

Joseph Joachim Raff

(b. Lachen / Switzerland, 27 May 1822 – d. Frankfurt a. M., 25 June 1882)

Symphony No. 1 in D major op. 96 *An das Vaterland* (1859-61)

Joachim Raff's *Eine Preis-Symphonie: An das Vaterland* was not his first symphony: In 1854 Raff composed a *Grande Symphonie in E moll* (WoO 18). Although “lost”, several of its attributed features are of interest when considering Raff's future multi-movement orchestral compositions. For one thing Raff *also* referred to this work as a suite. For another Raff knew that its five movement layout (notwithstanding earlier examples of Beethoven, Berlioz, and Schumann) was outside the standard configuration for its time. Considered as a suite, with its historical ties to the Baroque concatenation of dance of movements or its association as a grouping of unrelated pieces, Raff may have had doubts as to its effectiveness as a symphony. In 1863, Raff composed his *First Orchestral Suite*, Op. 101 two of whose movements are presumed to be reworkings of the original, discarded E minor symphony. Absent the original, it is impossible to know how Raff altered the materials when integrating them into the orchestral suite. However, by this time Raff had already written four of his seven piano suites, three of which are in five movements. Curiously, Raff maintained the five movement structure for his orchestral suites as well as for the *Suite for Piano and Orchestra*, Op. 200, and *Suite for Violin and Orchestra*, Op. 180. By 1861 when Raff at age 39 finally produced his “official” first symphony, the result, *An das Vaterland*, contained five movements, and was the single largest orchestral work Raff would compose. No other Raff symphony is so configured.

Although Raff was not a “nationalist” composer *per se*, the D major Symphony is loosely connected with the politics of its day. His personal sense of nationalism was doubtless linked to the broader issue of the desire for German unification which did not occur following the uprisings of 1848. The symphony, together with *Wachet auf*, Op. 80 (with a well known text by Emanuel Geibel), *Deutschlands Auferstehung*, Op. 100, the Overture *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott*, Op. 127, show those relatively few instances when explicit nationalism was in play. Raff uses Gustav Reichardt's 1825 melody composed for Ernst Moritz Arndt's poem (1813) ›*Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland?*‹ which was well known in the 1850s. The symphony itself was begun in the late summer of 1859 after the Treaty of Villafranca (which Napoleon III and Emperor Francis Joseph of Austria signed following Austrian military defeats in Northern Italy). If the sub-title can be understood in nationalist terms, the primary title, *Eine Preis Symphonie* is more direct. After completing it in the Summer of 1861, Raff soon became aware of the competition sponsored by the *Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde* in Vienna to be judged by Ferdinand Hiller, Carl Reinecke, Robert Volkmann and Vinzenz Lachner. Ultimately, the new symphony was awarded the prize from amongst the 32 submitted entries. The successful first performance was given in Vienna on Sunday, February 22, 1863 in the Musikvereinsaal conducted by Josef Hellmesberger. The score, dedicated to Prince Karl Alexander, the Grand Duke of Saxony-Weimar-Eisenach, was published in Leipzig by Schubert in January, 1864.

Notwithstanding the use of Reichardt's melody the symphony was not begun with a program. Raff cobbled one together after the fact when one of the judges objected to the tune's use, and after the results of the competition were announced. This was printed in the newspapers and included in the published score. In 1862, according to Helene Raff's biography of her father “*The first three movements are supposed show German life and existence, the fourth describes German disunity.*” Raff's note itself says “*Here the composer felt himself permitted the use of a motive not original with him...as a symbol.*” Helene continues “*The fifth movement begins with a lament on the destiny of greater Germany and then proceeds to develop prophetic visions of future unity and majesty.*” While post World War II sensibilities might question statements such as these, one must remember when they were uttered and recognize them as consistent with the emerging nationalist perceptions of other artists of the period. Raff here is German as Verdi is Italian, or Dvořák is Bohemian or Mussorgsky is Russian. Parenthetically, throughout his pedagogical career Raff discouraged his students from developing compositional techniques that were *limited by or to nationalist elements*. The prize, and hence its title, *Eine Preis-Symphonie*,

was followed shortly afterwards with another, awarded by the Leipzig publisher C. F. Kahnt for a cantata celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of *The Battle of the Nations* at Leipzig. This aforementioned piece, *Deutschlands Auferstehung*, Op. 100, together with *An das Vaterland*, more or less established Raff's reputation as a major figure in German music.

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Several characteristic symphonic compositional procedures are established with the opening measures of this work. The most important of these is the statement of a collection of motivic fragments which, by remaining fragmentary, coalesce into any number of variant forms without ever assuming a primary shape. It is the effect of a theme *without being one* - the logical outgrowth of the Beethovenian generative cellular motive. The exposition of the first movement contains within its 209 measures at least eight different motivic bits and pieces which are subjected to numerous transformations and combinatorial mutations *before beginning* the formal development itself. Development properly begins from the second note, although the larger architectural design clearly outlines a sonata form exposition even as it passes through a number of different stylistic points of reference before ending, most properly, in the dominant A major. Fragments of Lisztian fanfare intermingle with Wagnerian floridity, dramatic and tonal uncertainty and ambiguity and Tchaikovskian pathos (clearly anticipating the exact style of *Swan Lake* by at least dozen years), yet the whole is in its eclectic admixture purely Raffian in form and substance. The opening fragments do not settle into their ultimate form *until the very end of the symphony* thus anticipating not only Cesar Franck by nearly two decades, but also any number of 20th century composers and the general technique of perpetual evolution and resolution through ultimate arrival. This stands in stark contrast to the ›proper‹ sonata-form procedure Raff inherited in which statement is followed by development which in turn is followed by restatement (which in any case, according to the textbooks is more concerned with resolving the tonality, not the materials). The movement is primarily optimistic/heroic in its Lisztian ethos. But where Liszt observes the structural imperative of numerous interruptions in flow and tempo, Raff (once the principal tempo is established) maintains it throughout its 632 measures.

