

# Booklet notes by Dr Avrohom Leichtling for Sterling CDS 1085

Raff: Suite for Piano & Orchestra, Overtures & Preludes

By the time Joachim Joseph Raff (1822-1882) began composing works for solo instrument and orchestra, he had been in Franz Liszt's inner circle for several years as a full participant in the Weimar avant-garde. Having been intimately involved with the creation and orchestration of the earliest versions of at least two of Liszt's three formally-named piano concerti, it is not surprising, therefore, that Raff's own first concerti followed, in a general sort of way, Liszt's model of inter-connected, thematically related movements.

Ultimately and irrespective of their actual titles, Raff produced at least nine surviving concertante works: three for piano, four for violin, and two for cello. Two of these combine the concerto principle with the Baroque suite and partita. The most important of Raff's keyboard works are his seven suites for solo piano in which the closed and generally rigid cast of the earlier forms was given new life with much more elastic *melodie* and *harmonie* attributes. The **Suite for Piano and Orchestra** in E-flat major, Opus 200, along with the slightly earlier Suite for Violin and Orchestra in G minor, Opus 180, artfully run "traditionally" incompatible concepts together by transferring the now romanticized Baroque partita to the orchestra and, at the same time overlaying specifically concertante elements on them.

The decade of the 1870s saw Raff compose 87 works, close to one-third of his total catalogue including five of his nine concertos, six of his eleven symphonies, four of his six suites with/for orchestra, the four Shakespeare Overtures and one opera. The Suite for Piano and Orchestra in E flat major, Opus 200, was begun early in 1875 and completed in April of that year. Additionally, 1875 saw the composition of Raff's 7<sup>th</sup> Symphony, Opus 201, the opera *Benedetto Marcello*, the Two Scenes for Voice and Orchestra, Opus 199 and several smaller keyboard compositions. The Suite was first performed from the original manuscript in Hamburg on Wednesday, 22 September 1875 at the *Saale des Kurhauses* conducted by Gustav Härtel with Karl Faelton as the piano soloist. Numerous performances followed. The work was published in a number of different formats with the score and parts brought out by C. F. W. Siegel in Leipzig in February 1876. A transcription for 2 pianos was published posthumously in 1883. Reductions for solo piano of two of its movements appeared in 1877 and 1880 along with a version of the third movement for piano 4 hands. Except for a transcription of the minuet movement for solo piano, Raff himself did not prepare any of the other arrangements.

The Suite's five movements: *Introduction and Fugue*, *Minuet*, *Gavotte and Musette*, *Cavatina*, and *Finale*, are scored, as are most of Raff's concertante works, for very practical forces including 2 Flutes, 2 Oboes, 2 Clarinets, 2 Bassoons, 2 Horns, 2 Trumpets, Timpani and Strings. Raff's use of the "Haydn orchestra" is particularly but typically deceptive considering that the manner in which he handles the ensemble is anything but "classical" and demonstrates how he was indisputably one of the great orchestral composers of his time.

The opening *Introduction and Fugue* is the most adventurous of the five movements. Its mixture of methods satisfies none of its sources yet produces, through its very ambiguity, a completely different kind of piece than any one of its component parts would suggest alone. Beginning with a grandiose orchestral statement that does little more than establish E-flat major, the piano's immediate interruption, while giving snippets and hints of the fugue subject to follow, nevertheless is more akin to a cadenza one expects towards the end of a movement, not at its very opening. The second orchestral statement barely begins before the piano interrupts again for another extended extemporization which arrives, deceptively, in G minor before moving on, gradually transforming the amorphous material, with a third introduction from the orchestra, into the subject which begins a straightforward four-voice fugal exposition. The episodes between statements of the fugue subject more resemble a sequence of sonata form developments than anything else. The fugue subject is played against itself in inversion, a neat contrapuntal trick and sure evidence of Raff's well-deserved reputation as a master contrapuntalist. Much of the piano writing while the orchestra is busy developing the fugue subject resembles the Hanon keyboard exercises which have bedeviled pianists since they were first introduced into the wonderful world of piano pedagogy. Yet Raff, like Shostakovich some eighty plus years later in his Second Piano Concerto, turns these humdrum exercises into a marvelously humorous counterpoint of parallel musics - two kinds of academism producing something distinctly unacademic. In the final analysis, the movement in addition to its other stylistic and procedural adaptations and accretions also marries fugal procedures to the monothematic sonata form structure - a clear, if mercifully shorter descendant of the Grosse Fugue, Opus 133 of Beethoven.

