

Booklet notes by Dr Avrohom Leichtling for Sterling CDS 1098

Raff: *De Profundis, Te Deum, Vier marianischen Antiphonen, Pater Noster* and *Ave Maria*

General Background:

It is curious to note, given the popularity of and demand for choral music during the latter nineteenth Century, that Joachim Raff's compositions for chorus, whether works with instrumental or orchestral accompaniment or unaccompanied compositions, do not occupy a more prominent place in his voluminous output. During the years between 1850 and 1856, when he served as Franz Liszt's assistant at Weimar, Raff prepared orchestrations and arrangements of a number of his master's works, including at least two major compositions for chorus and orchestra (*Prometheus Unbound*, WoO 14A (1850), and *Domine Salvum Fac Regem*, WoO 16B (1853)). In addition to the Liszt arrangements, Raff completed twelve works of his own for accompanied chorus (ten with orchestra and two with smaller instrumental ensembles) and eight for unaccompanied chorus, three of which are miscellaneous collections of short choral songs scored for male choir, a popular ensemble of the time. Of these twenty choral pieces, nine are liturgical in nature, and eleven are based on secular, political, or nationalist subjects. In a total catalogue of nearly 300 titles, Raff's choral music occupies less than 10% of his total output, even though two of his choral works with orchestra are among his largest non-operatic compositions.

One might have expected Raff, a Catholic, to have produced major settings of the more common liturgical texts, for example, those portions of the Ordinary of the Mass (*Kyrie-Gloria-Credo-Sanctus-Benedictus-Agnus*) set perhaps as a *Missa Solemnis* or even a *Requiem*. In fact, he did neither other than a single *a cappella* setting of the *Kyrie* and the *Gloria* of the Ordinary, which may have been part of a larger project intended to honor the Church in Lachen, Switzerland where he was baptized. Beginning in 1848 with his setting of Psalm 121, WoO 8 (1848), Raff's choral works appeared sporadically over the next thirty-three years. Aside from his use of Psalm texts, Raff's one major, explicitly liturgical (while non-Psalm-based) work for chorus and Orchestra is a setting of the Latin Ambrosian hymn, *Te Deum Laudamus*, which is more an occasional work than an extensive piece of religious concert music *per se*. Raff's most elaborate religious piece is his late oratorio *Welt Ende - Gericht - Neue Welt*, Opus 212 (1879-81), the structure and content of which would not be equaled as a far-flung piece of religious concert music until Benjamin Britten's *War Requiem*, completed 80 years later in 1961. A post-mortem examination of Raff's personal papers reveals that he was planning an oratorio based on the life of John the Baptist, as well as at least eight other works falling in the general categories of vocal music, such as opera, music drama, and oratorio.

Te Deum, WoO 16 (1853)

While Raff was in Liszt's employ, the older composer encouraged his younger colleague to devote his efforts to creating religious musical literature. Raff was rather more interested in keyboard and vocal music in general, and the theater in particular, at this time, having written two grand operas during his Weimar years: *King Alfred*, WoO 14 (1848-49, revised in 1850 and again in 1852) and *Samson*, WoO 20 (1851-52, et seq.). His extensive opus *Dornröschen* (Little Briar Rose: Epic Fairy Tale in Four Parts), WoO 19 (1855) essentially took the Grimm Brothers' fairy tale and cast it as an unstaged, highly compressed opera variant, in essence, an oratorio.

In July 1853 Raff composed his setting of the *Te Deum*, a rare concession to Liszt's encouragement to compose religious music, on a Commission from the Roman Catholic Church in Weimar to mark the coronation ceremony of Grand Duke Karl Alexander of Saxe-Weimar-Eisenach. Raff conducted its first performance on 28 August 1853 in the City Church, Weimar, together with his arrangement of Liszt's setting of Psalm 20 (*Domine Salvum*), written around the same time. The *Te Deum* remained unpublished until 2012, when it appeared as part of the Complete Edition of Raff's works printed by Edition Nordstern of Stuttgart. The present recording is the work's first.

At this time, Raff's music naturally enough tended to exhibit a degree of Lisztian influence, particularly with respect to the older composer's harmonic vocabulary. Perhaps because it may have been written with the foreknowledge that it would be performed together with his arrangement of Liszt's *Domine Salvum*, the *Te Deum*'s harmonic language is decidedly Lisztian, with many rapid changes of mode and tonal center, in "the Lisztian manner." Later in his career, Raff would learn to stretch his adaptation of Liszt's harmonic syntax into longer musical episodes and, in the process, make it his own. As to other possible influences or sources, evidence of any Gregorian Chant in his setting is notably absent.

