

Booklet notes by Dr Avrohom Leichtling for Sterling CDS 1099

Raff: *Bernhard von Weimar Incidental Music, Der entfesselte Prometheus Overture, Intermezzi from Welt-Ende – Gericht – Neue Welt*

The four works on this CD present an interesting picture of Joachim Raff at opposite ends of his career. Three of the works come from the formative period when Raff was Franz Liszt's personal secretary and factotum, and include a composition written by Liszt that Raff arranged and orchestrated for its initial performance. Two of these were written in 1854, by which time Raff, then thirty-two years old, had long been an important member of the New German School, Liszt's closely-knit community based in Weimar. The fourth work dates from the last years of Raff's life, when his music had moved away from verdant, if often neo-classically oriented, romanticism and was advancing headlong towards a wholly anti-romantic objectivism (which, in this instance, can easily be viewed as a very early precursor of what the later twentieth century would term "minimalism").

Bernhard von Weimar zu Wilhelm Genast – Raff's overture and two marches:

Joachim Raff wrote few orchestral works in forms other than overtures composed to introduce his six operas, orchestral suites, concerti, works for chorus and orchestra, and symphonies. There are, for instance, no symphonic poems, surprising given his close working relationship with Franz Liszt at the time when the older composer was creating his cycle of them. Raff composed a small handful of generic concert overtures, and one singular work of incidental music written to be performed as part of a stage play. This lone example in Raff's output formed the basis for his dramatic overture, *Eine feste Burg ist unser Gott* (A Mighty Fortress Is Our God), Opus 127, as well as for the two orchestral marches included here, which are drawn from the music for that same stage play.

Although he wrote a prodigious quantity of solo piano music up until and including this time, Raff also produced two operas during his Weimar period: *König Alfred* (WoO 14, 1848-50) and *Samson* (WoO 21, libretto - 1851-52, music - 1853-57). Additionally, he wrote about the music and musical events of his day, including penning a highly controversial book, *Die Wagnerfrage* (The Wagner Question), published shortly after the premiere of Wagner's *Lohengrin*. His analysis of the opera, sometimes positive, sometimes negative, caused considerable dissention inside Liszt's circle.

In the summer of 1854, Raff wrote incidental music for the play *Bernhard von Weimar* by Wilhelm Genast, who would become Raff's brother-in-law in 1859. The play was given a half dozen performances beginning in January 1855, before it totally disappeared from the repertory. For this production, Raff wrote an overture, two marches, a pair of fanfares for four trumpets, several ruffles and flourishes for drums, and a variant of the overture's finale, to be played at the conclusion of the play. The overture underwent a number of modifications before being published in final, revised form as his Opus 127 by the Leipzig publisher Hofmeister in November 1866. In this final form, the overture was first performed on Palm Sunday, 26 March 1866, in a benefit concert for the widows and orphans of the orchestra of the *Grossherzlichen Hoftheater*, a performance conducted by Wilhelm Kalliwoda.

The text of Genast's five-act play was published in Weimar in 1855. Its title hero is Baron Bernhard von Sachsen-Weimar (1604-39), one of the most important military commanders in the 30 Years' War. Raff's inclusion of the well-known Lutheran hymn tune *Eine feste Burg*

directly references the issue that was at the heart of the many conflicts that raged throughout Europe during this period: the struggle between established Catholicism and the ascendancy of Protestantism. Tradition has it that King Gustavus Adolphus of Sweden ordered that this chorale be played as his soldiers went off to fight in the war. Baron Bernhard's military exploits were famous but not fatal; it has been suggested that he died only after being poisoned by agents of the French minister, Armand Jean du Plessis de Richelieu (known to history as Cardinal Richelieu). Richelieu himself appears as a character in the play, two of whose five acts are set in Paris in 1639, the year of Bernhard's death.

Early performances of Raff's overture in its various intermediate forms refer to the play variously as being a *Trauerspiel* (Tragedy) or a *Schauspiel* (Festival Play). Theodore Müller-Reuter, in his *Lexicon der deutschen Konzertliteratur* (Bibliography of German Concert Literature) (1909), notes that the original version of the overture, in addition to having been transposed from the original key of C major up to D major, was also expanded in length by as much twenty-five percent. Volker Tosta, publisher of the renowned Raff *Werkausgabe* (Edition Nordstern), relates that "an earlier version of the overture may have concluded with the chorale. The final version ends with music not heard previously in the overture and may have been used by Raff in the original incidental music." For its initial public performances, the piece's title changed each time it was presented: It was called, by turns, Overture to Bernhard von Weimar, Tragedy by Genast; Dramatic Overture on the Chorale *Eine feste Burg*; Dramatic Overture to the Festival Play Bernhard von Weimar; Dramatic Overture on the Chorale *Eine feste Burg* to the Festival Play Bernhard von Weimar; and *Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott* – heroic-dramatic *Tonstück* in Overture form. At one point, it seems that Raff toyed with the notion that this "dramatic overture" had become a kind of symphonic poem (*Tonstück*) – but his reluctance to use the term (as was also the case with his later Shakespeare preludes) suggests that his attitude towards this most characteristic of Romantic forms was ambivalent, to say the least. With the exception of this work, which at over eighteen minutes is the longest of any of Raff's single-movement, non-concertante orchestral pieces, it is safe to say that Raff considered his overtures too limited in scope to call them symphonic poems.