The second movement posits a militaristic minuet in the best tradition of the Haydn "London" symphonies going head-to-head with alternating episodes of verdant romantic lyricism. Typically, Raff's alternating episodes are in keys totally unrelated to the tonic E-flat major. The minuet proper begins stridently with dotted rhythms, incisive left-hand octaves joined to full-fisted right-hand diatonically harmonized melody. The solo piano opening is answered by brass and timpani with echoing comments from the winds and strings. Then barely past two statements of the minuet's initial phrase, the instrumental texture and stolid harmonic base disintegrates, giving way to music of a totally opposite character and in E major, perhaps the most distant key imaginable. All becomes salon-style lyricism, and largely for the piano alone. The thematic material, sweet sixths, is accompanied by a 19th Century equivalent to the old Alberti bass - with filled-in chords and not merely the Mozartian outline of them. Curiously, only the piano's key signature changes; the rest of the orchestra stays in E-flat. When a full restatement of the minuet is given, it is the orchestra in all its militant sheen that states it while the piano is content to engage in a bit of contrary and wholly unprepared noodling - a caricature of the kind of virtuoso filler that often characterizes many concertos written by virtuosos for their own professional aggrandizement.

A reiterated A-flat / G melodic cell hints at a modulation to C, but Raff typically turns the modulation on its ear and leads us to C major - which at least connects it harmonically to the previous E major section by virtue of the common tone E natural.

Beginning with a solo horn answered by a solo oboe, a wonderfully lyric episode marked *Un poco meno mosso* is accompanied in good *accompagnato* style by our now arpeggiating piano. Episodes in which either the piano is unaccompanied or, alternatively, accompany the orchestra follow in succession. The full orchestra returns - but not with a restatement of the minuet as much as a formal development of its

principal materials. The writing for the piano becomes increasingly more filigreed. Elements of the trio's original horn melody vie for supremacy with the original minuet theme. Ultimately, Raff brings back the minuet in its original form. Along the way, there is a brief flirtation with the trio's materials again - in C major (but with the E-flat signature) but for piano alone, and only for the purpose of suggesting a Beethovenian double trio. A much truncated four-bar restatement of the opening breaks the piano's reverie and ends the movement in the affirmative.

The musette originally was a bagpipe-like instrument common in 18th Century France. Music written in imitation of its characteristic droning often sounded sustained parallel fifths in the bass registers of whatever instruments were used. Since such compositions also frequently resembled the Gavotte in rhythmic cast, the pairing of the two variant Gavotte forms became a standard configuration, especially as composers "remembered" the baroque era (and particularly the French Partita). Raff's third-movement pairing appears to be an intentionally traditional one. However, his treatment of the form more resembles the preceding minuet than an updated replication of the older form. As before, the piano, now firmly in C minor, begins the movement alone and is soon joined by the orchestra - but the squared-off, stilted nature of the music is balanced curiously with a completely understated orchestral response to the solo piano. Similarly, there are long episodes played by the unaccompanied piano during which the Gavotte's materials are developed and extended, all while maintaining the strictest two-to-the-bar metricality.

The contrasting musette, in C major, accommodates the traditional pastorale nature implied by its name, complete with droning fifths in the cellos and basses. Unlike the minuet, however, Raff's musette places the focus entirely on the piano - the orchestra role having been reduced to a minimum. The return of the gavotte proper is handled similarly to the return of the previous movement's minuet. The repeat is largely a literal one except that, as before, hints of a repetition of the musette are not fulfilled. These hints serve as a diversion cut short by an abruptly rüde ending in C minor.

Cavatinas occur eight times in Raff's work. Originally associated with opera and specifically as the technical description of the tripartite aria of relatively simple construction that came to take the place of the Baroque da capo aria, the concept of brief, relatively straightforward lyrical instrumental movements began to appear early in the 19th Century. Of course, the most famous cavatina of all time is the 3rd movement of Raff's *Six Morceaux*, Opus 85 for violin and piano. So well known was this little gem that it was the one piece of that kept Raff's name alive for over a century after his death in 1882. The example in the present Suite, in A-flat major, is an appropriately brief, utterly middle-era romantic *arioso*. But the simplicity of its sixteen-bar theme (consisting of four four-measure phrases) presented initially by the strings, then somewhat more elaborately by the piano and then with a fuller orchestral setting, completely misleads the listener into the expectation of a simple, salon-like interlude. Quite without warning, the tonality shifts to E major (the common tone between them being the enharmonic A-flat/G-sharp) where a second, somewhat more florid melody is given by the piano with orchestral comments. After a return to the A-flat opening theme, things might have stood pat except for a concentrated if subdued development - a sonata-form structure hiding behind the deceptively simple opening melody. Numerous shifts of key (and key signature) follow as the head of the initial melody becomes the focus of musical discussion. Upon returning to A-flat major, the theme is given its fullest statement - and the movement ends, as many of Raff's sonata form structures do, with both themes, now reconciled to the same tonality, presented simultaneously.