Although Raff tended to write very quickly, it is evident from the cut of its themes, the largely homophonic writing for chorus, and the straightforward, no-frills manner of its orchestral clothing, that the *Te Deum* (in C major) was conceived from the start as an occasional piece, intended to be performed without excessive rehearsal, but nonetheless to be of solid construction and wholly professional craft and invention. The work is scored for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba (a rare instrument in Raff's orchestra), timpani and strings, plus a four part chorus (S-A-T-B).

Given that its première took place less than a month after its composition, the work had to be conceived from the start in the most practical terms: at 251 measures, it is relatively brief, its structure a simple tripartite A-B-C with the middle section in A-flat major, the setting of the words eschewing elaborate melisma and repetition.

Although Raff's gaze often turned to the baroque or even further back to the renaissance or middle ages, the *Te Deum* is very much of the present (that is, the nineteenth century), as evidenced by a decided lack of extensive imitative counter-point, fugue, canon and the like, but with a preponderance of block choral writing doubled almost literally and continuously by the orchestra (a stratagem adapted largely if not entirely in order to provide reliable pitch support for the chorus, which would not have had much time at all in which to prepare for the debut). Its brilliance lies in its brevity and bracing Lisztian harmonic fabric, its directness, its lack of romantic sentimentality. It is very clearly the antithesis of the religious Verdi, Brahms or, especially, Bruckner.

De Profundis, Opus 141 (1867)

In the Roman Catholic liturgy, Psalm 130 (129 according to the Septuagint Greek) occurs in the *Liber Usualis*, the collection of Gregorian chant arranged by the specific services of the Church in chronological sequence throughout the year as part of the *Officium Defunctorum*, that is the Office for the Dead, specifically the Burial Service. Raff's setting of this text could be interpreted as his sole effort at the composition of something approaching a *Requiem* Mass. In this case, dedicated to Franz Liszt, the piece likely constitutes Raff's rapprochement with Liszt following the acrimonious split between

them in 1856, and Raff's discomfiture with the musical politics within Liszt's Weimar circle. Indeed, the text is one that Liszt had previously recommended to Raff for musical treatment. Unlike his setting of the *Te Deum*, Raff makes only a passing reference to the plainsong for this Psalm. Also in marked contrast to the *Te Deum*, Raff's *De Profundis* has not a trace of Liszt in it.

De Profundis is scored for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani and strings, with an eight-part chorus (S-S-A-A-T-T-B-B). The score was first published by Schuberth in 1868, and appeared as part of Nordstern's Complete Edition of Raff in 2000. It was first performed at Weimar's City Church on 28 March 1872, conducted by Karl Müller-Hartung.

There are fifteen Psalms (120-134) which begin with the words *Shir HaMa'alos* (A Song of Ascents) which were an integral part of ceremonies associated with the culmination of the Jewish holiday of Sukkos in the days twenty centuries ago when the Temple stood in Jerusalem, the single most joyous observance in Judaism. The "ascent" in these Psalms refers, on one level, to the actual manner of presentation of the Psalms by the *Levi'im* (Levites) who would sing each of the fifteen Psalms standing on a different, higher step of the stairs ascending from ground level to the altar - hence the superscription "A Song of Ascents". More than that, of course, ascent refers conceptually to man's upward striving to achieve the highest level of spirituality and connectedness with God.

Psalm 130, the eleventh in the sequence, although primarily penitential in nature, is, outside of Jewish liturgical usage, often associated with death and mourning (generally or specifically). In its specific, Jewish, post-Temple-era liturgical use, it is recited during the *ten days of teshuva* (repentance) that fall between *Rosh Hashanah* (when divine judgment for the new year is made, hence its commonly used name *Yom HaDin*, or Day of Judgment) and *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement, when that judgment is sealed for the coming year). Together with the fourteen other Psalms that surround it, *Mi m'amakim* or *De Profundis* needs to be understood as a cry of the soul to God, seeking salvation from judgment while still in this life. Its opening words are critical to a proper understanding of its overall purpose: in non-Jewish liturgy, the all-important opening words are generally omitted. The Psalm itself is not at all mournful; rather, while serious in tone, its primary message is of hope and consolation. Even a simple comparison of the original Hebrew text (in its English translation) to its Latin Version, reveals that there are many places where the meaning and intern of the original have been altered. Raff's setting of the Latin text divides into an orchestral prologue, followed by five subsections.

Nr.1 - Orchestral Introduction: *Andante*, G minor, in triple meter (3/4).

A slow-moving, mournful piece complete with Lisztian downward-swooping chromatic orchestral sighs, which migrates briefly and agitatedly through A-flat major and F minor before ending quietly, sighingly in G minor. Proceeding without pause to the first verse of the text, the introduction serves primarily to establish a fairly typical nineteenth-century atmosphere of sadness and, ultimately, resignation. It bears little thematic relationship to the rest of the piece.