Before composing the original version of the overture in 1854, and notwithstanding that he had composed two operas and a setting of Psalm 21 for chorus and orchestra, Raff had written only one other orchestral piece up to this time – a Festival Overture WoO 15 (1851-53). Between 1854, when he wrote the incidental music for the play, and 1865, when the final concert version of the overture as we know it today was completed, Raff's orchestral catalogue grew to include two symphonies, two concerti, three overtures and at least two additional works for chorus and orchestra. His expansion of the original overture, viewed in the context of his "official" First Symphony (*An das Vaterland*) of about the same time, clearly show Raff at a stage when his rhetorical preferences ran to expansive and leisurely statements and developments. Indeed, the final version of the overture could easily have been one of the movements of the *Vaterland* symphony – at least to the extent that both are built on pre-existing musical materials: Martin Luther's chorale (written sometime between 1521 and 1527), and Gustave Reichart's 1825 melody to Ernst Moritz Arndt's poem *Was ist des Deutschen Vaterland?* Both pieces are very different from the far more compressed and concise rhetorical methods of Raff's later work. It is noteworthy that Raff's Second Symphony, Opus 140, written shortly after the final version of the overture, is already much more clearly focused and to the point.

The overture is written for Raff's customary orchestral complement of piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani and strings. Its formal layout is quite clear and direct. The opening section, *Andante religioso*, in D major,

is effectively a mid-19th century chorale prelude based on *Eine feste Burg*. The contrast between the relatively static rhythm of the chorale tune, played in long values somewhat like a late medieval *cantus firmus*, against the contrapuntal accompaniment, sets the tune off to excellent advantage. Without having reached any particularly intense peak, the chorale breaks off, and the music transitions into the darker realm of D minor, where the main body of the piece lives. Marked *Allegro eroico*, the bulk of the overture is essentially a straightforward sonata-form structure concerned with two themes. The one is comprised primarily of dotted rhythms and is reminiscent of Liszt's *Hunnenschlacht* and *Mazeppa* (albeit at something more than arm's length). The second theme, in F major, is at once more recognizably Raffian in shape, color, and antiphonal orchestral layout. It grows to a very intense climax, where the chorale tune makes a brief appearance. A full-scale, extensive development of the two themes ensues, and, at its peak, the chorale theme makes a third appearance as an addition to the developmental mix. The recapitulation begins immediately, but focuses solely on the second theme, now transposed to D major. A return to the minor mode signals a second, considerably abridged development, whose purpose after the climax is to prepare for the work's conclusion. The tempo slackens to *Andante*, and the chorale is heard one final time, first in the minor and then, after a tremendous crescendo, in the major. There, the piece might have ended, but, having progressed through *accelerando*, we find ourselves back to *allegro (Allegro trionfale)*, at which point a new swatch of martial-flavored material makes an unexpected appearance (perhaps, as Volker Tosta has noted, as a holdover from the incidental music). The tone becomes rather Beethovenian, but as only Raff could have reconceived him and his Ninth Symphony – on a note of triumph. Otherwise and throughout, the chorale, in an unambiguous reflection of its title, serves as a point of reference, above the fray, immutable and truthful, a refuge from the storm of human conflict raging beneath it. Raff's having been raised a Catholic, and having written a certain amount of Catholic liturgical music, one must marvel at his ability to successfully incorporate perhaps one of the best known chorale melodies in Lutheran practice into an otherwise secular stage play's incidental music.

Raff's reworking of the music for the Genast play was not limited to the overture alone. His Piano Concerto in C minor, Opus 185 (1873) uses the principal theme of the first of the two marches written for the play as the basis for the concerto's third movement. His appropriation of the theme is neither literal nor complete – but enough of it survives the transition from incidental music to concerto finale to be clearly recognizable as such.

