

SYMPHONY No.11 IN A Minor Op.214

Der Winter

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 score to Raff's Symphony No.11 lay finished six years prior to its composer's death and, as was mentioned previously, was the first of the four symphonies in the cycle *Die Jahreszeiten* to be written. It may have been Raff's intention to follow the normal regard for the appearance of the seasons by allowing the Eighth to begin the publication of the series and to indeed simply hold back *Der Winter* until the other three had been published. While not unreasonable there are greater suspicions pointing to Raff's unhappiness with the Winter Symphony and this writer chooses to believe that Raff would have revised the score before publishing it had he lived longer. It is entirely possible that such intentions were even intimated to such disciples as Louis Lüstner and Max Erdmannsdörfer. At any rate the published score indicates *revised and edited* by Erdmannsdörfer; how much editing was necessary and how much revision was done will remain unknown until Raff's manuscript surfaces. As the work stands it is seriously unbalanced, not so much in its formal outline - it contains the same number and sequence of movements as the others in the cycle - but in matters of movemental proportion and the materials utilized in supporting their design. It is, in toto, the weakest of the Seasons' cycle and, with the exception of Symphony No.6 in D minor, the weakest in Raff's entire series of symphonies, though not as marred as No.6. *Der Winter* evinces qualities which make it seem more related to Symphonies Nos.6 and 7 - the symphonies which immediately precede it - than to its companions in the cycle, this despite the fact that it shares *Urmotive* and may indeed have been the place of origin for them. It is interesting to note how the inspiration decreases from one movement to another: in the first movement Raff presents music of the highest quality and equal for the most part to materials in the movements paralleling it in the companion symphonies of the cycle; the scherzo is a strange affair and arouses the greatest number of questions concerning revisions though musically it is satisfactory; the slow movement manages to become interminable and is out of proportion with what precedes it, the materials being of a sentimental nature difficult to accommodate today; the *Finale* is, with the *Finale* of the Sixth Symphony, possibly the weakest symphonic movement by Raff with materials so trite as to be embarrassing. These assessments however must be tempered by realization that next to weak passages come completely satisfactory ones, that amidst note-spinning and senseless sequential writing passages of eloquence or power do emerge and the symphony did have its champions, Goepf in his book on the symphony chose it before any of the others in the cycle and placed it with the *Im Walde* and *Lenore*; in the United States at least it seems to have enjoyed a greater number of performances than any of the other symphonies from *Die Jahreszeiten*.

The first performance of *Der Winter* took place in Wiesbaden under Louis Lüstner on 21 February 1883. The critical reaction was lukewarm and Helene Raff mentions that "... even one of Raff's most faithful disciples, Louis Lüstner, had his reservations concerning this work." What is not clear is whether Lüstner's reaction was based on a performance of the unrevised manuscript or the edition prepared for publication by Erdmannsdörfer.

The first movement of *Der Winter* Symphony (A minor, Allegro, 4/4) bears the title *Der erste Schnee* (The First Snow) and, like all of the first movements in cycle, is remarkable for orchestral coloration and mood setting. The very opening - octave A' in the oboes against

the first theme in octaves from the bassoons - is startlingly original: Ex.1 [not extant]. The octave Ur motive is obviously present from the beginning and it should be noted that the bassoon theme has in its *Kopfmotiv* the compass of a minor third, another of the *Urmotive* which permeate the cycle. The music then "shivers" on a dominant seventh chord in the strings, Ex.1 is repeated in the woodwinds, the strings "shiver" again, the clarinets "swirl" and, a few measures after letter A the main theme of the *Allegro* enters in the low register of the solo flute supported by pizzicato triplets in the lower strings and sustained harmonies in the clarinets: Ex.2 [not extant]. As simple as this may seem, this passage is one of the most haunting bits of music in the last four symphonies of Raff, dolorous, melancholy and beautiful in proportion; indeed the long notes featured in the construction of this melody stand in great contrast to any of the main themes from the companion movements of the Seasons. Letter B brings back Ex.1 in diminished form in the woodwinds against the hollow octave tremolo of the strings; the music shivers once again and the *pizzicato* triplets of the lower strings are replaced by eighth-note *arpeggio* figures as Ex.2 returns at letter C in the strings in a manner highly reminiscent of Brahms (Fourth Symphony, first movement). At letter D a new motive enters, marchlike in character and, with the accompanying clarinet runs, suggestive of Tchaikovsky once again: Ex.3 [not extant]. This motive vies with Ex.2 for preeminence up to letter E, at which point both are dismissed and another motive is introduced which, after being wedded to Ex.3 emerges as a triumphant march for full orchestra: Ex.4 [not extant], at the end of which the minor mode suddenly intrudes and the icy image of Ex.1 returns in diminished form. Letter H brings a transitional passage notable for the counterpoint involved: Ex.5 [not extant] and the music almost comes to a standstill, "freezes" perhaps, in the half-note modulatory sequence which leads to a fugal passage for the strings based on Ex.2. At letter J Ex.2 is fragmented and a dialog ensues between the woodwinds and strings with the pendle-motive emerging clearly during the proceedings. At letter K the dialog moves to the extremes of the orchestra (trombones added to cellos and double basses) and an eighth note *tremolo* pattern emerges in the violins, again very suggestive of Tchaikovsky. What takes place between letters K and M is one of those passages in which Raff truly exhibits genius: the means are extraordinary simple: a modulatory scheme, the pendle-motive, fragments of Ex.2 and the running tremolo pattern are utilized to prepare the full restatement of Ex.2; the music relies completely on instrumental color and when, at letter M, Ex.2 returns with new accents from trumpet and tympani, the music acquires a depth and beauty which must hold all but the most recalcitrant and contrary of listeners. At letter N a sustained *forte* passage in the orchestra brings back Ex.1 in its original (undiminished form) now stated with the added portentous weight of horns and trombones. Eventually this subsides and, to the most delicate background, coloration (including triangle) Raff playfully develops the *Kopfmotiv* of Ex.1: Ex.6 [not extant].