Nr.2 - *De Profundis*: *Andante con moto*, G minor, in common time (4/4) - full chorus

Original Hebrew text in English translation:

[A Song of Ascents]

From the depths I have called You, O Lord.

O Lord, harken to my voice;

may Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications.

Latin Version:

[*Canticum graduum*]

De profundis clamavi ad te, Domine;

Domine, exaudi vocem meam.

Fiant aures in vocem deprecationis mae.

English translation of Latin Version:

[A Song in steps]

From the depths, I have cried out to you, O Lord;

Lord, hear my voice.

Let your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplication.

Raff's setting of the opening sentence consists of a slow-moving, decidedly Bachian fugue which appears variously throughout the eight-voiced chorus. The fugue subject appears to have the general melodic shape of the requiem plainchant, although it does not quote it completely. It is a very subtle reference, however, and, as fugue subjects nominally in a minor key go, it contains a very neat and wholly typical trick (which, in any case, also manages to reflect the modality of its plainsong source): customarily, a fugue subject begins in the tonic key (in this case, G minor) and is answered by the next voice in the dominant (or D). Depending on how many voices the fugue features, this pattern is repeated. Raff's fugue subject, which is presented in the chorus, for the moment ignoring its orchestral accompaniment, can easily be heard as if it were in B-flat major, the so-called relative major key — it is that ambiguous. The first statements answer begins on F, as if in the dominant of B-flat. It is then repeated in the third and fourth statements of the fugue subject. The entrance of the sixth through eighth voices extends the delicious ambiguity, moving the fugue up a fifth - nominally to D minor in the orchestra but remaining implicitly in F major in the chorus. The addition of the harmonic orchestral support Raff overlays on his fugue subject resolves the question of tonality. The various entrances of the fugue subject do however move relentlessly upwards.

Raff sets the second sentence *Domini, exaudi vocem*, shifting between more generally imitative and purely homophonic writing, before returning to another fugal exposition, this time with a counter-subject which thickens all contrapuntal textures across the board. On the words "ad te" ("to you"), we hear a reminder of the sighing figuration from the introduction. Gradually, the thrust of the music builds to a wrenching climax, again on the words "ad te", landing on a massive C-sharp diminished seventh chord — the *ne plus ultra* representation of tension and stress in the Romantic era — followed by a deathly silence. From here to the end, *Fiant aures intendentes*, the chorus' elaborate counterpoint is dropped entirely, and the first section ends quietly in G major. There are many word repetitions in this section, with the order of the words of the text often disarrayed. The music represents the emotions of despair as a convoluted eight-part fugue.

Nr.3 — *Si iniquitates: Andante, D minor, in duple meter (6/8): Double Canon for 4-part Men's Choir*

Original Hebrew text in English translation:

O God, if You keep iniquities, O Lord, who will stand?

Latin Version:

Si iniquitates, Domine, Domine, Quis sustinebit?

English translation of Latin Version:

If you, Lord, were to mark iniquities, who, O Lord, shall stand?

The setting of *Si iniquitates* is the first of two sections in the work that shifts the focus away from a full chorus, reducing the choral forces to men's voices only. Shorter and more compact than Nr. 2, the third section begins with a quiet introduction in the lower strings which enables two oboes to present thematic fragments that coalesce into the double canon sung by the men at their entrance 27 measures in. A canon can consist of simple imitative counterpoint, where a melody is played against itself before ending. (In English-speaking countries, the most well-known example of a canon is the children's song, "Row, row, row your boat"). Raff works with two such melodies simultaneously. In the beginning, the tunes are discontinuous, but they ultimately meld into a close-knit four-part counterpoint while keeping the dynamic level of the whole very quiet throughout. The words are then repeated, but in a largely homophonic manner, in a back-and-forth commentary between chorus and orchestra that quickly becomes agitated and impassioned. By the end, however, the drama evaporates as the chorus despairs on the word "*quis*" ("who" — as in, "who shall stand?"). The section ends quietly with fragments of the canon theme passed through the winds and answered by the strings.

Nr. 4 - *Quia apud te: Allegretto*, B-flat major, in duple meter (2/4): Soprano aria with 4-part Women's Choir

Original Hebrew text in English translation:

But forgiveness is with You,
in Order that You be feared.
I hoped, O Lord; yea my soul hoped,
and I wait for His word.

Latin Version:

et propter legem sustinui te, Domine.
Sustinuit anima mea in verbo ejus:
Speravit anima mea in Domino.

English translation of Latin Version:

For with you is forgiveness; and because of your law,
I stood by you, Lord.
My soul has stood by his word.
My soul has hoped in the Lord.