The *Zwei Märsche zu Bernhard von Weimar*, WoO 17, appeared in print in 1885, three years after Raff's death. The score, published in Munich by Joseph Aibl (edition number 2558b) gives no editorial attribution; however, the publisher printed an arrangement of these pieces for piano four-hands, prepared by the twenty-one-year-old Richard Strauss (as edition number 2558c), published at the same time as Raff's score and its parts. Many of Strauss' early tone poems and chamber music appeared in editions published by Aibl – and the edition numbers associated with the Raff pieces suggest that Strauss may have had a hand in preparing Raff's orchestra score for publication, although it is likely impossible to ascertain what that might have meant. Strauss' arrangement of Raff's two marches appears in his catalogue as AV 184! Furthermore, in 1885, Strauss had gone to Frankfurt to study at what was then known as the Raff Conservatory, primarily because of the presence there of Hans von Bülow, whom Strauss considered the most important musician of the day. Willi Schuh, in his *Richard Strauss: A Chronicle of the Early Years (1864-1898)*, suggests that Strauss' Raff arrangement was made specifically as an attempt to please von Bülow, who was, after all, one of Raff's most ardent supporters during his lifetime and after. *Aus Italien*, Opus 16, the first of Strauss' ten symphonic poems, was written soon after he'd done the Raff arrangements, that is, in 1886. The Bernhard marches had first been performed thirty-

one year earlier, on 2 January 1855 at the Court Theater of Weimar, conducted by Raff.

The Bernhard marches are among the very few examples of such pieces to be found in Raff's work. In 1867, Raff composed a *Festmarsch*, Opus 139, to celebrate the wedding of Grand Duke Alexander and Grand Duchess Sophie of Sachsen-Weimar, and in 1871 he prepared a transcription for orchestra of Richard Wagner's *Huldigungsmarsch*, originally scored for military band, at Wagner's request, for the publisher B. Schott of Mainz. And, in 1859, Raff made transcriptions for piano two-hands of two marches from George Frederick Handel's oratorios *Saul* and *Jeptha*, which were published in 1879 by Schubert. But the most famous of Raff's infrequent adventures in the realm of the march, in fact, perhaps the best-known march of its day, is found in his Fifth Symphony (*Lenore*), Opus 177 (1872). Its third movement, a nearly twelve-minute-long symphonic march, uses a concept borrowed from Haydn but which Raff (typically) turned on its ear. The first section of the piece consists of a gradual crescendo culminating in a completely realized orchestral statement (which is effectively the finale of Haydn's Symphony #44 [Farewell] in reverse), followed by a trio, then a grand diminuendo. Following Haydn's example backwards, the movement opens with only a handful of instruments playing, with the rest of the orchestra introduced by degrees one instrument at a time – followed by its structural palindrome, where instruments are subtracted from the orchestra one by one until only a few are left.

The First Bernhard March, in C major, *Allegro vivace ed energico*, was intended for the play's third act. As its tempo marking indicates, it is a lively, energetic piece that follows a standard A-B-A structural gambit. Its swirling triplets, dotted rhythms and syncopations are somewhat reminiscent of the grand manner of Wagner's overture to *Rienzi*, but with a far more concise rhetoric. Considering that both marches were conceived as incidental music, one can assume that Raff carefully calculated the durations of the various subsections of the marches, based on the timing of the predetermined stage actions to which they would serve as accompaniment. The developmental episodes are necessarily brief, although Raff allows himself to wander to unrelated keys. The "B" section (roughly the equivalent of the trio in a minuet or scherzo), while in the same tempo, is quieter, more lyrical, although also in F major. Except for a passage when the trio leads back to a restatement of the main march, the orchestra is otherwise systematically reduced by elimination, in turn, of the piccolo, trumpets, trombones, tuba and timpani. The return of the main march is at first quite literal, but as it begins to move towards its conclusion, Raff incorporates elements from the trio to give us an early glimpse into a compositional technique which will often subsequently recur – use of the coda as secondary development. A slight acceleration of the tempo pushes the march to a "glorious" Rienzian conclusion.

The second march, in F major, *Andante moderato*, is altogether more sombre and subdued in tone, and was intended for the play's fourth act. Like the first march, the second is also cast in tripartite A-B-A form, where the outer sections are in F major, but the trio (the B portion) is in the tonic minor (that is, F minor). The opening section itself is in three parts, the first of which presents the march theme (which is repeated literally) scored only for oboes, clarinets, bassoons, horns and timpani – a military wind-band in miniature. The second part of the opening provides continuation of the opening, but as it works its way back to a restatement of the opening, the other instruments of the orchestra enter gradually until the march theme is presented by the full ensemble. The trio, marked *Sostentuto espressivo*, focuses musical interest in the strings, with minimal support from the horns and bassoons. Casting a dolorous aspect at the outset, it shifts for a time to A-flat major, where a brief, poignant climax is reached before fading back into the murky, emotionally subdued regions of F minor. The return to F major signals a truncated reiteration of the opening march's themes, at first in the winds (as at the beginning) but quickly gathering the massed

orchestral forces for a full statement. The climactic moment is short-lived, however, as a rapid diminuendo and disintegration of the orchestra pave the way for the march's coda, where elements from the trio mix in with the main march theme before concluding with horns and bassoons alone on a quiet F-major triad. The two marches, still in their original printed version, receive their first-ever recording here - likely the first modern performance of the pieces since the late 1920's .