As this motive is playfully passed around the woodwinds in diminished form, the sixteenth note accompaniment of violas blossoms into a recognizable scalar pattern from Ex.3, which itself is not long in coming. There is a long crescendo passage based on these materials which, as it gathers momentum, becomes ever more suggestive of the march-scherzo in Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique* symphony, though ultimately Raff chooses another course, as is evidenced, by a lessening of tension between letter Q and letter R when Ex.4 begins its return. Between letters R and S this march material is presented with a great deal of chromatic coloration, particularly in the basest instruments of the orchestra. The march however is more playful than forceful and when the final climax comes at letter T it is simply the harmonic release (A major) which surprises. As before this march motive suddenly parts at the appearance of the minor mode and Raff repeats, at letter U, essentially what took place from letter G to I. At letter V he makes a move which at first seems to hint that he is about to repeat the buildup to the march passage once again, a sensation enhanced by the sixteenth note motion in the violas; to be sure the dotted rhythm motive from Ex.3 begins to protrude and is challenged at letter W by what seems to be new fugal material: Ex.7 [not extant], which however doesn't last long on the scene. At letter X the horns hint at the return of Ex.2 and the general motion begins to increase throughout the orchestra with Raff relying very heavily on modulatory sequence and the dotted rhythm motive of Ex.3 to maintain

the momentum. The climax of this crescendo takes place at letter Y where one expects the music to lead into a full statement of Ex.3 once again, but there Raff surprises the listener and with full orchestra states Ex.2 in a marchlike manner in major mode, the first and only time in the movement that it is given such realization and the maneuver is truly startling. Equally startling is the sudden plunge into A minor at letter Z and the statement of Ex.3 in the minor mode - a truly "chilling" aural experience. Letter Aa returns Ex.1 in its diminished, form, and the momentum begins to subside. The woodwinds indulge in antiphonal runs and this is answered by a last reminiscence of Ex.1 in its original form played by second violins and celli in unison against sustained harmonies. A sudden rush of sixteenth notes in pyramid pattern against the clanging of the triangle forms a coda and the first movement of the Winter Symphony is brought to a swift conclusion.

The second movement, *Allegretto*, A major, 2/4 bears no title. That presents the first question about this strange little movement. Whether Raff had a title in mind and never put it down or whether Max Erdmannsdörfer simply didn't retain one that was already there we shall perhaps never know, but the fact remains it is the only Scherzo among the symphonies in the cycle *Die Jahreszeiten* that doesn't have some superscription. Raff was consequent about three things in this symphony cycle: each first movement was given to the description of something related to nature at the time of year to which the symphony is dedicated; each last movement was given over to a human undertaking apparent for the time of year; inasmuch as the other three *scherzi* of the Seasons' cycle were dedicated to supernatural phenomena which Raff regarded as relative to each season it seems likely that this *Scherzo* to the Winter Symphony also had a title conjuring a supernatural idea, perhaps frost elves and ice giants or something similar. The music itself seems to suggest something at first elfin and then finally something more ponderous. Though it is not of the gruff nature of *Gespensterreigen* in the Autumn Symphony it certainly does not possess the wild gestures of the *Walpurgisnacht* in *Frühlingsklänge* or the fleet and airy orchestration of the *scherzo* to the Summer Symphony. It is the shortest of all the *scherzi* in the symphony cycle and it is formally perplexing rather than formally complex, an *intermezzo* rather than a true *scherzo* and a rather free form at that.

