

JOACHIM RAFF

Elegie for large orchestra

WoO 48

Originally, the third movement of the Symphony No. 10 "At Autumn Time" op.213

Joachim Raff was not a composer accustomed to wrestling with the concept of expression in his music. He admittedly would never have tolerated any accusation of sloppy construction - the rebuttal being reference to his formal perfection in all matters technical. It would have seemed to him equally absurd to leave a beautiful idea underdeveloped and intentionally not make use of its potential to charm. Raff's music is seldom conflict laden, but it is in no way impersonal.

At present there is only a limited number of examples of Raff's creativity available in manuscript, and where it is at all possible to compare sketches and final manuscript versions with printed versions, there are only selected instances where working methods come to the fore. Raff exhibited a keen instinct for the architectonics of his designs and the technical requirements of his music. He distinguishes himself from contemporaries like Liszt and Brahms in one regard especially, for once a score was finished and published, it was history for him. Reworkings came only from outside necessity, and this may be witnessed in the piano works Opp.2-14 when Breitkopf und Härtel, after relatively long deliberation and lack of contact with Raff, considered their reprinting. Raff's response was not exactly that of correcting things in the by then decades old compositions, but rather, of composing entirely new works which, in consideration of dimension and formal undertaking, were actually substitutes for the original piano pieces.

The case under consideration here is only marginally different. The Elegy belongs to a project which had been diligently pursued since 1876. A four-part symphony cycle was to incorporate an amalgamation of sensitivities associated with the four seasons. At the time Raff had reached his 54th year and was at the pinnacle of his career. The years of being financially strapped were past, for his music was being played everywhere. The altered circumstances stimulated him with the necessary confidence to undertake the grand dimensions of the project.

The downbeat came in the spring of 1876 with the composition of the *Winter* Symphony, which went unpublished during the composer's lifetime and appeared posthumously as his Symphony No. 11. Given wing by its completion however, Raff continued onward and finished the next symphony installment, *Frühlingsklänge* (Sounds of Spring), and published it immediately. Then two more years were to pass before *Sommer* (Summer) made its appearance in the series. Only an Autumn Symphony was missing at the end of 1878, but this was delayed because of Raff's duties as the director of the new Hoch Conservatory in Frankfurt. It took another year before the final installment was supplied, the last in his career as symphonist, *Zur Herbstzeit* (At Autumn Time) which, like its companions, was in four movements. Following the weighty first movement in the home key of F minor, there follows a scherzo-like Dance of the Spectres, then an elegy and a finale with a seasonably appropriate coloration of a hunt.

Traditional formal concepts are wed to bourgeois genre types here as in the other symphonies of the Seasons´ series and which, through occasional examples in the orchestral coloration, allow, rather than inhibit, the listener´s powers of association to take flight.

Louis Lüstner premiered the new work in Wiesbaden on December 11, 1880. Directly thereafter Raff began revising his manuscript. In the *Lexikon der Konzertliteratur* (Lexicon of Concert Repertoire), Leipzig, 1908, p. 392, Theodor Müller-Reuter supplies comment on the revision via a letter by Raff to Lüstner: „I´ve composed a completely new third movement for it (the 10th Symphony) and in addition, the last 8 pages of the finale as well). In the biography of her father Helene Raff maintains that Raff took on the changes because of aesthetic considerations by his wife: „The third movement Elogy impressed Frau Raff as being too pathetic ... in the Elogy he (Raff) had intended to invoke the grand majesty of autumn coloration and the passionate explosion of soulful emotions engendered thereby. The idea, that this might affect a response too filled with conscious pathos, disturbed him and so he substituted another elegy for the original, one which fills the design gently in muted tones ; the one composed first only appeared later in print as an independent orchestral piece.“ (P.214) This last sentence contains an error however, for up to now there has never been a printed edition of this movement, even though one may have been planned.

As was typical for Raff, he was not content here with simply redoing details and the result was a new movement all things considered. A few conceptual jumping off points were retained from the first version however, and though this is not the place for detailed comparisons of the two elegies, juxtaposing the two versions does show a genuine relationship between the compositions. Among characteristics **common** to the movements is the disposition to begin the music with an intentionally similar, rhythmically swinging orchestral unit, piano. In each an oboe melody is featured at the beginning, followed by a new idea elaborated somewhat before the opening melody returns with the home key. A contrasting middle section is initiated with variants in major mode and built to a climax filled with pathos. After returning to the dominant, material of the opening reoccurs, albeit somewhat abbreviated. The ending in both movements is arresting, for before the final chords an outburst in dynamic extremes is inserted. **Differences** are accounted first in the choice of tonality, but extend considerably this. Basically one may state that the final version is in a varying degree presented in a more „straightforward“ manner. That stands in reference as much to the application of individual meters as to formal, instrumental and expressive factors, which can be set forth as follows.