Der entfesselte Prometheus: Raff's orchestration of Liszt's Overture and Liszt's transformation of the materials into his fifth symphonic poem, Prometheus:

The details of the relationship between Franz Liszt and his then very young assistant Joachim Raff have been the subject of much speculation over the years. Liszt's partisans have, traditionally, tended to downplay Raff's role during the six years of their relationship. This point of view may have had its historical genesis in circumstances surrounding the acrimonious split between the two composers which caused Raff to relocate from Weimar to Wiesbaden, although a rapprochement did occur in later years. More recent scholarship, including the very recent discovery amongst Liszt's papers of a previously unknown keyboard Fantasia in B major by Raff (WoO 15a) (its existence and character greatly abetted by its subsequent recording for Naxos Records by pianist Tra Nguyen), has tended, on the basis of surviving manuscripts and other documents, to demonstrate that Raff's creative contributions to Liszt's work of the period 1850-56 was quite substantial. However, Liszt, like any number of other composers, would often return to revise and rewrite earlier works. Limits of time and space make a complete, in-depth discussion of "The Prometheus Question" impractical here; that said, however, the essential facts of the case are these:

Between May and June, 1850, Franz Liszt composed an overture and eight choruses to serve as incidental music for the play *Der entfesselte Prometheus* (Prometheus Unbound), a work in thirteen "mythological scenes" by Johann Gottfried Herder (1744-1803), whose one hundredth birthday was to be celebrated at the Weimar court theater with a limited staged production of the play accompanied by Liszt's new music. The work was performed only once, and then, for all practical purposes, it disappeared altogether. Given that he had perhaps no more than eight weeks' time in which to compose the music, it may be more accurate to say that Liszt wrote out a large number of sketches and brought them to varying degrees of completion, with shorthand instructions as to how the sketches were ultimately to be completed and assembled for performance. The overture was evidently written in a number of fragments, not necessarily in chronological sequence. Raff arranged these as closely as could be determined from the sketches, or perhaps from Liszt's own suggestions. In some cases, Raff ignored Liszt's directions altogether, especially as to orchestration and concerning some of the internal "connective tissue." In both Raff's and Liszt's versions, the overall structure is essentially in sonata form, laid out as introduction-exposition-development-recapitulation-coda. It appears that Liszt put the greatest effort into the fugue, which comprises an important part of the development section. Raff worked with Liszt's sketches in July and August of 1850, after which Liszt reviewed Raff's work and approved it (together with whatever corrections and changes might have been requested). The work was performed in Raff's arrangement on 24 August 1850. Between 1852 and 1854, Liszt returned to his original materials and, keeping in mind and on hand Raff's version of the overture, rewrote the piece giving it the title qualifier "Symphonic Poem." In this form, it was first performed on 10 October 1855 in Braunschweig, conducted by Liszt. Raff copied out Liszt's new version, which was published by Breitkopf und Härtel of Leipzig in May 1858. Although several subsequent editions of the work appeared in print, they are all, with only minor changes, based on Liszt's 1855 final revisions.

A broad overall structural and dramatic description applies to both Raff's Prometheus and

to Liszt's final version. The principal differences between the two pertain to passages that the other chose either to omit or to add. Both versions begin with agitated expository materials in the key of A minor. Both then have secondary, more lyrical material in D-flat major, and both follow this with an extensive development featuring an elaborate orchestral fugue. Both contain a recapitulation which does not slavishly follow the sequence or content of the exposition, although Liszt's final version omits a group of themes that Raff included in his (specifically at rehearsal figure "L"). Each concludes with the secondary materials transposed to the tonic A major. Both Raff's and Liszt's versions of this essentially similar music have fundamentally fragmentary architecture in which the alternating succession of fast and slow tempos creates an effect of discontinuity. The nature of each group of thematic ideas is extremely varied, ranging from the highly melodramatic opening, with its combination of gruff, choppy exhortations and rough, rude, syncopated grittiness – to the discontinuous, mysterious, and elusive – to hymn-like chorale episodes of passionately soaring lyricism. While Liszt's version is arguably more aggressive than Raff's, Raff's version of the opening of the overture is considerably more dissonant in certain harmonic respects than is Liszt's.

The basic instrumentation of both versions calls for piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, timpani and strings. Raff's instrumentation differs from Liszt's revised version only to the extent that his additionally calls for an alto and a bass clarinet.

