accents in the full string body, the woodwinds, answered by horns, intone the *Ur*-motive of Ex.A, the rhythmic outline clearly manifesting (through over-the-bar-distension) Ex.B; at the conclusion of this passage and the move into A major at letter E we hear Ex.G pendelled between woodwinds and brass. Ex.4 returns in expanded guise to dispel the wintry tones and the sunny realm of A major is affirmed after which the movement is brought to its conclusion.

The form of *Frühlings Rückkehr* may at first seem strange but it is easily explicable: Introduction - Exposition - telescoping of Development and Recapitulation - recapitulation of Introduction - Coda or A-B-Bc-A-Coda (B).

A *Scherzo* forms the second movement and Raff entitles it *In der Walpurgisnacht* (During St. Valpurga's Night) which is supposed to be a night of witchly revelry taking place on the First of May. If one wished to be impish and hold to Raff's movemental inscriptions, after Spring's Awakening one would expect the First Bouquet of Flowers (*Der erste Blumenstrauß*) which is the third movement; after all, the First of May is almost summer! There may be two reasons why Raff put the *Scherzo* on second place however; the first is that all four symphonies in the Season's cycle follow the same placement of movements: *Allegro* First movement; *Scherzo*; Slow Movement; *Allegro (Finale)* in other words to maintain a surface unity of design; the second reason has more musical judgment behind it for both the *Scherzo* and *Finale* begin in a somewhat similar manner.

The *Scherzo* (A minor, *Allegro*, 2/4) begins like the first movement with an introductory section in which the home key of the movement is delayed for a number of measures, perhaps by design A minor is only first recognizably established at B or at the same place as A major in the first movement. This prelude parallel is used here for a different reason, one which recalls the beginning of the *Im Walde* Symphony, for Raff presents the listener with a number of thematic and rhythmic fragments which are presented in fully recognizable form only after the beginning of the movement proper. Establishing a mood is also a reason for this introductory section and there were probably more than a few listeners who were

reminded of the beginning of the *Scherzo* in the *Im Walde Symphony* with the color motive prominent, for the chromatic alterations in the opening of the *Walpurgisnacht* are quite similar in effect, as is the actual orchestration (low strings, bassoons and clarinets). The basic figure dominating this introduction is: Ex.1 [not extant], not a theme in itself, but a developmental motive. Sixteen measures before letter A the trombones and basses bring in a portentous motive: Ex.2 [not extant] which, in its bass line, begins with Ex.A of the Cycle motives. The coloration of octave oboes and clarinets may or may not be a reference to the beginning of the Winter Symphony. Letter A brings a further extension of this idea: Ex.3 [not extant] and a general crescendo begins, primarily using Ex.1, but the orchestration is of primary importance since the effect of the cross accents in the accompaniment relies on it. Sixteen measures before letter B the first orchestral outburst brings in the hint of yet another motive to be revealed in full form later on: Ex.4 [not extant].

At letter B A minor is at last clearly established and the *Scherzo* proper begins, not with one, but two motives of equal importance which form counterparts to each other: Exs.5a & 5b [not extant]. After this material is worked up (triplets dominating) letter C introduces more new material, albeit material derived on the one hand from Ex.1 (rhythmic) and Ex.5b (also rhythmic): Ex.6 [not extant]. Interesting is the fact that both these elements are presented in the same contrapuntal manner as Exs.5a & 5b. In the course of Ex.6 the major thematic element between C and D is brought in on the horns and an extended dialog among the brass ensues which completely dispels the elfin like materials which have gone before: Ex.7 [not extant]. This theme is of course the full realization of Ex.4 from the introduction. Letter D brings a remarkable passage in the trombones and lower strings which - probably because of the long sequence of 3rd. inversions - prompted Raff to add a footnote to the conductor not to alter anything: Ex.8 [not extant]. This material leads to the return of Ex.7 (horns, lower strings) in a less sonorous manner than before and at letter E a transitional idea: Ex.9 [not extant] brings back Exs.5a & 5b. A coda-like passage begins with the triplet motion dominating but subsides at letter G which introduces A major and the trio section. The main theme: Ex.10, is the first truly lyrical element of the movement. At letter H a puckish element enters once again based on material from Ex.5a which evolves as a certain independent factor a few measures after letter H: Ex.11 [not extant]. Letter I recalls the pendel motive of Ex.B from the cycle motives and letter J brings back Ex.10, now sung by the horn and later joined by the second violins, which is essentially a passage which repeats letters G to H. The long transition between letters K to M is pure color and the interest of the listener is sustained by the interplay of the instruments and chromatic harmonies, a passage not dissimilar from that which concludes the *Scherzo* of the Winter Symphony; the weird clarinet sequence on the descent of a minor seventh is particularly arresting as is the preparation for the return of Ex.5a at letter M where, over a sustained timpani, double basses and clarinets in their lowest register share in the dialogue which lead the music back into A minor. Ex.5a dominates until letter N, at which point Ex.7 is added. A transitional passage based on triplet motion leads to letter O and the crowning gesture of the *Scherzo*, with A major once more to the fore Ex.10 is sung forth with an incredible counterpoint from the trumpets doubled by oboes: Ex.12 [not extant].