The fourth section of *De Profundis* softens the musical discourse by disposing altogether of the mens choir, the minor tonalities (D minor, G minor, etc.), and the more overt contrapuntal devices (fugue, canon), replacing them with a gentle, flowing aria *accompagnata* for soprano and supporting four-part women's choir. Upon its entrance, the choir provides gentle harmonic support for the soprano, allowing her to float gracefully above it. The middle section of this simple A-B-A tripartite structure, in G-flat major, is similar in conception to its flanking episodes, but with its focus on the words "*Speravit anima mea in Domino*" ("My soul waits for the Lord"). Upon returning to the principal tonality (B-flat major), the chorus takes up the soprano's *cantilena*, while the soprano replies to the chorus' phrases in a reversal of the original soprano-answered-by-chorus construct of the middle section. This reversal of ways and means is one of Raff's signature "moves" - and it allows his repetitions to be simultaneously both literal and non-literal. The movement ends with only slightly more formal imitation; the head of the main theme of the aria is passed through the chorus, voice-by-voice. The orchestra

plays a subdued role throughout the movement — to the extent of eliminating the trumpets, trombones, and timpani from its arsenal, another patented device Raff often utilizes in the slow movements of his symphonies and concerti. The orchestra's role is otherwise almost purely decorative.

Nr. 5 - *A custodia: Andante con moto*, C major, in triple meter (3/4): full eight-part chorus

Original Hebrew text in English translation:

My soul is to the Lord among those who await
the morning, those who await the morning.
Israel, hope to the Lord,
for kindness is with the Lord,
and much redemption is with Him.

Latin Version:

*A custodia matutina, usque ad noctem,
speret Israel in Domino.
Quia apud Dominum misericordia,
Et copiosa apud eum redemptio.*

English translation of Latin Version:

From the morning watch,
Even until night,
Let Israel hope in the Lord.
For with the Lord there is mercy,
And with him is plenteous redemption.

One of the more common cadential formulas in tonal music, the plagal, or "Amen" cadence, consists of a mere two chords - the first on the subdominant, or 4th step of the scale, followed by the tonic triad, on the first. In the case of G major, this cadential formula translates into a C major triad followed by a G major triad. The concluding two sections of Raff's *De Profundis* form a giant, structural plagal cadence. Taking the 30,000-foot view, the first part consists of the 5th section (*A custodia*) (ultimately in C major), with the final part (*Et ipse redimet*) in G major. At ground level, however, a different view materializes, largely due to the fact that Raff permits himself a degree of musical pictorialization that is otherwise absent from the piece. The tone painting here concerns itself with the word *matutina* (dawn), which prompts not only a depiction of sunrise in the literal sense, but also the implicit pointing ahead to an expression of the concept of *miserericordia* (mercy). The section is the most harmonically unstable of the entire piece. Except for one brief moment when Raff lands on the word *Domino* (Lord), it is not until the final fifteen measures of the movement that C major is established. For the remainder of the movements 182 measures, there is no set tonality, and keys keep shifting in ways characteristic of this composer: by common-tone modulations, or by mediant relationships (i. e., key centers which are a third apart - for example C major->A-flat major, C major->E major, etc.). Its harmonic restlessness can be likened to the shifting color palette one sees on a clear dawn, but it also serves another, strictly structural function by keeping the question "What key are we in?" at arm's length. Further, it also prepares for the extended resolution of the final section of the piece, like indecision in an introduction leading to resolution in the main body of a movement or piece to which it is attached. Otherwise, the text is treated in fragmented fashion, subject to much unresolved imitation among the voices of the chorus. There are no themes or extended passages of *cantilena per se* so much as thematic fragments tossed about, as if in pure development but without exposition (!). There are several climactic

moments in which dramatic stress is largely absent. These serve as arrival points in the dramatic arch that leads inevitably to the finale.

Nr. 6 - *Et ipse redimet: Allegro*, G major, in duple meter (C = 2/2): Double fugue for full eight-part chorus

Original Hebrew text in English translation:
And He will redeem Israel from all their iniquities.

Latin Version:
Et ipse redimet Israel ex omnibus iniquitatibus ejus.

English translation of Latin Version:
And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.

Raff begins the finale of *De Profundis* in A-flat major, with a clarion call from brass and timpani that is also the head of the first subject of the double fugue which is to follow. Answered immediately by the strings in unison, we are given the entire fugue subject, and a process is set in motion whereby the question-and-answer construct will take us through several keys before landing in G major with the entrance of the chorus for a full exposition of the eight-part fugue. After this full exposition of the first fugue, Raff begins the process over again with a second, even longer fugue (of 44, as opposed to 31 measures). The first fugue is then turned upside down (inversion) before being combined simultaneously with its upright version - a bit of remarkable contrapuntal virtuosity.