One glaring discrepancy appears immediately when comparing the two versions of *Prometheus*. Liszt's version is 443 measures in length, whereas Raff's is 832 measures long (or 88% larger). Since both versions have similar performance times, the difference in bar counts can be accounted for by the fact that Raff generally uses rhythmic values that are twice as large as Liszt's and are played twice as fast. Liszt chose to reduce the bar count by halving the rhythmic values in his notation. Put simply, where Raff's score abounds in eighth notes, Liszt's version uses sixteenth notes which thus take up nearly half the total number of measures. "The devil is in the details" as the expression goes, and the illustrations below give a small but very typical example of how Raff treated Liszt's sketches, and how Liszt, using Raff's arrangement, rethought them a few years later.

There are two musical elements present in different implementations in both examples: the first is the theme which appears in the 1st violins, the second, a short rhythmic pulse (occurring in the lower strings) answered immediately by a sustained chord in the winds. The first of the small handful of significant changes from Liszt-to-Raff and Raff-to-Liszt is where Liszt replaced Raff's four clarinets with three horns. The second noteworthy variance is the transformation of the lower string's pulse, which Raff presents as a syncopation, but which Liszt changes into a dactylic punch. Raff's version may have used Liszt's original notation, but Liszt's revision makes the effect more focused - and easier to play. The third and most obvious difference is both a change of orchestration as well as one of note content: Raff's version has the theme carried solely in the first violins, whereas Liszt's later version has the theme played in octaves by the first violins and the violas; this octave doubling gives the theme more support. Further, the upward-moving third and fourth measures in Raff have been transformed from a simple syncopation into an urgent chromatic upswelling (this is in the second measure in Liszt). The net effect of these changes is to make the whole passage much more assertive, even aggressive in Liszt's version.

Example 1- The opening allegro, as arranged by Raff from Liszt's sketches:

Joachim Raff
after Franz Liszt
Prometheus (1850)

a tempo (♩)

Clarinet 1-2 in A

Alto Clarinet in Eb

Bass Clarinet in Bb

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass

Example 2 – The same passage as rethought by Liszt between 1852 and 1854:

Franz Liszt
Prometheus (1852-4)

Allegro molto appassionato (♩)

Horn 1-2 in F

Horn 3-4 in E

Violin I

Violin II

Viola

Violoncello

Contrabass

Considering the extremely short amount of time that Raff was given in which to prepare Liszt's sketches for the one-time-only performance in 1850, his arrangement of the overture and the choruses represents a huge associatively creative endeavor carried out under circumstances that were arguably, just about impossibly difficult. The result is remarkable on any number of grounds, an accomplishment not at all diminished by acknowledging that Liszt's later version of his own source material is more carefully worked out and elaborate. One should note that Liszt also reworked the choruses and published them separately in 1855 as Choruses from Herder's Prometheus Unbound, S.69. The choruses were widely known and very popular and were performed until the end of nineteenth century when they, too, disappeared from the general performance repertory.

Intermezzi from *Welt-Ende – Gericht – Neue Welt* – background:

In the summer of 1877, Raff moved from Wiesbaden, which had been his home for twenty-one years and where roughly one hundred and seventy of his works had been composed, to Frankfurt-am-Main, where he was to assume the duties of Director of the future Dr. Hoch's Conservatory. From this time until his death in June 1882, Raff's efforts on behalf of the Conservatory proved an often difficult and time-consuming job. Despite the fact that his administrative duties tended to limit his opportunities to pursue his own compositional work to the summer months, he nevertheless concentrated his efforts largely on the creation of major works with surprisingly little decrease in productivity. Among the many outstanding accomplishments of his Frankfurt period are his tenth and eleventh symphonies (published as Symphony No.9, Opus 208 (1878) and Symphony No.10, Opus 214), the Four Shakespeare Preludes, WoO 49-52, the operas *Benedetto Marcello*, WoO 46, and *Die Eifersüchtigen*, WoO 54, and three works for chorus and orchestra – the virtual choral symphony *Die Tageszeiten*, Opus 209; the cantata *Die Sterne* WoO 53; and *Welt-Ende – Gericht – Neue Welt*, Opus 212. Discounting the blizzard of *Albumblätter*, multi-movement piano pieces, and other miscellany not composed during the Frankfurt years - which would have been viewed as routine "standard issue" under other circumstances - one must marvel that he completed the number of major works recited above (and which, in any case, does not take into account a number of significant chamber works, as well), and that they are all, uniformly, creations that exhibit impeccable invention, craft and ingenuity.