This is one of those passages of such thrilling inevitability that the heart and mind simply rejoice at the effect. The sudden plunge (F 7) into distant tonality at letter P and the rhythmic impetus added by trumpet fanfares and banging tympani form excellent contrast to the preceding and the music moves, *un poco stringendo*, into the coda. What at letter P seems to be a move in the direction of a fast conclusion suddenly takes another direction and there is a chilling recall of Ex.? [unknown] from the *Scherzo* of the Winter Symphony. At letter R there is a mysterious pause and then Raff slams the listener with a wild melee of five measures which concludes on two final orchestra chords of the usual dominant-tonic relationship.

The third movement With the First Bouquet of Flowers (*Larghetto*, 2/4, C major) begins with the following simple theme: Ex.1 [not extant], the first 8 measures for the strings and the second for horns, clarinets and bassoons. At letter A Raff introduces a triplet motion in the

form of transitional material: Ex.2 [not extant]. After a delicate embroidery in the woodwinds a dialog is heard in the violins beginning at letter B: Ex.3 [not extant]. Whether it is intended as such this theme has a flavor reminiscent of Ex.? [unknown] of the slow movement in the Winter Symphony, especially in its sequential design. The rhythmic outline also prominent in the movements of the Winter Symphony is heard at the conclusion of this material. Letter C returns Ex.1 but in its reverse: B is heard first and A as answer to it. Letter D introduces A flat major and a new theme is heard on the celli: Ex.4 [not extant] at the conclusion of which the violins enter with a 16th note scalar counterpoint and soon a dialog ensues between the celli and violas using this theme. Letter F returns the listener to C major and the contours of Ex.2 are presented in the woodwinds after which the violins restate the theme in octaves against a florid accompaniment of the celli and pleasant woodwind counterpoint. Letter G brings to the oboes and clarinets Ex.4 and to a syncopated accompaniment in the strings Ex.1b [not extant] succeeds to the proceedings in the woodwinds with the violins adding gentle support at letter H. Three measures before letter I the pendel-motive is introduced and at letter I begins an hypnotic ostinato on the note G: whole measure note value for the solo flute against a pizzicato quarter in the second violins. Against this Ex.4 comes back in close counterpoint between first violins and violas (both muted) with discreet support from members of the woodwind family. Only in the last measures of the movement does the strange ostinato cease and the movement closes in the pure C major in which it began; a most affecting coda, though one must admit there is a similar idea concluding the third movement in the concertante Symphony of Berlioz, *Herold en Italie*.

The title of the fourth movement, *Wanderlust*, needs no translation. Marked *Vivace* (A major, 3/4) it begins with what must be accepted as an intended reminiscence of the Winter Symphony's first movement: the note E is sounded in four measures in high woodwinds and strings, the hollow octaves at once evocative (or, if you wish, indicative) of the opening of the Winter Symphony. The note E could also be symbolic of the key of the 9th Symphony, *Im Sommer*, which is in E minor. As in the first two movements Raff avoids establishing the home key of the movement for a number of measures. A most curious series of pizzicato chords involving parallel fifths persists up to letter A, and these are in answer to a triplet motive in the strings, as well as accompaniment to a duplet motive in bassoons and horns and also the binding factor to the octaves of the beginning. A passage illustrating the combination of these elements may serve as Ex.1 [not extant].

