Joseph Joachim Raff  
(b. Lachen near Zurich, 27 May 1822 - d. Frankfurt/Main, 24 June 1882)

Cavatina pour Violon et Piano op .85 No. 3  
Arrangement pour Violon avec Accompagnement d’Orchestre  
par Edmund Singer (1831 - 1912)

Albert Schäfer’s Chronologisch-systematisches Verzeichnis der Werke Joachim Raff’s  
(1888, edited and updated by Mark Thomas of The Joachim Raff Society), lists no less  
than eighteen works for Violin solo (with piano or orchestral accompaniment) by Joachim  
Raff. These works include 2 Concerti, a Suite, and a Konzertstück, all with orchestral  
accompaniment, 10 Sonatilles (single movement sonatinas derived, more or less, from  
Raff’s Opus 99 Three Sonatilles for piano), 5 full length violin and piano sonatas, a  
umber of shorter collections or single movement duos and fantasias, and the Six  
Morceaux. Of all these works (to say absolutely nothing of the remainder of Raff’s  
catalogue of nearly 300 compositions), it is the last named, indeed, the third movement  
of that piece, which has almost single handedly kept Raff’s name alive since his death in  
1882.

At the height of his career, Joachim Raff was one of the most widely performed and  
respected composers of his day. That his life and work fell into total eclipse within a  
generation after his passing is a remarkable, indeed almost unbelievable statement in and  
of itself. Curiously, for almost a century, the sole composition to have survived this  
absolute collapse and eradication, the Cavatina movement of his Opus 85, has itself been  
the object of every conceivable kind of transcription and arrangement. An earlier  
measure of the popularity of this movement can be shown by the fact that the piece was  
known to have been in the repertoire of the Piano Quintet that performed on the ill-fated  
maiden voyage of the R.M.S. Titanic (before it, the Titanic, that is, sank in April, 1912)!  
However, it is the first and most important of these transcriptions that forms the basis of  
the text of the present volume which replicates Fr. Kistner’s first edition of Edmund  
Singer’s orchestral arrangement.

The Cavatina is the third of a set of brief, compactly written duos for violin and piano  
that Raff composed under the collective title Six Morceaux. The titles of the six  
movements, Marcia, Pastorale, Cavatina, Scherzino, Canzona, Tarantella, all Italianate  
forms (even if the music is squarely mainstream mid-century German) suggests, perhaps,  
that Raff was aiming both for as broad an audience as well as wide a range of  
performance opportunities as possible. All of the pieces, however, are excellent examples  
of Raff’s art in miniature. They display Raff’s predilection for concise thematic  
exposition, careful but colorful harmonization along with concurrent, extensive  
development, even within the confines of performance times that average four minutes  
apiece.

The set was composed in Wiesbaden in 1859, and dedicated to Louis (Ludwig) Strauss(s)  
(1836 - 99), a leading violin virtuoso of the time. The score was first issued by  
Kistner/Leipzig in January, 1862.

Edmund Singer (1831 - 1912), who prepared the orchestral version of the Cavatina, was  
another well known violinist of the period. Singer was konzertmeister of Liszt’s Weimar
orchestra in 1854 when Raff was acting as Liszt’s factotum (1850-1855). He was also the dedicatee of Raff’s Konzertstück for violin and orchestra La Fée d’amour, Opus 67 (1854), and, as such, would have been intimately familiar both with Raff’s idiom in general as well as with his approach to the violin in particular.

The D-major Cavatina is simplicity itself. At seventy-two measures in length, there is hardly time or space for much more than a statement of a melody, its slight but clear development along with a modified recapitulation. Within this restricted venue, Singer takes Raff’s very straightforward composition and adds to it the barest minimum of orchestral substance and color. The result, in this case, is a virtual miniature concerto movement. The original piece consists of little more than the violin’s melody accompanied by the simplest of harmonic support. The central developmental episode tends to wander somewhat away from the primary key of D major, but not by very much at all. Indeed, the tessitura of the accompaniment (in both Raff’s original and Singer’s fairly literal transcription) hardly ever rises above that of the violin, and largely stays below the first octave above middle-C. As if to emphasize this by keeping the orchestral color fairly neutral, Singer’s orchestra consists of 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 2 horns, timpani and strings.

While orchestral strings pluck their arpeggiated accompanimental figures, the winds provide the equivalent of the original piano’s sostenuto pedal – thus leaving the solo violin with a wide open field in which to display its sentimental melody. Later, as the strings make a convenient switch to arco, occasional tremolandi along with supporting rumbles from the timpani and thickened woodwind textures, help to increase the tension thereby bringing the piece to its very telescoped climax. In the end, it is the violin on its low D, with a soft, sustained D major chord in the winds framed by discrete pizzicato strings that brings to piece to a quiet conclusion.

Dr. Avrohom Leichtling, 2004
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For performance material please contact the publisher Kistner & C.F.W. Siegel & Co., Cologne.

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