The second movement scherzo immediately shifts gears to concentrated, gritty D minor. Beginning in a rapidly moving 6/8 (almost as ›one to the bar‹) the music shifts between 6/8 and 2/4, ultimately joining the two together in a textural layer of opposites that is a feature of Raff's language. As in the first movement, there is a collection of motives which assume different thematic shapes. Everything is mercurial with orchestral tutti's brief, almost breathless. A secondary idea moves towards F major featuring four horns with woodwind comments but quickly gives way to the rushing scherzo itself. The 2/4 trio, now in B flat major, assumes a *Liedertafel* character one will often encounter in Raff - this time, a simple tune harmonized only in thirds. Given by winds with interrupting string pizzicato beneath, the tune is developed and ultimately given to strings, and eventually the brass. These repetitions are concerned more with shifting the orchestration than the development of the material. But, in its continually whirlwind fashion, the initial scherzo is brought back as a literal da capo which veers off course into a fuller restatement of the trio, now transposed to D major. Raff does not allow the return of the first movement's grandiosity, which the now full statement of the trio's simple melody might suggest. Rather, it loses its bulk through orchestral deconstruction in a manner that will be more fully worked out in the scherzo of the *Lenore* symphony, ending quietly as simultaneous fragments of the trio and scherzo quite literally fall apart together.

The third movement (Larghetto) demonstrates Raff's ability as a composer of long-lined, broadly arching cantilena. It is also the first symphonic example of a movement with explicit ties to another work - in this case, the third movement of the 9th Symphony of Beethoven with which it shares a common tonality, B flat major, succession of tempi and structural layout. In essence, Beethoven's movement is a set of variations on two themes with slightly different tempi that are eventually worked together. But whereas Beethoven moves by mediant relationships between his theme groups and variations, Raff remains squarely in keys related to the tonic B flat. Its uniformly broad triple meter vascillates between explicit 3/4 and implicit 9/8, and arrives at three impassioned climactic moments. In between these are alternate sections whose simple

pizzicato accompaniments support thematic fragments that are thrown back and forth between numerous solo instruments. Together with its thematic and harmonic shapes this procedure anticipates yet again virtually everything we know to be essence of Tchaikovsky's mature style. Each of the two principal sections is allotted a pair of variations. As with the scherzo, the movement ends quietly in thematic dissolution.

The fourth movement, the depiction of German disunity, is in G minor and also returns to the compound duple meter of the second (12/8, not 6/8). It begins as in the first movement with bits and scraps of thematic materials as if in a development rather than an exposition. From a broad view, one might characterize the third movement Larghetto the trio of an enormous grim scherzo that began with the second movement and ends with the fourth. Early in the movement, the Reichardt melody gradually emerges and is heard defiantly in B flat major throwing off the ›disunity‹ of the opening agitato. From this point on, the opening motives and Reichardt are subjected to an extensive development. At one point, as the tonality settles briefly in G major, the violin figure at the opening of the first movement appears suddenly, but in a vastly augmented form. This arrival point of the *first* movement provides the principal thematic focus of the remainder of the symphony. After several impassioned climaxes the movement loses steam and ends in perfunctorily and without any real sense of resolution, in G major.

The concluding fifth movement picks up from the end of the fourth. Where the fourth movement ends peremptorily in G major, the fifth begins as an angst-filled but mellifluous lament in D minor. One could easily drop the pause between the movements thus creating a lengthy dramatic arch spanning from the scrappy drama of the fourth movement with its Reichardt references, to the emergence of the transformed first movement motive, to its celebratory conclusion. The movement itself is in three broad sections which gradually pick up speed and brightness. Along the way Raff presents a mysterious urthema consisting of a brass fanfare in long note values, and several passages of Valhalla-like pomp. Ultimately, though, it is the transformed and expanded first movement motive around which the movement revolves in its elaborate sonata form presentation and development. In the end, Reichardt is heard one last time, first without elaboration but ultimately together with the other materials of the piece, each asserting its importance as an ensuing stretto concludes the whole in an optimistic blaze of glory.

Having said all this, then, one notes that the other element most characteristic of the symphonies that follow *An das Vaterland* is largely absent in this seminal work, namely the particular nature of harmonic relationships both in terms of internal structure and movement to movement. Although nominally in D major, the remaining movements are in tonalities related to the minor mode: the second, D minor, the third, B flat major, the fourth G minor, and the fifth beginning in D minor. While this largely contradicts the expectations of a piece whose primary tonality is major, it perhaps provides a glimpse into Raff's future endeavors when conventions and expectations will typically be turned inside out. The remaining ten symphonies will feature mediant tonal relationships both between and within movements. The present work has all the moves and shapes of a Raff symphony but without the characteristic quirky harmonic language. Like the aforementioned five movement structure, Raff dropped the essentially conventional harmonic design with the concluding double bar of the score!

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