

RAFF'S "WINTER" SYMPHONY

Allegro. "The First Snow." Convincing, and it seems classic pieces of programme music are Raff's symphonies. It may be set down as generally admitted that they are not descriptive. They help in their own way to settle the nice boundaries of entitled music. What Raff himself intended (or thought he intended) is hardly relevant; it is certainly not conclusive. For if we agree that the power of music comes from its utterance of the unconscious intent, the deliberate purpose of the composer is just what we do not care to know. When we consider that all our perceptions are subjective, surely art, in its permanent expression of them, ought to have that attitude,—above all, that particular art whose medium is invisible.

The first division of our symphony is fragrant with the breath of early winter, with its blended tremor and delight. If we cannot see in every phrase a definite symbol, or even a relevance to the subject, we can always be content with the abounding beauty itself. We cannot quite believe that an interlinear interpretation is, somehow, really essential to the true enjoyment. The feeling of winter is there throughout, however indefinable in words.

Against hollow octaves of oboes sounds the frigid, unhoused theme of the fagots:

Allegro. OBOES.

The image shows two systems of musical notation. The first system is for Oboes and Fagots. The Oboe part is in the upper staff, starting with a treble clef and a common time signature (C). It features a melodic line with a dynamic marking of *p* (piano) and a series of notes with slurs. The Bassoon part is in the lower staff, starting with a bass clef and a common time signature (C). It features a melodic line with a dynamic marking of *p* and a series of notes with slurs. The second system continues the same parts. The Oboe part continues with a melodic line and slurs. The Bassoon part continues with a melodic line and slurs. The word "FAGOTS." is written below the second system.

FAGOTS.

answered by a shrinking murmur of strings. This duet introduces the prettily dreary song of the main melody, first in the flutes, with graceful trip of accompanying strings:

FLUTES AND OBOES.
Espressivo.

mf

pizz. STRINGS.

Though lightly tinged with sadness, it has a strongly human, almost domestic quality, which is rudely shocked by the interrupting strains of the first phrase, figures of hostile nature without, ever answered by the fearful cry of strings, succeeded again by the placid song. Other graphic touches of the unfriendly season are ever breaking into fragments of the melody, chiefly a running phrase in the clarinet, with picking strings and chirping flutes. During one of the strains of the main subject there sound, deep in the basses, rough, hammering blows, rasping against the other harmony, growing louder and fiercer:

VIOLAS AND FAGOTS.

cresc.

BASSES IN STRINGS.

Presently, with unlesened noise, they somehow merge into lines of agreement, and then, with full chorus of each lusty voice, rings out from the very din of the blows a glorious, fervid song that draws all man and nature into its ranks.



If we had to say something wise about meaning (which in music is as bad as the moral of stories), we should guess, say, this. First come rough blasts of the storm, driving man and beast in terror to their lairs. Then, presently, man is seized by the very spirit of the winter; dauntless he revels in the snow; fear itself is turned to run and frolic. But the stirring song, like day, must end. The frosty first theme comes moaning again, and the strings hum in sad harmony. We must never tie ourselves to any story which links our labels of successive phrases. Otherwise we quickly lose the guiding hand of the poet, blinded by our own sense of a preconceived path.

A gloomier hue is cast, of darkening shadows. Night is added to winter. And now the first melody becomes a pious chant in proper fugue, and loses the human note. But the mood grows lighter and brighter. There is more energy in the surrounding figures. Soon the song sounds in all its first fulness of human feeling and of earthly color. Again it ends with the chill strains of the woodwind. Then among symbolic sounds of winter is a new figure in the wood, with humming strings. This is presently doubled in pace, whence it grows cheerily playful, throwing off the cold reserve:



And the earlier running phrase joins in the gambol, growing more boisterous, when suddenly a theme of mysterious meaning sounds in the basses. As it steals nearer, we greet it as the herald of the joyous song. More and more the spirit infects the ranks; all are summoned, and then out bursts again from full throats and hearts the great chanting praise of winter. And now, though all the blasts blow fierce and cold, they but add to the joy of the glad tune. The true climax of all this first act (of the season's drama) is surely where the first melody turns its sad minor to glad major, and, the fierce winds in captive background, crowns all the strife with triumphant joy.