The movement begins with a theme which borders on the trite: Ex.1 [not extant]. At letter A there is every indication that the embroidery indicates a variations movement what with the interplay among the woodwinds and the outlines of Ex.1 fairly obvious to the eye if not to the ear. Letter B, with addition of horns presents yet another variant of Ex.1 and the delicate antiphonies between strings and woodwinds to the pulse of the horns is sheer aural delight. Letter C brings sextuplet roulades and more dialog this time between first violins and flutes only, but Ex.1 is recognizably present. Letter D gives Ex.1 to the oboes (pair) and flutes though now the harmonies change considerably. Letter E shows Ex.1 still present but a chromatic element enters, heretofore not present. A change from major mode to minor is preceded by a new theme: Ex.2 [not extant], which is interesting for its inclusion of the tritone. At letter F in A minor, there is a minor mode version of the beginning of the movement and the interplay among instruments is repeated though now the strings present this strange and important motive: Ex.3 [not extant]. At letter G Ex.2 takes over completely and intertwines with Ex.3. Following a short crescendo the orchestra, glows with some of Raff's most extraordinary orchestration as Ex.2, now in a most consonant guise, dominates the music (C major) only to disappear in the chromatic swash of sound (Ex.2) at letter I and reappear shortly thereafter in minor mode. Letter J brings reminiscences of the first movement and Ex.2 provides the transition; Ex.3 returns in pure E minor and then, with a reminiscence (or premonition) of similar gestures in other symphonies of the cycle the strings give out: Ex.4 [not extant], after which A minor is reestablished and Ex.1 comes limping back in the woodwinds. A shift into A minor permits the first violins a final statement of Ex.1 (minor mode) and the ghostly pulsations of the tympani provide an *ostinato* which, serving as an accompaniment to Ex.2 (in non-tritone form), leads to a final swell of orchestra sound in A major. Two pianissimo chord for high woodwinds and a final pizzicato unison A brings this unusual movement to its conclusion.

If there was ever a movement in Raff which deserved the characterization *Biedermeier* it is the third movement of the Winter Symphony. Described as *Am Kamin* (By the Fireside) this slow movement (*Larghetto*, 6/8 F major) is worthy of inclusion with the most notoriously sentimental salon pieces of the composer. Raff's expertise in matters of orchestration is to be felt throughout the movement as is his knowledge of counterpoint, harmonic maneuver and that almost indefinable sense of nuance which marks him as nothing less than a master. Yet the material in the movement is almost without contrast thematically speaking and the relentlessly even pacing in the pulse of the music is genuinely soporific. It is perhaps exactly what Raff wanted: A musical remembrance of a cold day's work, the cheeks rosy from the frosty air, the body succumbing to the lovely warmth of the fire and sleep. As a musical experience for today it is just too long to be indulged no matter how accurate the tone painting of the poetic intent. The movement opens with the following bassoon solo; the rhythm of the strings setting up exactly that pulsation which enervates the attention: Ex.1 [not extant]. This is treated in canon among bassoons, horn, and oboes. A "variation" occurs somewhat later with flutes and strings and this leads at letter A to an accompanimental pattern which Raff later weds to the following theme : Ex.2 [not extant] in the violins. The rhythmic outline between Ex.2 and Ex.1 is barely perceptible and is one of the objectionable elements in the material. At letter B the intrusion of the tritone in the melodic material awakens the possibility of some relationship between this movement and the scherzo, but eventually the outlines of Ex.1 return to dispel the idea of surprise. The sixteenth note figure of the bass is the only element which keeps the interest going and it is in the bass that the important harmonic elements are introduced as the upper voices continue their unrelieved sequential treatment of fragments of material from previous examples. The octave motive intrudes in the horns just before letter D and a somewhat interesting motive emerges in the strings: Ex.3 [not extant]. The chromatic unrest in the voice leading is something shared with the *Ekloge* movement of the Summer Symphony. A climax is soon reached and the music settles back, at letter E, to the general comfort of the beginning, (G major), a comfort not easily surrendered, as is witnessed at letter F when the tonality returns to the opening F major. It is at this point that the objectionable occurs: Raff insists on using this material again (Exs.1,2,3) and the movement spins out to almost 16 minutes duration, a burden of existence which the material cannot sustain. The subtle changes which occur do mask the fact that Raff is here simply a master of cliché. The chirpings of the woodwinds at letter H do little to awaken interest; from an analytical standpoint they simply show Raff repeating his "b" section in this movement and relying on sequence in the melodic material to extend the proceedings. The gentle weaving of the celli (sixteenth note figuration) add a certain weight at letter I and the chromatic extension in the melodic line does afford a bit of relief; certainly the climax at letter J and the sudden change in dynamic level (*pianissimo*) when the strings reach high in their register is most affecting as is the haunting horn call before letter K and the appearance of the octave motive in answer. The stillness is broken at letter K and the sustained mood disturbed (letter K could have provided a good place to end the movement) but Raff introduces new motion and builds to another climax utilizing Ex.2, a climax which seems superfluous. Letter L brings a return, of Ex.1 in the home key of F major. A short coda in which the tritone is prominent once again rocks the movement to a gentle close.