Conductor and pianist Hans von Bülow was quoted as saying, "With Raff, things tend to move quickly." While this observation is certainly a literal reference to the accelerated metronomic speeds Raff assigns to his pieces, on a deeper level, it refers to an aspect of Raff's work that became increasingly evident over time and resulted in his almost total break with the common practices of musical composition of the later nineteenth century. Raff was never one to wallow in excessive emotionalism of any kind. Once he had gotten past the effusive sentiment of the *An das Vaterland* Symphony, Opus 96, "gotten it out of his system," if you will, his trademark lean *métier* became increasingly manifest, as exemplified in the orchestral realm by works such as the Concert Overture, Opus 123, and the Second Symphony, Opus 140. Gradually, other novel features began to appear: sudden shifts in direction, resulting in a prototypical stream-of-consciousness that informs certain primary elements of early-twentieth-century expressionist composers, and first seen in Raff's oeuvre in the original Eighth Symphony (now known as Symphony No.11), but which are often a mainstay in the Ninth and Tenth Symphonies. There are frequent, almost inexplicable shifts of "style" – premonitions of later composers and younger contemporaries such as Debussy, Dvořák (!), Stravinsky and Sibelius. These features of Raff's writing at the time, together with certain Russified characteristics, did not escape the notice of Pytor Ilyich Tchaikovsky, who held Raff in high regard and who, on more than one occasion, borrowed directly from him. In certain works, the whole notion of development *per se* is

subsumed into a cubist sense of object placement without transition – exemplified, for instance, in the Four Shakespeare Preludes, whose anticipations of the practices of film-music scoring are prescient indeed.

Raff's involvement in the late 1860's with Palestrina's music informs certain aspects of the oratorio *Welt-Ende*, which was begun in 1879 and completed two years later in 1881. Here, not only is the harmonic aspect of composition simplified to a near primitive state, but all manner of musical gesture is scrubbed clean of clutter, orchestral textures are reduced to their bare bones, and whole sections are built out of the simplest of materials repeated endlessly (*ostinato*) in what the later twentieth century would recognize as a primary technical device and characteristic of minimalism. These practices were certainly not the result of Raff's having "no time to compose" - they were the conscious decisions of a man confidently navigating by means of his own creative instincts.

Raff's years running the Hoch Conservatory proved to be extremely difficult ones, during which the "cult of personality" led to many unpleasant conflicts between him and some members of his faculty. Composing new works came to be Raff's only real source of enjoyment prior to his death in June 1882. Helene Raff, in her monograph on her father's life (*Joachim Raff: Ein Lebensbild*), notes that, "At this time [1880 and thereafter] Raff was often to be found in a melancholy mood, thinking anxiously about the future, on one occasion he spoke in an almost child-like manner of his hopes of heaven; on another he impressed upon his daughter the need to believe in God always and to be aware of his omnipresence. However, he didn't make any specific decisions concerning the possibility of his own death." That he turned increasingly to vocal music, and to the realm of the religious or mystical oratorio and away from purely instrumental music in his last years, may have been a reflection of his efforts to deal, by more spiritual means, with the emotional exhaustion that he felt as a consequence of the difficulties of his position as Director of the Conservatory. Raff's final opera, *Die Eifersüchtigen* (The Jealous Ones), written in 1881-82, has for its comic-opera plot a story that revolves around marital discord founded on jealousy. Given the jealousies that had "poisoned the well" for him, this could also easily be seen as a kind of musical-psychological sublimation of his real-life, real-world conflicts.

Notwithstanding Raff's unrealized plans to compose a second, presumably major, religious oratorio based on the life of John the Baptist, his only such completed work is *Welt-Ende, Gericht, Neue Welt* ("World's End, Judgment, New World"), Opus 212. The piece had been under consideration all during the 1870's, prior to his move to Frankfurt, but it was not formally undertaken until 1879, whereupon it occupied him off and on during the next two years. As was the case with most of his opera libretti, Raff assembled the text for *Welt-Ende* himself, "nach Worten der heiligen Schrift Zumal der Offenbarung Johannis" ("after the words of the Holy Scriptures especially the Book of Revelation of St. John"). *Welt-Ende* is perhaps Raff's longest and largest single non-operatic work. Each of its three parts tackles its subject matter in a concise, telescoped manner. The first part, World's End, subdivides into four sections: The Vision of St. John, The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, Pleas and Thanksgiving of the Martyrs, and The Last Signs of Life in Nature and Despair of Mankind. The second part, Judgment, depicts the angel and the sounding of the trumpets of doom, when the quick and the dead stand before God and the lost and the saved express their respective despair and joy. The third part, New World, reveals a new heaven and new earth, and sings the praises of their Creator.