Having played with his two fugues separately, Raff now sets out upon the real *tour-de-force* of the finale: the combination of both fugues simultaneously, symbolizing, perhaps, redemption and at the same time unification with God. This notion is further enhanced by its dramatic contrast from the preceding 5th section, in that the finale, for all its contrapuntal complexity, remains solidly in G major once it has been established upon its initial choral statement in the first fugue.

After a brief episode of *stretto*, the sequential entrance of the eight voices of the fugue before each statement of the subject is complete (though each does more or less get to state it completely having once entered the fray), Raff brings the work to a close adding an obligatory "Amen" to the text and speeding up the tempo to allow a last telescopic view of both fugues together with the grafted cadential "Amen".

Neo-classicism and Raff's works for five-, six-, and eight-part unaccompanied chorus

The concept of neo-classicism is generally considered to have originated in the early to middle years of the 20th Century, largely through the efforts and influence of major composers such as Stravinsky, Hindemith, and others, as an antidote to the overripe gigantism of much of the music of the pre-World War I era. In the main, the neo-classical composers sought to create a new, anti-romantic objectivist tonal aesthetic by recasting many of the shapes and elements of the early eighteenth Century (going "Back to Bach"). In truth, however, one of the earliest neo-classicists was the pre-twentieth-century Joachim Raff, for whom the term, had it been coined in his time, would have meant an exploration of historically earlier musical means within the context of nineteenth century musical speech - not just to revive the literature of those times (don't forget that not only was Raff a supporter of the monumental compilation of the

complete edition of J.S. Bach begun in the mid-nineteenth century, but also the composer of a significant number of arrangements and transcription of Bach, many decades before it became common practice), but also to mine its technical resources to find new approaches to old problems. In Raff, this can be seen in his many works, not otherwise transcriptions or arrangements, but instead predicated on Baroque forms and mannerisms updated for his contemporary nineteenth century audiences and performers. However, Raff also cast his view much further back, as evidenced by the *a cappella* pieces on this recording.

In the late 1860's, Raff's interest in religious music peaked. Beginning with his setting of *De Profundis* in 1867, he would within two years take several well-known Roman Catholic hymns and set them variously for five-, six-, or eight-voice unaccompanied chorus. Raff, who almost never passed up an opportunity to explore new techniques or to revive much older ones in newer guises, was, in these pieces, particularly involved with resuscitation of aspects of sixteenth-century Italian polyphony and antiphonal choral writing. It is during this time that he wrote the *Vier marianische Antiphonen* (Four Marian Antiphons), WoO 27 (1868), a *Kyrie* and *Gloria*, WoO 31 (1869), a *Pater Noster*, WoO 32 (1869), and a setting of *Ave Maria*, WoO 33 (1869). Some of these works are based on the original plainsong chants that are associated with the texts, a compositional concept that dates back at least as far as 10th century *Musica enchiriadis*, or to the Notre Dame School of 12th Century Paris (Leonin, Perotin, et al). The eight pieces contained in these four works constitute Raff's entire contribution to the *a cappella* concert-liturgical literature. Although they are given WoO (Without Opus Number) designations, Raff originally did assign opus numbers to them, in the early 140's among his works. Raff chose, however, to withhold these works from publication during his lifetime. As a consequence, they did not begin to appear in print until more than one hundred and thirty years after they were written.

The reason for Raff's withholding these pieces is not hard to imagine, given his status as a well-known practitioner of "Modern" German romanticism: any large-scale incorporation of reconfigured and undisguised elements from the Italian Renaissance in his compositions would have been seen as decidedly anachronistic and totally out of step with the times, and would likely have been misunderstood. Interestingly, Raff would face the diametrically opposite stylistic problem in connection with the original version of his eighth Symphony (*Der Winter*) - published posthumously as his Symphony No.11 — which he likely viewed as too forward-looking for audiences of the late 1870s, when it was written. While it is often said that the "advanced" chromaticism of Raff's contemporaries and immediate successors, particularly Wagner, Mahler, Bruckner, early Schoenberg, and Strauss, was "the music of the future," it turns out that Joachim Raff was, in many more respects, way ahead of the futuristic curve, despite his purposeful avoidance of Wagnerian ways and means.

Vier Marianischen Antiphonen (Four Marian Antiphons) for five-, six-, and eight-part mixed chorus, WoO 27 (1867)

The term "antiphon", derived from the Greek for "opposite" and "voice", when used specifically with general reference to Christian musico-liturgical practice, means a responsive interaction by a choir or congregation, usually in Gregorian chant, to a psalm or other text in a religious service or musical work. The musical term "antiphony" describes the statement-response construct which can be as simple as the byplay between two instruments or voices, or as complex as two or more orchestras and/or choruses. As a compositional device and mannerism, it reached its most glorious early peak during the Italian Renaissance (the sixteenth century), as demonstrated by the

sizeable chunk of the literature of the period which required multiple choruses and/or instrumental groups placed at different locations within a performance space, answering each other over large physical distances. A large body of Gregorian antiphons exists, published in the *Antiphonale Sacrosancte Romanae Ecclesiae Pro Diurnis Floris*.