The finale will be familiar from many of Raff's concerti and symphonies - an energetic and high-spirited romp that generally avoids heroic over-statement. Raff was often criticized for writing finales that do not screw up the drama to the nines. For Raff, the resolution of musical drama frequently involves dissipation of the tension that has already occurred earlier in a work. In the case of the Suite, the *fugue*, *minuet*, *gavotte* and *cavatina* have already taken over 30 minutes. Given the often-intense nature of those 30 minutes, the *finale*, at 10 minutes' duration, provides the necessary dramatic release by allowing its pianistic pyrotechnics and Hanonesque noodlings to skirt dangerously close to Offenbach, Leo Delibes, the French Quadrille and the Can-Can (a dance form, after all). Raff's preoccupation with French subjects throughout his life (but especially in the period of the 1870s) doubtless raised lots of German eyebrows in disapproval. With aplomb typical of this fundamentally eclectic composer, the ruffles and rouge of his insouciant finale has, for a second theme and in the wholly academic tonal relationship of the dominant, nothing less than the fugue subject of the first movement now stripped of serious pretence and transformed with a wink and a nod into high spirited frivolity! Altogether, this delightful Franco-German firecracker thoroughly dispels the heroic/serious nature of the opening Introduction and Fugue, the militaristic minuet, the aggressive Gavotte and the cantabile cavatina with clear-cut thematic material, straightforward ballet-like accompaniments and rapid fire alternation between solo and tutti. As in the previous movement, Raff runs his themes together at the end, not in a blaze of glory, but with ironical brevity of expression and bubbling wit!

### *Joachim Raff, the Anti-Wagnerian Opera Composer*

As of this writing (August 2009), the worldwide revival of interest in the music of Joseph Raff has made considerable progress. In addition to the new Raff *Gesamtausgabe* (Complete Edition) published by Edition Nordstern (Stuttgart), there are now available numerous reprint issues of Raff's symphonies, concerti and various other orchestral works (Musikproduktion Hoeflich - Munich), as well as a growing catalogue of excellent recordings including at least two complete cycles of the symphonies in addition to the orchestral suites, some of the concert and opera overtures, as well as the concerti and a decent sampling of his chamber music, keyboard works and lieder. Largely absent in the recorded catalogue and in live performance, however, are his works for chorus and orchestra and his operas. The present recording affords us an opportunity to sample excerpts from both of these genres. The extensive catalogue of works by this endlessly fascinating composer includes six full-length operas, the first of which, *König Alfred* (WoO.14), marked one of Raff's earliest and most important professional successes. Indeed, of all the many forms his music took, it is in the realm of opera that Raff's accomplishments remain most underappreciated. Operas appear in Raff's oeuvre with fair regularity between 1848 (when he was 26) and 1882 (at age 60, the year of his death), and he produced four of the six libretti himself.

As with much of his catalogue which often ignores, reverses or inverts then-current trends and expectations, Raff's operas characteristically eschew both the Wagnerian concept of the *Gesamtkunstwerk* (comprehensive, all-embracing art-form) as well as Robert Schumann's idealization of German opera as being based on folk legend-styled poetry and sources. As a young man working for various music publishers as an editor, copyist, transcriber and arranger, Raff would have been intimately acquainted not only with the epic stage works of Meyerbeer, Marschner (*Der Vampyre*, for example) and others such as Lindpaintner and Lachner, but also the Italian *bel canto* composers, especially Donizetti and Bellini. Raff wrote a number of "paraphrases" of themes from the operas of Composers of the time: *Fantasie brillante* on motives from Donizetti's