For reasons not apparent to this writer, Goepf found the *Finale* of the Winter Symphony - *Carneval* - the most interesting. The most unique things about it is the fact that it is a rondo and that the coda - the only one among the symphonies in the cycle - brings back the material of the first movement in a final peroration and thus gives a semblance of unity within the symphony itself. The opening of the movement begins with the following gesture: Ex.1 [not extant], hardly a theme of outstanding contour. Letter A brings a steady eighth note pulsation in the double basses: Ex.2a [not extant], which must be considered the first part of a theme which is completed (after all the strings except first violins have entered in canon at the octave) by the woodwinds: Ex. 2b [not extant]. Letter B brings a chordal theme: Ex.3 [not extant] given out by the upper voices of the orchestra and then, with these taking up the eighth note pulse of Ex.2a, exchanged with the lower voices of the orchestra. Letter G brings a repetition of this material with added fanfares from the brass. Letter D brings back

Ex.2 in both its components from which the following is derived: Ex.4 [not extant] and tossed about the orchestra until letter D at which point the tonality shifts to E major and a fugal theme, also derived from Ex.2, is introduced: Ex.5 [not extant].

After a fugal exposition a general crescendo ensues which reaches its climax at letter G. To speak of a "new" theme at this point is not quite correct; the steady outlines of Ex.2 a are given the barest variation (accent shifts) and the trombones underscore the proceedings with the following chromatic line: Ex.6 [not extant] to which is subsequently added Ex.3. As the orchestra din subsides a transition is to the home key of A major and there is a recall between letters H-J of the passage between A-C at the beginning of the movement. At letter J Raff manages to afford some relief from the steady eighth note pulsation of Ex.2 a (which has permeated the proceedings up to this point) by changing the meter from 2/4 to 3/4. Alas, the new theme which emerges is itself suffused with the 8th note motion: Ex.7 [not extant]. The transition to the return of the 2/4 meter has a charming dialog between strings and flutes and clarinets which is featured up to letter M where the meter does indeed change. A modulation back to A major brings back Ex.1 and at letter N, high in the woodwinds there is a canonic treatment of Ex.2a and, to be sure, Ex.2b begins to emerge, From letter O to P there is a repetition of the passage from letter D to E and thereupon, without the previous transition, Ex.5 is given further treatment. Letter Q brings back the trombone passage (Ex.6) and the general orchestra melee continues until interrupted twice by a recall of material from the beginning of the first movement, though it is a transitional idea from that movement rather than one of the themes. A move into E flat major and a change of meter to 6/8 brings a new section and a new theme: Ex.8 [not extant], which is the nadir of Raff's inspiration. What ensues between letters R and T is music so trite as to irritate. Some listeners may find the music acceptably playful, perhaps because of the grace note figure which pits octave and pendle motives against Ex.8, others, such as this writer, will probably find the passage just plain silly. Considering also the fact that the music in the movement has been going on for quite some while this 6/8 section adds little but length. At letter T the triplet feeling leaves the music and a section ensues in which elements of Exs.2 and 3 are assembled as counterpoints to one another. Fanfares from the brass add a bit of refreshment to the eighth note motion of Ex.2a and there is the expectation that a coda is about to ensue. Raff instead inserts a *decrescendo* and at letter U Ex.3 returns. Finally, at letter V, Raff begins the coda and it is indeed worthwhile even if it doesn't eradicate the waywardness of what has preceded nor alleviate the general impression of flaccid maneuver. Via the diminished form of the *Kopfmotiv* of Ex.1 from the first movement, the octave motive ringing from the flutes, and the brass and tympani adding exciting rhythmic punctuation, the music builds up to a superb climax at letter W when the brass bring in Ex.1 from the first movement now in augmented form and in the major mode - the first time for each in regard to the motive, and the first movement and *Finale* are linked together. The return of the eighth note motion from Ex.2a at letter X brings a superfluous transition to the coda which begins at letter Y. From that point on Raff is at the peak of his inspiration in the movement. To the insistent eighth note *ostinato* on the tympani alone Ex.3 returns throughout the orchestra in augmented form for its final peroration. Although the remainder of the movement is based almost exclusively on the eighth note motion of Ex.2a, it is utilized in such a way as to engender nothing but excitement and indeed, to anyone hearing this final passage in Raff's Winter Symphony, the first image to be awakened will most likely be the very end of the Tchaikovsky Fourth Symphony. The last measures of the Winter Symphony bring back the very opening gesture (Ex.1) and the symphony ends joyously.