Ordinarily, an oratorio (or, for that matter, a cantata) focuses its attention on the singers – the soloists and the chorus. Raff, adhering as he so often did to his own creative impulses, ignored the oratorio "tradition" almost entirely. True, there are the expected choral numbers

in the piece – but only a quarter of the total of thirty-six, that is nine, scattered throughout the work (in a piece having a playing time of 108 minutes). Sixteen of the thirty-six numbers are recitative or aria combinations for St. John, who is, with few exceptions, the only vocal soloist. Three other numbers are for “a voice” not otherwise identified in the score. Raff’s most significant departure from the oratorio tradition comes in the manner and specific role the orchestra plays in the whole work. There are nine separate numbers (the same count as for the chorus), each of which is referred to as an “Intermezzo,” and all of which serve to provide purely instrumental commentary on the recitatives that, for the most part, precede them. If Raff’s *Die Tageszeiten* (The Hours of the Day), Opus 209 (1877), was effectively his thirteenth symphony, with its eclectic mixture of concerto, cantata and symphonic construction, *Welt-Ende* posits yet another hybrid structural transmogrification, injecting into the oratorio format the orchestral suite and variation forms, together with a use of *leitmotiv* and recurrent variations which precede most of the recitatives. Although the piece was widely analyzed in print at the time of its initial performances, some critics were quick to point, rather squeamishly, to Raff’s eclectic approach. One comes away with the impression that this compositional methodology did not sit well at all with critics who rather expected their oratorios to be well mannered, and to follow “the accepted practices of Handel and Mendelssohn!”

There are other, deeply hidden, numerological symbols to be found in the score. In Hebrew, cardinal numbers are expressed by combinations of letters of the alphabet: aleph (a) = one; bays (b) = two; gimmel (g) = three; etc. The numerical representation of the number 18 (jy) is contained in the word “life,” *\yyj*, or *chaim*. The alphabetical Hebrew representation of the number thirty-six (wl) (*chai* times 2, or, literally, 30 + 6) is considered to be a sign of great *mazel*, or good luck. Raff, who had previously written an opera based on the story of Samson from the Book of Judges, and who had spent a certain amount of time learning about Jewish history and language (even to the extent of preparing a doctoral dissertation) may well have been aware of the symbolism of the number thirty-six when he conceived the architecture of his depiction of the end of the world and humanity’s judgment and rebirth, in thirty-six numbers (a fact no critic or commentary of the piece has previously noted). Its total duration, 108 minutes, could also be seen as *sechsmal chai*, or (18 times 2 times 3).

With or without numerology, *Welt-Ende* was completed in March 1881. The full score, parts, and piano-vocal score were published by Breitkopf und Härtel of Leipzig in 1882, not as a formally engraved publication but rather as a neat, handwritten score. The first performance was given on 17 January 1882 in Weimar, conducted by Karl Müller-Hartung, Music Director at Weimar after 1868. Other performances followed soon after, in Berlin, Dresden, Dusseldorf, and Wiesbaden. Curiously, the score was published with both Raff’s German text and an English language version. The translation was prepared by Virginia Woods Morgan (1866-1900), herself a composer and poet and also the wife of American composer John Paul Morgan (1841-79). She frequently signed her work “Mrs. J. P. Morgan,” which is how it appears on the first page of the Breitkopf score of *Welt-Ende*. Given the keen desire in English-speaking lands for new, and especially for major, choral music, the preparation of Raff’s score to include an English language version is not surprising at all. A performance in Leeds (UK) in late October 1883 was conducted by the noted composer Sir Arthur Sullivan.

The Intermezzi:

The first four of the nine *Welt-Ende* intermezzi occur in the first part of Part One of the oratorio – each, an orchestral representation of one of The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse. Under any other circumstances, especially in light of the often extreme

hyperbole of Wagnerian theater and the often over-ripeness of late nineteenth century music in general, one might expect these particular four orchestral pieces to take advantage of the full symphony orchestra's Technicolor glory. Such, however, is the diametrical opposite of Raff's approach which, in the chronology of Raff's oeuvre follows closely on the heels of his minimalistic four Shakespeare preludes, which are roughly contemporaneous with *Welt-Ende*. Instead of bombast and hyper-emotionalism, we get distillation and understatement. Of the intermezzi as a group, anyone even passingly familiar with the music of Bernard Herrmann (1911-75) will immediately recognize here precursors and intimations of the methods, gestures and even some of the harmonic flavor of Herrmann's many film scores. Many of the intermezzi display at least one primary, characteristically pithy, rhythmic signature, often introduced in the associated recitative. Three of the intermezzi conclude with the very same ten-measure chorale, or a close variant of it. Three others do not end at all but are followed by recitatives. The longer intermezzi (War for example) play with a small sample of motifs that are thrown back and forth without development so much as distended displacement, in true cubist manner. One of the intermezzi functions as a *passacaglia* in which two of the *leitmotifs* of the entire piece are worked together. Another is little more than a fanfare for brass. Once they have been established, tempo, meter, and, for the most part, tonality remain unchanged throughout each of the nine intermezzi. Along with avoiding developmental extension or elaboration, another characteristic structural device is his use of orchestral accretion or dissolution. In many places, Raff alludes to his own previous works – for example, War points fleetingly to the final movement of the *Lenore* Symphony, while Pestilence hints at the scherzo of the Winter Symphony. Fugal exposition or imitative writing is used characteristically to depict stress, confusion and conflict.