"*Maria de Rudenz*," Opus 4, *Rondo brilliant* on "*Io son ricco e tu sei bella*" from Donizetti's *L'elisir d'amore*, Opus 7, *Valse-Rondino* on motives from *Les Huguenots* (Meyerbeer), Opus 13, *Fantaisie-dramatique* on Motives from the opera "*Les Deux Princes*" by Fl. Esser, Opus 19 #3, *Deux Airs Fameux* from Meyerbeer's "*Robert le Diable*," Opus 28, *Fantaisie Militaire* on Motives from *Les Huguenots* by Meyerbeer, Opus 36, *Fantasia* on Motives from *La Sonnambula* (Bellini), Opus 37, and *Fantaisie* on Motives from *The Barber of Seville* (Rossini), Opus 44. All of these compositions pre-date the operas. If Raff's two early operas (*König Alfred* and *Samson*) have something of the spectacle in them, then perhaps the general spirit of Meyerbeer may be said to lurk in the background. On the other hand, given his familiarity and evident admiration for the Italians, Raff's future focus on comic opera and especially *bel canto* would seem to be both logical and inevitable. It should be borne in mind that Wagner's influence on German music of the last half of the 19th Century was virtually inescapable, and in Germany, operatic success came to mean imitation of Wagner's sweeping overhaul of operatic method and content. One had to look to Italy (Verdi - as in *Falstaff*) or to Bohemia (Smetana - as in *The Bartered Bride*), for example, to find non-German comic operas that enjoyed success on the German stage. Exceptions were few, the rare German example of Herman Goetz (*Der Widerspänstigen Zähmung*) (*The Taming of the Shrew*) being a good case in point-but, as with Verdi, Goetz's libretto stemmed directly from Shakespeare and not from a native German source. Raff had the temerity to turn his back on the whole Wagnerian apparatus and produce comic operas at a time when great mythological and/or politico-philosophical epics were the order of the day. On the occasion of the 1870 première in Weimar of Raff's opera *Dame Kobold* Opus 154 (1869), with libretto based on the comedy *La Dama Duende* by Pedro Calderón de la Barca (1600-1681), Liszt wrote a description of it to Princess Wittgenstein, who reacted, "What you teil me... astonishes me. Raff light-footed and sparkling - who would have thought it?" While not an unexpected remark coming from a princess with whom Raff was not on the best of terms, one familiar with Raff's oeuvre would not be surprised by these qualities at all - since humor, oftentimes sly and well disguised — hiding in plain sight as it were — is often the very basis of his art. His take on Italian *bel canto* transposed to German soil would, however, have been somewhat out of step with the times. Except for *König Alfred*, which had the support and encouragement of Liszt during Raff's close association with the elder composer, and *Samson*, WoO.21 (1853-7) (a full twenty years before Saint-Saëns' much more famous opera on the same subject), only *Dame Kobold* among of the other five of Raff's operas made it to the stage during his lifetime. As of 2003, when Mark Thomas compiled his important comprehensive catalogue of Raff's works for The Joachim Raff Society ([www.raff.org](http://www.raff.org)) only one of the operas had been published. A work such as *Die Eifersüchtigen* (*The Jealous Ones*), WoO.55 (1881-2) would seem to have been a kind of forerunner to Richard Strauss' "domestic (or bourgeois) comedy" *Intermezzo*, Opus 72 (1923-4) for which he, like Raff, wrote his own libretto. Raff's lyric opera *Benedetto Marcello* (*Kunst und Liebe*) [*Art and Love*] (WoO 46), completed in 1878, was not staged until 2002, nor published in full score (Edition Nordstern) until 2006.

Raff's use of the overture as an isolated set piece signaling to the audience the nature of the drama and the music to follow illustrates his distinctly anti-Wagnerian take on the state of German opera. In the end, and despite the early success of *König Alfred* and, later on, *Dame Kobold*, the mature Raff, a renowned artist whose symphonies, concertos and chamber music would be performed everywhere, would remain almost unknown as a composer of operas. That he continued to write them, indeed to explore "the path not taken" even in the operatic world, demonstrates yet again his unwillingness to bow to the conventions of his time, as well as his adamant refusal to shrivel up and die in the

face of the destructive futility of "performance politics" which remain unchanged to our day. Such politics were largely responsible for his century-long condemnation to the purgatory of near-oblivion.

In her 1922 biographical monograph of her father, Helene Raff notes that Raff began the composition of ***König Alfred***, an heroic opera in four acts, WoO 14, when he was living in Stuttgart in 1848. The text of the opera was written by the Norwegian Henrik Glogau, an economist and amateur poet, some of whose poems Raff had previously set to music, and whom Raff had met in Stuttgart. The historical Alfred is the Anglo-Saxon English king, Alfred the Great (847-899). Its narrative relates the intrigues in the fight between the Vikings (the Danes) and the Anglo-Saxons, and portrays Alfred's courage, betrayal and ultimate victory. "By the end of the opera," relates publisher Volker Tosta, "all is radiant glory, exultation and happiness, and the patriotic song with which the overture begins is thundered out by all on stage." Although properly an apprentice piece, *König Alfred* was thoroughly revised and reorchestrated ("...with attention to north German budgeting...") once Raff arrived in Weimar to take up residence in Liszt's household and to work as his assistant. Early efforts to get the opera staged proved frustrating. Through Liszt's intervention, however, the work was finally accepted for performance at the Weimar Court Theater, and would have been conducted by Liszt himself except for illness in Princess Wittgenstein's family which necessitated that Raff take up the baton and direct the work himself. (Liszt and the Princess had been in a long-standing relationship at that time, and her illness meant that Liszt was obliged to go to her and not stay in Weimar for the initial performances.) The opera was premiered on 9 March 1851 and was a tremendous success. Liszt enthused in a letter to Wagner that "Alfred was the most talented of all German operas written in the preceding decade except for those of Wagner himself."