Allegretto. The second movement is the most mysterious, if we must seek for something more definite than the mere "Allegretto," which the poet has written. The want of a title does seem purposed; and so it is almost impertinent to insist on finding it in spite of the poet's intent. But it must be yielded that the provision of title for the whole and for each of the other scenes leaves a natural craving for some enlightenment here.

Surely there is here a lyric episode. That is, after the strife and energy must come a phase of quiet thought. The dramatic element has now subsided. Nothing happens, or very little. Nothing is done. The lyric is definite enough; but it is itself,—not translatable. A quaint song is here for winter evenings, perhaps a ballad, a household glee; for the voices move all

together in four even parts, with marked time, clear tune, and sharp cadence. This is evidently the beginning.

STRINGS
Allegretto.

1st ending.

We might imagine some old *Minne-song* set to the notes. The tune is rehearsed with dainty interplay of two groups of woodwind. The melody is varied with much delicacy, so that when, later, the simple tune reappears, it seems new.

There is in the middle a swelling glide of strings and a whistling of flutes that is very like the howling of the wind without,—even if we must defy the critics. An ominous theme sounds once in the bass:

STRINGS.

poco marcato.

Then the ballad sings in the minor, with changed surroundings,—no longer a simple glee, but a single voice with trembling strings, while others break in with excited refrain. The wind moans and whistles most clearly. The song descends into unearthly scenes of tone and of tale; that warning phrase sounds again and again on high, and in a lull of the storm (in major hue of the latest strain, freed of its tragic dross) a hymn is blown in the clear tones of the trumpets. Very earthly the first song now sounds, as it timidly reappears. But the pious air of the hymn prevails. A ballad we are sure it is, with cheerful beginning and terrible haps, ending somehow in heaven.

Larghetto. "Am Camin." "At the fireside" saves us much thinking. But we must have guessed it. How like members of the family the voices steal into the deeply enchanting melody, each appearing somehow after joining unobserved in the circle!

FAGOTS. *cantando.*
Larghetto.

p
pizz. STRINGS.

Each entrance of new voice has this quiet way of taking us by surprise. Raff's melodies have a strongly human quality, fragrant of folk or legend poetry, and this is one of the most glorious of them all. The whole symphony was worth writing alone for this tune. The rest of the movement is clear in the intent of the music and of the meaning. What might strictly stand for a second theme is a light, mirthful phrase in the wood answered more thoughtfully in the strings.

WOODWIND.

(Viola *pizz.*) (Cello *pizz.*)

VIOLINS.

arco.

But the whole middle phrase has surely a placid, chatty feeling: *häuslich* they would call it in German,—a sort of domestic idyl, without strongly romantic heights. When the first song of the hearth re-enters, the setting is in a way reversed. Before, the fagot played to the strain of the strings. Now, woodwind and horns give a bright color of background, whence the cellos emerge in solo song, followed again in the surprising way of the beginning by violas, second and first violins. Through a stormy burst we wander again into the lighter mood of sprightly laughter and friendly chat, which turns by natural path of thought into the last verse of the serious tune.

Allegro. "Carnival." There are many frolics in the classics of music. Indeed, most of its poetry might be called a simple utterance of pure exuberance of spirit. And it is curious how in such phases of the masters the greatest art is somehow called into service to express the very simplest feeling. Indeed, highest art seems closest akin to primeval emotion.