At letter A the home tonality is established though no clear theme emerges, only the play between triplet and duplet ideas; eventually through the harmonic unrest characteristic of the music the duplet idea dominates and the following idea emerges: Ex.2 [not extant], to which is added an important counterpoint in the horns: Ex.3. The duplet idea utilized up [to that] point gives every indication of being a relative to Ex.? [unknown] in the first movement of the Summer Symphony. The music grows in intensity and at letter B horns, trombones and strings enter with this bold gesture: Ex.4 [not extant]. Against this is pitted the high screech of woodwinds on the following ostinato: Ex.5 [not extant] - a figure which is held to tenaciously for some thirty measures; it may be noted that only the minor third is involved in this pedal point, perhaps another manifestation of the Ex.A [not extant] of the cycle motives and a clear indication of sounds to be encountered at the beginning of the 9th Symphony. Some 18 measures before C there is a general dénouement and the second of the cycle motives: Ex.B [not extant], or pendel motive appears. The accompaniment to the new theme presented at letter C seems to be related to a figure in the first movement of the Winter Symphony, a relationship emphasized all the more strongly when the strings take it up on further repetition of Ex.6 [not extant].

A transitional idea appears at letter D utilizing elements of Ex.5 and Ex.6: Ex.7 [not extant]. At letter E horns and clarinets hint at another independent idea which finally emerges in a splendid tutti passage in the violins and high woodwinds: Ex.8 [not extant]. Letter G brings a transition in pianissimo tones and in the basses there ensues a restless motion which brings back Ex.6 and at letter H begins a fantastic fugal section in which a host of Kopf-motives from preceding thematic elements are brought together. The modulatory scheme and the

idea of fugue may be intended as symbolic of wandering. The fugal section is brought to a climax and an exciting coda to the section beginning at letter I leads back to a restatement of materials from the beginning of the movement which occupy the measures between letters J to M. The buildup to the restatement of the tutti passage at letter F does indeed utilize the ideas presented at letter D, but these ideas (Exs.6 and 7) are subjected to some development when they reappear at letter M and a particularly lovely bit of lyrical counterpoint is added, in the strings to the chatter of the woodwinds and horns. The emergence of Ex.8 [not extant] begins slightly before letter N and the buildup to the repeat featuring this motive at letter O is similar but not completely exact. Letter P brings back one of the fugal ideas, but the preparation is now not for another fugal passage but to another tutti passage highly syncopated which seems strangely extraneous since the passage contains no recognizable thematic or motivic recall. For the same reason the passages between letters R-T seem equally extraneous, although when T is reached and Ex.8 returns, the music following Q to that point may be explained as preparation for an affirmation of the A major proclamation of Ex.8; if so that preparation is diffuse and, marks a weak point in the Finale. As the tutti presentation of Ex.8 begins to subside we encounter at letter U, over a pedal F, the duplet-triplet combination and a crescendo involving these materials begins which culminates at letter V in the use of the full orchestra; another crescendo begins and culminates in a strange peroration of materials from letters A, Ex.2 and Ex.3. A long cadential passage brings the listener to letter W and an 11 measure transition (piano) involving elements of Exs.7 and 8 brings a double line and the beginning of the coda. Between Y and Z the pendel motive makes its appearance and there is much play on the interval of the third. At letter a it becomes finally formally apparent what Raff is up to: at this point the strings enter with a premonition of the beginning of the first movement of the second symphony in the series *Im Sommer* and what seem to be mere accompanimental woodwind patterns likewise contain subtle hints of material to be encountered in the first movement of *Im Sommer*. At letter b Raff finally starts the finale towards its ultimate conclusion. With A major firmly established at [letter] c we have the final gesture of the symphony: a series of tonic chords covering 21 measures which must be the midway point in sheer self-willed music making between the end of Beethoven's 5th Symphony and the Fifth Symphony of Sibelius.

Critical reaction to *Frühlingsklänge* was indeed mixed. As usual the *Scherzo* was singled out for praise, more often than not the first movement as well. The slow movement was hardly mentioned and the *Finale* the most heavily criticized. Helene Raff's comments that the critics didn't understand the "disquietude" which entered, into her father at springtime is sheer nonsense, especially since she accounts this as an element which crept into the music of the *Finale*. The most likely reason that the *Finale* was not appreciated from a formal standpoint is simply that few could have known that it was the first in a series of symphonies which formed a cycle and which were to stand in relation to one another. The lack of response to the musical element in the *Finale* must have been an honest one for it does not represent Raff at his best despite the usual and surprising gestures which satisfy. The stop-and-go towards the end is irritating no matter what the reason behind it and it seems to be a carry over from the Seventh's *Finale*. There is one element in the Eighth Symphony of Raff that does make the work truly unique - if one allows it and not the Eleventh to assume primacy in the cycle - and that is the fact that it presents material to be used in another symphony.