The instrumentation of the Overture comprises one of the heftiest for which Raff ever wrote: Piccolo, 2 Flutes, 2 Oboes, 2 Clarinets, 2 Bassoons, 4 Horns, 3 Trumpets, 3 Trombones, Tuba, Timpani, Percussion and Strings. Given when and where it was written (and under whose eye it was seen and whose direct influence must have been felt to some degree), it is not surprising that the grandiose rhetoric of the music is at least vaguely Lisztian. But even at this very early stage (this being, for all practical purposes his first orchestral work), Raff's voice begins to emerge quite clearly. The handling of the orchestra is secure, extremely colorful and instinctively well balanced, for all its reliance on heavy brass and percussion. Indeed, it is the back-and-forth dialectic between and within groups of instruments, the equal weight of distribution of musical argument throughout the whole orchestra, that became one of Raff's trade-marks.

Generally speaking, Raff's concert and opera overtures are fairly succinct pieces. This is especially true of the four late Shakespeare preludes, which contain some of the most concentrated, anti-romantic music of the later 19th Century. There are, however, at least three notable exceptions: *Fest-Ouverture*, Opus 117, dedicated to Carl, King of Württemberg; *Eine feste Burg ist unser Gott*, Opus 127, which began life as music for a stage play; and the overture to *König Alfred*. These works, together with Beethoven's *Leonore* No.3, Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, and perhaps even Rossini's *William Tell*, are broadly-laid-out structures making big orchestral statements which outline the dramatic architecture of their associated operas.

In Raff's case, the Alfred overture in C major (Haydn's great "Festival" key and the original tonality of the *Eine feste Burg* overture) suggests music associated with Alfred and the Anglo-Saxons in both an heroic-patriotic manner (*Andante maestoso*) and a

militaristic mode (*quasi Marcia*), and also features a combative development most likely meant to be associated with the conflict with the Vikings.

The overture begins with quiet nobility, stating the patriotic theme in a manner which seems to predict works such as the finale of Brahms' First Symphony (also in C) or Academic Festival Overture, or perhaps the general tenor of Elgar's Pomp and Circumstance marches. Even at this earliest stage in Raff's orchestral output, the simple statement of the tune is immediately subjected to lengthy development, landing on a full orchestral statement which immediately then tapers off and leads into music of stormy and presciently Tchaikovskian urgency in C minor. If the lifetimes of the two composers were reversed, one might almost think that Raff was heavily influenced by the Russian composer. This nonetheless demonstrates Raff's otherwise natural and inevitably eclectic bent. The C minor *Allegro* (actually, *Doppio movimento*, or "twice as fast") is marked by swirling triplets set off against alternating quarter-note and dotted rhythms (a nod to the mid-19th century's Obsession with sequential diminished seventh chords, employed to enhance harmonic tension by deflecting tonal resolution). The insistence of these motives, garbed in Raff's chosen harmonic language, very clearly predicts Tchaikovsky. A transition to what would be a secondary theme (if this were a sonata-form structure) briefly reiterates the opening patriotic theme. The Viking triplets and dotted rhythms are transformed into a sprightly E flat major march which follows the dynamic shape of the piece's beginning, that is, it has a relatively quiet commencement followed by repetition and accretion until arriving at a complete orchestral statement.

A full-scale development of all three themes ensues: the patriotic tune, the Vikings in combat, and the heroic march all appear in numerous rough-and-tumble sequences and combinations. This leads not to the expected C minor recapitulation, but to an unexpected but grandiose re-statement of the opening C major patriotic theme (*Andante maestoso*) in all its glory in the winds and trumpets, complete with brass and percussion fanfares and flourishes amid swirling technicolor strings. The absence of an *allegro* coda (think 1812 Overture, for example) is notable, a missed opportunity Raff would eventually correct with the final Version of *Eine feste Burg* nearly twenty years later.

After *König Alfred* came **Samson**, WoO 21, nominally a Biblical opera concerned with the retelling of the story of Shimshon (Samson) as Shoftim (Judges), 13:1-15:31. Following the death of Moses came an historical period of slightly over 400 years, culminating with the establishment of the rule of the Kings (Saul, David). This period of the Judges, beginning with Moses' disciple Joshua and continuing through the reigns of seventeen successive leaders of the Jewish people, was largely concerned with settling the land and the expulsion of the original inhabitants, together with their pagan religious practices, which the Jews had been commanded to expunge. Samson was the fifteenth judge and was the leader of the Jewish people for approximately 20 years.