Tonality.

First version: C minor.

Second version: C-sharp minor (which builds to final appearance through a tonal variant).

Meter.

First version alternates between 4/4 and 3/4.

Second version is completely 4/4.

Formal construction.

First version is a sort of rondo form with the outline ABAC. After the beginning a dominating pattern emerges and combines motivic elements from A, B and C. Eight measures before the end a repeat of the major mode refrain is hinted at, but is nevertheless altered after three measures as a sort of coda.

Second version is practically analogous with the formal model ABAC. Here also a sectional pattern dominates in which thematic particells from A and B are included. With material from B, Raff argues for a tonal reprise (C-sharp major after letter F) in which, via the subdominant, motivic material from A re-enters. Such formal maneuvering in this version rests more strongly on conventions of rondo than in the previous version, despite abbreviations in the reprise - the character of the movement thus has little in common with typical rondo outlook.

Tempo.

First version: Adagio non troppo lento; quarter note equals 112. The only other general performance indication later on is Maestoso during a section in C major, where the intent is more a change in the character of the music than of the basic tempo.

Second version: Adagio; eighth note equals 116. No tempo modifications are notated. In view of Raff's often evident pedantic streak, that may seem somewhat contradictory, but it is evidence also for his self-assuredness: the music is comprehensible without added explanatory commentary. The variance of design among thematic components and the change of dynamics in orchestral usage account for a texture which can in no way be considered as representative of one and the same tempo throughout.

Orchestration.

First version: 3 Flutes, 2 Oboes, 2 Clarinets, 2 Bassoons, 4 Horns, 2 Trumpets, 3 Trombones, Tympani, Strings.

Second version: 3 Flutes, 2 Oboes, 2 Clarinets, 2 Bassoons, 2 Horns, Strings.

One should take into consideration that the first version calls for more brass and tympani. Major points in part A are emphasized by string configurations, altered internally with chords both plucked and bowed. Against such background clarinets and oboes present thematic material. Imitation, which permeates section B, brings in the orchestra gradually and with effective intensification. After a single reprise a tutti is required in the subsequent contrasting C section. Raff does not use the flutes in the three levels of motivic confrontation of this movement.

In consideration of the second version, on the other hand, Raff has taken care in reducing his orchestral forces and eliminates the largesse of brass, using the strings for exposition of the movement's thematic elements. Only later do oboes take up material already presented by the strings and nothing original of their own. The main theme of the B section is given to the celli before the oboes lay claim to it. The return to section A presents the initial orchestral tutti, clearly more moderate than its parallel in the first version. The second orchestral climax occurs in the middle of section C, but is more sudden in its termination when compared to that of the first version and its more extended margins. The orchestral ensemble of the second version basically allows for a more softly contoured sound portrait (see the above quotation by Helene Raff).

Dynamic considerations.

First version: a wavelike motion in the dynamic outlay begins softly and leads to powerful outbursts. For the large orchestra here Raff indicates only forte at the climaxes which, every now and then, is intensified for a few measures to fortissimo.

In the *Second Version* not even forte is required for the first half of the movement (ABA) and even at C this dynamic is reached merely in passing during the tutti section. Only in the final formal section do dynamic exertions occur, among them a crescendo taken over from the first version, which comes shortly before the end. Raff then binds diminished orchestral resources and the softer direction of line to a more tightly controlled staggering of dynamics, which conductors who take up both versions will have to consider, for relationship of the orchestral forces to dynamic requirements begs comparison.

The two elegies are comparable to one another in many respects and study of the second version might make it easier to reconstruct Raff's considerations in the period of composition between the two. A value judgment more in favor of the one than the other should not be construed from what has been written here. Nevertheless, if one should proceed with analytical comparison, the validity of the term "version" itself might come under question. One thing remains certain however: both elegies for the Symphony *Zur Herbstzeit* (At Autumn Time) are equally worthy of performance and deserve to be played, recorded and broadcast throughout the world.

Matthias Wiegandt, Freiburg, May 2003
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