Although there are a number of Marian antiphons, that is, hymns sung in honor of the Virgin Mary, and some of great antiquity, the term most often refers to the four hymns which came to be used as detached chants, that is, not associated with a specific psalm verse, since about 1239, when Pope Gregory IX ordered that one of them, according to the season, be sung at the end of the office:

- *Alma Redemptoris Mater* (Advent through February 2)
- *Ave Regina Caelorum* (Presentation of the Lord through Good Friday)
- *Regina Coeli* (Easter season)
- *Salve Regina* (from first Vespers of Trinity Sunday until None of the Saturday before Advent)

Raff's thematic sources for the first three antiphons can be found in the *Antiphonale*. The chant source that Raff uses for *Salve Regina* does not appear there, and was most likely composed sometime in the eleventh century by the German monk Hermann von Reichenau (1013-1054). Raff traditionally marks the location of quoted chants in his scores with the label "*cantus firmus*" - a theoretical term that came into use in the 14th Century. Throughout the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance, regardless of the voice in which the chant would appear, it would often be sung in longer note values, while the other voices embellished it with shorter ones. Raff, by and large, does not do this. His preference was to transform the essentially arhythmical chant sources into measured melodic phrases. The part-writing, counterpoint and flow, and, to a degree, the harmonic idiom, appear to be a deliberate imitation and recasting of the compositional methods of Giovanni Pierluigi da Palestrina (1525-1594), as much as they arise from Raff's study of *Gradus ad Parnassum* (Steps to Parnassus) (1725) by the music theorist Johann Joseph Fux, who formulated rules for contrapuntal writing derived from the work of earlier theorists, particularly of the sixteenth century. The great revival of interest in Palestrina's music began in the early nineteenth century as part of a larger philosophical movement which looked back to "the golden age" of the Italian Renaissance, and which manifested itself, among other ways, in the great thirty-two volume complete edition of Palestrina's music published by Breitkopf und Härtel between 1862 and 1907.

More generally, however, as was the practice in the sixteenth century, Raff provides no tempo indications for his "Renaissance" pieces. All four of the antiphons (as well as the motets) are written in duple meter, in this case 2/1, and, for the most part, use only whole, half and quarter notes, thus imitating the manner of Renaissance notational conventions. Raff studiously avoids cadences that land on an open fifth, preferring, rather, always to end his phrases on a full major triad, a methodology that which would have been considered quite "modern" in 1550, even as the older cadential formulas remained part of the common speech of the period, including that of Palestrina himself.

Raff's *Vier Marianische Antiphonen* may have been performed privately during his lifetime, but was not given in public until 5 November 1999, together with his *Ave Maria*, at a performance in Alzenau, Germany. The pieces were published in 1999 as part of the Complete Edition put out by Edition Nordstern in Stuttgart. As with the *Te Deum* and the *De Profundis*, the present recording constitutes the works recorded première.

1. **Alma Redemptoris Mater** (Mother benign of our redeeming Lord)

The chant for *Alma Redemptoris Mater* appears on page 54 of the *Antiphonale* - and is set on the tone "F" in the Ionian (major) mode, which Raff transposes to G major. As a choral piece for six voices (S-S-A-T-B-B), Raff's transfiguration of Gregorian chant into a metrical as opposed to a rhythmical chant follows the original more-or-less from start to finish, but with frequent adjustments and extensions. While not a literal statement of the chant, that is, the complete sequence of its pitches, it is close enough to be clearly recognizable as such. Raff assigns the chant to the first sopranos and constructs a canon at the octave with the tenors which is maintained throughout. For its different phrases, Raff adjusts the temporal distance (that is, the amount of notated time) between the chant and its canonic imitation. The altos, second sopranos, and first basses have their own independent imitative counterpoint set against the canon, with the second basses shifting between singing the chant canon and intoning its own counterpoint against the other voices. In keeping with the general character of the chant, the piece is almost exclusively diatonic, staying entirely within the realm of G major, with only very occasional side trips to E minor and C major, and one surprising excursion into C minor. After all six voices enter, that is, by the second measure, there remain only five other measures in the entire piece (of 59 measures) when all six voices are not heard. The elongated cadence points give the whole the effect of an elaborately decorated chorale, as do the episodes where the counterpoint is reduced to what later theorists call "first species" - that is, note-for-note synchronicity — all voices moving in the same rhythm.