Samson was Nazir, one who according to Halacha (Jewish Law) was prohibited from cutting his hair or consuming anything made from grapes (e.g. wine). His great physical strength (metaphorically symbolizing his position and leadership authority) remained intact so long as he kept to the vows of Nezirus. While it is understood in the secular literature that Samson was a kind of Jewish Hercules, the concept of great strength is also understood to represent absolute moral, ethical and religious probity. Samson's great sins (lust, incontinence, violation of his vows) meant disaster not only of a personal kind, but also for his people as well. Initially, Samson was successful in battling the Philistines until, having become enamored of the pagan priestess Delilah and divulging the secret of his strength to her in a drunken stupor, his hair was cut and he

was blinded. Held up to mockery by the Philistines, Samson prayed that he might be given the strength to avenge his people through the sacrifice of his own life, the ultimate act of repentance. In a singular burst of strength, he pulled down the pillars of the pagan temple, killing all the Philistines assembled there along with himself. Samson was succeeded by Eli the prophet, then by Samuel, the last of the judges to rule, then ultimately by Saul, the first Jewish king.

Raff, who wrote his own libretto in 1851-2 in Weimar, laid out the action of his opera in five acts declaring originally that he had decided to write a music drama after the direction established by Wagner, but in his own manner. Inasmuch as Raff was not Jewish and would not likely have known the exegetical literature from its original Jewish sources, and even though he was known to have made a thorough study of the time and place of the story (possibly even as a doctoral dissertation), his references to Astarte, for example, and other personalities and places of action (such as Asia) are decidedly at variance with the original source text. Raff altered the biblical narrative to such an extent that "artistic license" would be the safest way to describe his dramaturgical "enhancements" — a wholly consistent and acceptable operatic practice. By comparison, Saint-Saens' later opera stays much closer to the original narrative.

Composition of the music was begun in 1853 and completed in 1857, by which time Raff had moved to Wiesbaden and had severed his ties with Liszt and the Weimar group. Notwithstanding these changes, Liszt regarded Samson as a work of genius and arranged to have the opera staged at Weimar. The principal problem to be overcome was to find a suitable tenor to sing the title role. Ultimately, Ludwig Schnorr von Carolsfeld, the great Wagnerian tenor fresh from having created the role of Tristan, was contracted to learn the part. Raff, in the meantime, undertook to make a revised, "leaner" version of the opera: evidently, he considered the original too Wagnerian! The eight-year delay produced by these revisions meant that the arrangements for the Weimar premiere fell apart. A promised staging of the revised version, completed in draft form in 1865 in Dresden, was cancelled when Schnorr died that year from the effects of a cold or, more likely, upper respiratory influenza, a common cause of death in those times. The opera thus was neither staged nor published in Raff's lifetime.

The brief Prelude to the third act of the opera is written for relatively small forces: 2 Flutes, Oboe, 2 Clarinets, 2 Bassoons, 2 Horns, 2 Trumpets, solo violin, solo cello and Strings. Marked *Lento, con movement moderato* (Slowly, with moderate movement), it is as clear and direct a piece as anything in Raff's entire catalogue, consisting of but a single extended melody played by solo violin and accompanied with gently pulsing, static woodwind chords over sustained tones in the violas. Set in G major and in 9/8 meter, and descriptive perhaps of the relationship between Samson and Delilah (as interpreted by Raff, at any rate), the piece does not rise above piano, although the score is full of expression markings, and carefully notated dynamic swellings. A little sighing figure in the oboe provides the only responsive notes to the violin's cantilena. No low-register instruments are employed. The entire violin melody is then repeated, now sung by all the first violins with a solo cello doubling it at the octave. The opening woodwind triplets become an intertwined figuration of sixteenth notes in the second violins and violas, with the original sustained tones transferred to the bassoons. An occasional pizzicato from the cellos and basses provides light touches to the foundation, while the oboe's original sighing motive is given to various upper woodwind combinations. Only at the coda does Raff bring in the horns and trumpets, along with a suggestion of harmonic ambiguity: the tritone pull of A flat major to the dominant D major is striking precisely for its unexpectedness. The final cadence, E flat major, C minor, G major, is also quite fresh,

as is the sonority of divided strings and widely-spaced winds and brass with which the piece ends, pianissimo.