Of that kind is the Carnival of Raff. But it has a way of its own that specially fits the name: something of the unending spinning of the top, the ceaseless buzz of Mayfair, that adds to the subjective feeling the graphic touch of the scene. At first, figures are romping about, more and more frequent, to a figure capable of a most wonderful momentum:



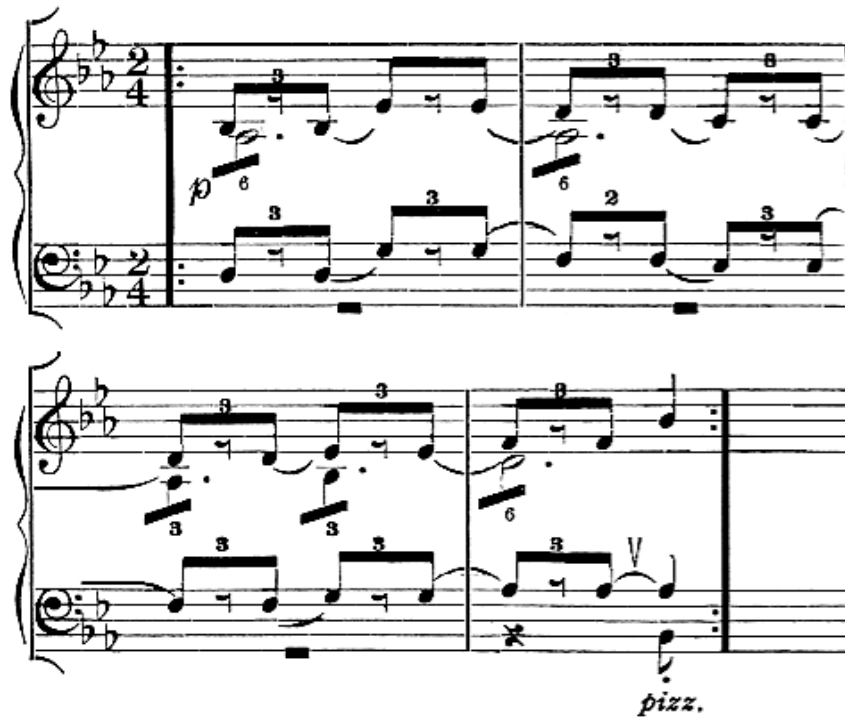
Presently the wood adds a frivolous air that fits the other at almost any point; and so we are dancing away without fear or care of clash. The dance does seem to sink for a while into song, but not for long. When the second tune comes in:



the general din and vague bustle seek the more regular lines of a round dance,—that is, each is dancing the figure his neighbor had a moment ago, and there is a general maze of successive steps. (It makes us wonder why a dance could not be devised to such counterpoint, the steps answering to the interdependent voices, on the principle of "three blind mice.") Finally the dizzy medley ends in a common burst of general chorus. But a few are caught stealthily dancing away to the first strain, and the rest are gradually infected just as before. Now it must stop, with reluctant skip; and there comes a song that with all possible grace and lightness has a certain speaking way:



In the return of principal theme things are somehow reversed, as in Alice's Wonderland. At first the heavier figures began, the low voices rousing the higher. Now the lighter trebles lead off and are joined each by a bigger neighbor. Finally the frivolous air is sung below the dance figure by clumsy basses of strings. There is the same maze as before, and the round dance of the second tune. But now the episode is new. Here we break away from all the general impersonal din and mob. This is the best of it all, without a doubt,—a moment of personal confidence, sincere, yet tinged with the lightness of the scene and of the dance's rhythm which holds our talk in its sway:



And mocking voices are spying and laughing about. It is a *tête-à-tête* snatched from the festival's whirl. Somehow we are loth when it ends, and we are hurried back to the general dance which begins once again. And now the mad frolic rages in real earnest. The former maze was real child's play. Four separate groups at least we can see dancing the figure, each at a different point, all in perfect agreement of motion. For some reason the brass are sounding a big signal blast in the midst. And now, in purest fun, they dance the step just twice as slow, the big basses leading off. At last, with much more diminished speed, all sing the strain together, ending, of course, with maddest clog of all.

Taken from *Symphonies and Their Meaning: Second Series* by Philip H Goepp (pp.267-281), published by the JB Lippincot Company of Philadelphia in 1902