2. **Ave Regina Coelorum** (Hail, O Queen of Heaven, Enthroned!)

The chant for *Ave Regina Coelorum* appears on page 55 of the *Antiphonale* — and is set on "C" in the Mixolydian mode (major with lowered seventh step). In its original form - and not consistently used there - the notation contains a single flat in what today would be called the key signature; however, Raff's transcription of the chant ignores this fact almost entirely, thus changing the modal flavor to plain major — in this case, B-flat major, to which the original chant has been transposed in Raff's version of it. At select places along the way, the original B-flat is cancelled, momentarily altering the chant's modal flavor. The second half avoids the lowered seventh scale step altogether.

Raff's setting is for five voices (S-A-T-Bar-B), and opens with the tenors, baritones, and basses in free counterpoint, giving suggestions of the *cantus firmus* which is stated in full only by the sopranos. As with *Alma Redemptoris Mater*, Raff transforms the chant - omitting some parts, elaborating others - but exploring each of the four phrase groups of the original over the course of the piece. Also as with *Alma Redemptoris Mater*, Raff shifts back and forth between imitative counterpoint and first species homophony (creating the "chorale" effect mentioned earlier). There is slightly more chromatic activity in *Ave Regina Coelorum*, which adds another dimension to Raff's method of taking an archaic source and updating it for modern (that is, mid-nineteenth century) ears.

3. **Regina Coeli** (Joy to Thee, O Queen of Heaven! Alleluia)

The chant for *Regina Coeli* appears on page 56 of the *Antiphonale* - and is set on the tone "F" in the Ionian (major) mode which, as with the *Alma Redemptoris Mater*, Raff transposes to G major; it is composed as a piece for five voices (S-S-A-T-B). Raff here comes closest to the Medieval practice of stating the chant in long rhythmic values, in this case by the tenors and basses in plain octaves, while the three upper voices move in fluid decoration over it, sometimes in strictly imitative fashion (in proportionally faster rhythmic values), at others in highly melismatic free imitative counterpoint, especially on the word "Alleluia." As with *Ave Regina Coelorum*, there are very slight chromatic

inflections, which tend to “modernize” the generally faux-Italianate idiom.

4. **Salve Regina** (Hail to the Queen Who Reigns Above)

The chant Raff employs for the fourth antiphon is not the one found in the *Antiphonale*, even though an *Salve Regina* chant is printed on Page 56, right after *Regina Coeli*. As mentioned earlier, Raff’s chant source was composed by eleventh-century composer Hermann von Reichenau, and is set in the Ionian mode on “C,” which Raff again transposes to F major. Of the four antiphons, Raff’s use of von Reichenau’s chant is closer to the entirety of the original than is the case with any of the others.

Raff’s basic gambit in this antiphon is to imitate the Italian polychoral antiphony, most directly by division of the now eight-part chorus into two groups (S1-S2-S3-A and T1-T2-B1-B2). Each of the seven sections of the piece begins with a fully harmonized, homophonic statement of the given chant phrase by the women’s choir, immediately answered with a literal repetition in the men’s choir. During the men’s answer, the women engage in free counterpoint to decorate the men’s answering statement. This last point is of greatest interest because it presents simultaneously two rather diametrically opposed kinds of musical texture — one polyphonic, the other not.

The Four Antiphons, together with *Ave Maria*, reveal an aspect of neo-classicism that is virtually unique. Imitation of the Baroque, which began with Raff and became a mainstay of twentieth century music, has not thus far inspired an equivalent movement developing an idiom that borrows elements directly from the Renaissance, the Middle Ages, the *Ars Nova*, or *Ars Antiqua*. Raff’s efforts to look further back in Order to move forward remain without any imitators or followers at all.

Pater Noster (Our Father). Motet for eight-voice unaccompanied chorus, WoO 32 (1869)

The term “motet” first appears in the 13th century in connection with some of the earliest examples of contrapuntal music and exemplified by the Notre Dame School of Léonin and Perotin. Essentially, it involved the superimposition of one voice (with corresponding text) over another, one in measured rhythm following the superimposed text, the other in the long, arhythmical pitches derived from a Gregorian chant. The form continued to develop throughout the Middle Ages, reaching its peak during the Renaissance, although its character changed altogether during that three hundred years. Although the term persists to this day, its primary, post-Medieval definition is: a choral work with liturgical or religious text not necessarily associated with a specific liturgical function, with musical episodes alternating between imitative counterpoint and more generally homophonic writing. As we have already seen, this generic technical description could easily be applied to Raff’s other choral music, were it not for the fact that the choice of texts, together with their more specific liturgical associations and musical sources, tends to inform their content and method.