During the gestation of *Samson*, Raff worked on a number of other projects. Perhaps the most ambitious of these was a piece for vocal soloists, chorus and Orchestra entitled ***Dornröschen*** (Briar-Rose), an Epic Fairy Tale in a Prelude and Four Parts (WoO 19) written in 1855 with libretto by his future brother-in-law, Wilhelm Genast. In 1854, Raff had supplied the incidental music for Genast's stage play *Bernhard von Weimar* - whose overture, after much reworking, became Raff's *Eine feste Burg ist unser Gott*, Opus 127. The music for *Dornröschen* was composed in the summer of 1855 when Raff visited his fiancée, Doris Genast, in Wiesbaden -and it is interesting to note that Raff chose this particular time in his life to set this particular tale to music. From the title, it is evident that Genast's libretto would likely have been based on the fairy tale as published in 1812 in the Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm Collection *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* ("Children's and Household Tales"). An earlier variant of the same story in French was set down by Charles Perrault in 1697 as *La belle au bois dormant* (The Sleeping Beauty in the Forest). It is this earlier version of the tale that Tchaikovsky used for his ballet, Ravel for his *Ma Mère l'Oye* (Mother Goose) and Walt Disney a century after Raff for his cartoon feature. The basic elements of the story itself are much older than Perrault, though, having literary ancestors which include examples dating back at least to the 14th Century, such as the Roman de Perceforest (circa 1330, Old French) and the novella *Frayre de Joy es Sor de Plasir* (circa 1350, Catalan). The Grimm brothers' exploration of German folk tales in the early 19th Century roughly paralleled the efforts of Clemens Brentano and Ludwig Achim von Arnim with their collections of folksongs known as *Des Knaben Wunderhorn* (The Youth's Magic Horn), which would spur the early career of Gustav Mahler later in the 19th Century.

The Grimm brothers ultimately became deeply involved in studying the etymological development of the German language, beginning a project that became known as the *Deutsches Wörterbuch*, perhaps the most important philological work on the German language. Their mutual professional interests in local and regional mythology guided them towards a more regional version of the tale in their telling, which followed Perrault only in its broad outlines. There are various references in the literature to suggest that *Sleeping Beauty/Dornröschen* herself is effectively a transformation of Brunhilde of the *Nibelungen* saga. The Prince, then, would have been a descendant of Siegfried, so to speak, and the impenetrable thorn bush the equivalent to Wotan's magic fire surrounding the sleeping Valkyrie, which only a true hero can penetrate in order to awaken her with a kiss. (Tchaikovsky's stroke of the tam-tam at this moment in his ballet must certainly be among the most famous kisses in the entire literature of music!)

The present recording presents the *Vorspiel* (Prelude) and the Intermezzo [*Die Dornhecke* [The Thorn Hedge]], scored for Piccolo, 2 Flutes, 2 Oboes, 2 Clarinets, 2 Bassoons, 4 Horns, 2 Trumpets, 3 Trombones, Tuba, Timpani, Percussion (Triangle and Bass Drum), Strings and, in one of the few examples of its use in any of Raff's orchestral works, a Harp. The *Vorspiel*, marked "*Mäßig bewegt*" (broadly moving) is, except for a brief moment in its central section, a quiet and dreamlike tripartite C major nocturne in triple meter. There is a certain distinctly Lisztian flavor to aspects of Raff's harmonic language here - sudden key shifts up a major third (i.e. from C major -> E major), major/minor cross-relations where the dominant contains both the major and the minor third, and the very ambiguous tritone (the opening in C major, shifting immediately to F sharp minor), which creates instability from the outset while at the same time maintaining a perplexing calm. Raff, however, is content to allow himself a passing nod

to Liszt as he immediately sets out to redefine the opening phrases by continually placing them in a succession of different keys in a manner that will become a trademark later on, the continual development and/or repetition of small phrase groups in varying settings. If Liszt is an influence here, he serves more as a point of departure than anything else. The piece is wholly typical of Raff, a composer who, having once latched on to an idea, will then work it through as many permutations as possible, limited only by the reach of his imagination and abetted by an infallible sense of timing. The opening phrases feature woodwinds set against a subdued background of string support, which are then repeated numerous times with different accompaniments. When the music lands in E flat major, the violins introduce another background idea of flowing sextuplets, against which the woodwind phrases continue to be extended.

The quiet entrance of trumpets and horns in octaves begin the transition to the central section of the piece, now in C minor, which introduces a secondary, fragmentary thematic idea. Sustained string *tremolandi* provide the foundation for the development of the new idea, which becomes increasingly intense, landing on a brief *fortissimo tutti* while attempting to set up E major as a point of arrival. Raff backs away quickly, though; the string's sextuplets become transformed into static, offbeat and quietly nervous chordal woodwind chatter announcing the return of C major. The strings (including a solo violin in its upper register) present the material originally associated with the winds. The harp joins in providing harmonic support with the woodwinds. A restatement of the opening gradually fades away, but not without a cadence which shifts back and forth between C major and E major, only to resolve to C at the last minute. Effectively, Raff has laid out the essential formula he will frequently follow in the slow movements of his orchestral works: the use of tripartite forms is carried out by having the repetition of the opening given to the inverse group of instruments, while the original materials and accompaniments are often reconfigured in much the same manner as in the *Vorspiel*.

The Intermezzo illustrates Raff's musical sense of humor. Of all the forms of music, none is knottier than the fugue. What better way, then, to suggest the knotty, spiky impenetrability of the thorn bush than in a furiously swirling G minor fugue? At the outset, that's what Raff wants you to believe! The snarling and fleet intermezzo presents in fact only the semblance of a fugue, with statements of its subject at the "correct" places (tonic - dominant - tonic - dominant). After its exposition, however, it is quickly transformed into a *moto perpetuo* toccata in which the "subject" remains entirely in the strings without elaboration or countersubject(s) but with triplet punctuations and variants which remain entirely in the winds, brass, harp and, ultimately, the percussion. Arriving at F major, a downward-moving thematic fragment is introduced, providing the only melodic contrary motion in the entire piece, while setting up a fairly typical Raffian pun. A new second thematic fragment, which concludes with the simplified tail end of the original subject, presents something of the character of sonata-form to the faux fugal exposition, complete with extended development of both ideas. Occasional pedal points (sustained long tones) suggest the mechanism of a fugal cadence - but it is all in fact merely an extremely brilliant and clever ruse - very much like the thorn bush itself, appearing both uniform in its makeup (the reiterated subject constantly shifting its tonality) yet indecipherable (a function of its spiky uniformity). The whole piece begins quietly and consists of one long, inexorable crescendo, reaching a furious G minor climax and sudden ending - all in some 300 measures.

Raff's sixth and final opera, ***Die Eifersüchten*** [The Jealous Ones], WoO 55, was begun in 1880 with composition of its libretto, and completed in 1882.

In 1878, Raff had assumed the position of Director of the Hoch Conservatory of Music in Frankfurt, having moved there from Wiesbaden. The final four years of his life, therefore, were largely devoted to the Conservatory, causing a concomitant decrease in his compositional output, not an uncommon phenomenon with composers assuming similar positions. One need think only of Howard Hanson (at The Eastman School of Music), William Schuman (Juilliard, then Lincoln Center) and Peter Mennin (Peabody Conservatory, then Juilliard) in the U.S. as examples of Composers of significant stature whose productivity was similarly diminished. Among the remaining nine works written between 1880 and 1882 that Raff completed, the oratorio *Welt Ende - Gericht - Neue Welt* stands as one of the major works of the period for chorus, soloists and orchestra.

Virtually nothing is known about *Die Eifersüchten* itself. Helene Raff said little beyond the fact that her mother, well versed in theatrical ways and means, thought the subject too light and inconsequential for an opera despite her devotion to her husband, even if the music were charming. (Curiously, this somewhat parallels Pauline Strauss' response to her husband's 1924 domestic comedy *Intermezzo*, whose subject is jealousy in marriage; one wonders, knowing that Strauss was familiar with Raff's work, if the then-seventy-year old composer was aware of Raff's opera, even to the extent of its existence — notwithstanding that it had never been performed nor published in Raff's lifetime.)

If the overture to the opera gives any indication of the drama it introduces, then the opera itself would certainly appear to have been a charmer. Scored for 2 Flutes, 2 Oboes, 2 Clarinets, 2 Bassoons, 2 Horns, 2 Trumpets, Timpani and Strings, the overture is virtually Mozartian in its classical proportions and Haydnesque in its whimsical humor. The piece is laid out as a succinct *sonata-allegro* movement whose principal themes are derived from the *Andante* with which it opens. The *allegro* begins with a hint of melodrama, suggesting perhaps an intertwining of jealousies and false relationships - but the music remains fleet and without any signs of *sturm und drang*. A secondary theme in B flat is more relaxed and lyrical. A full scale development follows, joined by a formal recapitulation in which the secondary theme returns in the tonic major. As is often the case in Raff's *sonata-allegro* movements, an extended coda provides a secondary development before the purely neo-classical D major coda. In many respects, the overture appears as to be a distillation of Raff's sonata-form *allegros*, particularly those of his 6th, 7th and 8th symphonies, first movements each of which it seems to resemble both in the cut of its themes and the flavor of its harmonic language - a delightful footnote to a lifetime of symphonism ... although, given Raff's extensive plans for works that remained unwritten at his death, it is unlikely he would have thought of it that way at all.

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