From its first measures, Raff’s *Pater Noster* (Our Father) appears to belong to that element in nineteenth-century composition which eschewed complex polyphony by restricting its counterpoint to simpler means. Unlike the eight-part, double chorus of *Salve Regina*, there is no real antiphonal writing in *Pater Noster* - rather, Raff constructs a free-flowing work for eight voices which does indeed alternate between imitative and homophonic writing. Raff’s handling of the chorus in this piece closely resembles the dialectical methods he generally employed in his orchestral pieces, in that there is much imitative byplay among all the voices. At 159 measures, it is the longest and most elaborate of his works for unaccompanied chorus.

Pater Noster was published for the first time in 2004 by Edition Nordstern and receives its first recorded performance here.

Ave Maria. Motet for eight-voice unaccompanied (double) chorus, WoO 33 (1869)
Raff's G major setting of *Ave Maria*, like the other a cappella choral works on this recording, was neither publicly performed during his lifetime, nor contemporaneously published. The first printed edition of the piece appeared in 1999 from Edition Nordstern, and the performance captured here constitutes its recorded premiere, as well.

Even a cursory comparison of any of Palestrina's settings of *Ave Maria* to Raff's demonstrates how Raff imitated Palestrina's compositional method. Written for a double chorus consisting of S-S-T-B / S-S-T-B, Raff's *Ave Maria* features his use of dovetailed (slightly overlapping) antiphonal choruses, hewing closely to Palestrina's example. While he intentionally avoids Lisztian harmonic shifts (which, in any case, would have been stylistically inconsistent with the motets otherwise sixteenth-century idiom), Raff does wander off harmonically to places that Palestrina and his contemporaries would likely never have dared to go! Despite that, however, Raff maintains enough of the flavor of the period to make his subtle harmonic liberties less obvious and keep matters wholly in the eclectic spirit of melding disparate elements together.

Formally, Raff divides the text into five sections, as follows:

*Ave Maria, gratia plena
Dominus, tecum!*
(Hail Mary, full of grace;
The Lord is with thee!)

There is close alternation between the two choruses, where the alternation appears to be repetition, but not a literal one. After three such entrances, all eight voices unify in imitative counterpoint, until the first full cadence in G major.

*Benedicta tu in mulieribus,
(Blessed art thou among women.)*

The second chorus begins the second section with the sound of its four voices entering in strict imitation of each other to create a single phrase longer than that in the first section of the piece. The first chorus follows without overlapping the second chorus for a similar length before all voices unite imitatively. All told, the second section is shorter by several measures than the first, but, like the first, it cadences in G major.

*et benedictus fructus
ventris tui: Jesus!*
(and blessed is the fruit
of thy womb: Jesus!)

The third section alters the nature of the antiphonal writing by joining the tenors and basses of both choruses in opposition to the sopranos of the two choruses. As before, there is alternation between the groups before they join together. This section cadences in E minor.

*Sancta Maria, Mater Dei,
ora pro nobis peccatoribus,
(Holy Mary, Mother of God,*

Pray for us sinners,)

The fourth section sees rapid alternation between the antiphonal and the more unified choral writing. It also passes through a number of distantly related tonal areas (from the perspective of the sixteenth century) before ultimately cadencing in E major.

nunc et in hora mortis nostrae.

(Now and at the hour of our death.)

As might be expected in the works of a nineteenth-century composer, the references to death prompt Raff to shift to minor tonalities, particularly the tonic minor (G), before gradually working his way back to G major and the obligatory addition of "Amen", exactly as in the *Te Deum* and *De Profundis*. The final section is, by and large, nearly twice as long as any of the previous four.

The composition of pieces that follow the examples of Palestrina and Fux, although representing a creative anomaly in Raff's work *per se*, may, aside from any question of self-study, also have served as demonstration pieces for his composition students, in whom a mastery of species counterpoint would have been expected and normal. Raff's pieces written after this time do have their sixteenth-century moments - for example, significant portions of the second movement of the orchestral suite *Aus Thuringen*, the opening of his Ninth Symphony, and the first movement of the late cantata *Die Sterne* (Sterling CD CDS-1089-2), all benefited directly from Raff's explorations of Palestrinian counterpoint.

The years between 1866 and 1869 saw the composition of five of Raff's major works with orchestra: two operas (*Die Parole* [1867-68], WoO 54, and *Dame Kobold*, Opus 154 [1869]), the liturgical choral work *De Profundis*, Opus 141, and two symphonies (Symphony No.2, Opus 140 [1866], and Symphony No.3 (*Im Walde*), Opus 153 [1879]). That Raff's attention should turn to the Italian Renaissance, seemingly in such diametrical opposition to the verdant romanticism of his principal works of the time - should surprise no one, except to demonstrate once again how adept Raff was at addressing very different compositional problems and projects with a consistent degree of focus and concentration despite their wildly divergent ways and means.

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