Seven of the intermezzi, built on simple rhythmic figures, are handled in true minimalist fashion. Whereas the term "*ostinato*" is customarily used to refer to a brief passage or figure that is repeated, when applied to an entire movement or piece the concept has evolved, for all practical purposes, into a different aesthetic *gestalt* altogether. The chart below shows the fundamental rhythmic signature of each. Reading these rhythmic signatures in sequence, one can perceive the cumulative effect created by a series of progressive variations, albeit at the rhythmic level.

1 – *Die Pest* (Pestilence), D minor (with concluding chorale in D major), 6/4, *Allegro* (quarter = 168) (82 + 10 measures) is quiet throughout, without any tuttis, but it capitalizes on the duality of its insistent rhythm and the downwardly oozing long tones of the flutes and clarinets. Other, more insistent rhythmic figures appear and impose themselves, but quietly, subtly - like a growing orchestral cancer.

2 – *Der Krieg* (War), A minor (with concluding E major chorale), 4/4, *Andante* (quarter = 144), (133 + 10 measures). Had Raff been so inclined, this little piece could easily have seen the light of day as his own version of Beethoven's Wellington's Victory, Opus 91 (1815), its handful of tiny motifs standing in for the French and English armies in Beethoven's orchestral war (albeit without the notated cannon shots). This intermezzo, with its miniaturist proportions, is not without hidden humor (a typical Raffian touch in any event, even when he's depicting the End of the World).

3 – *Der Hunger* (Famine), B minor (to D minor, to F minor, to an indeterminate tonal center, and finally to B minor) (with concluding chorale ending in F-sharp major), 6/4, *Largo (quasi andante)* [*ma*] *più mosso* (dotted quarter = 54), (79 + 10 measures), is best described as

a much-understated, indeed, plaintive, piece whose insistent rhythm creates the effect of musical starvation. The whole orchestra is never used.

4 – *Tod und Hölle* (Death and Hell), E minor (without chorale ending), 4/4, *Allegro* (quarter = 160), (199 measures) consists of a singular orchestral crescendo, becoming increasingly intense and stormy, and whose E minor ending is as succinct as it is cataclysmic.

5 – *Die letzten Zeichen* (The Last Signs) (not included on this recording), nominally in A minor, but for practical purposes, its swirling chromaticism stamps it as virtually atonal; certainly, it is without determinable key, 4/4, *Andante con moto* (quarter = 138), (103 measures). This intermezzo reverses standard procedure, forsaking a final cadence, but instead flowing directly into the next recitative.

6 – *Posaunenruf* (The Last Trump), 4/4, C major (ending in G major), *Adagio* (quarter=108), 18 (jy) measures – essentially a fanfare for brass consisting of fifteen repetitions of Example 6 in the chart above, with the sixteenth notated so that its effect is to move at half the tempo of the remainder. This leads to a brief recitative by St. John (performed on this recording by orchestra without vocal soloist), which then moves directly to the next intermezzo (our #7) which depicts the Resurrection.

7 – *Die Auferstehung* (The Resurrection), A minor (*passacaglia* with 25 variations), 4/4, *Adagio* (quarter = 108), 100 measures without chorale ending but which, like #6, flows directly into the next recitative. This intermezzo incorporates two of *Welt-Ende's* recurring *leitmotifs* (Death and Hell) into the fundamental variation principle of a *passacaglia*. Raff adds a footnote at this point in the score to make sure that the conductor and performers understand his intentions and method.

8 – *Das Gericht* (The Judgment), F major, 4/4, *Adagio* (quarter = 108), (90 measures), without chorale ending, but flowing directly into the ensuing *Arioso* and Chorus. A reworking and extension of the orchestral introduction to the first part of the oratorio.

9 – Intermezzo (Introduction to Part III: *Neue Welt* (New World), B-flat major, 4/4, *Andante* (quarter = 132), 134 measures, completely self-contained, and with more than a little flavor of Palestrina in its simple, frequently fugal counterpoint. The tonality for this “New World” (at least at the beginning), namely B-flat major, is the polar opposite of *Welt-Ende's* E major opening and closing sections.

Welte-Ende is scored for an orchestra of somewhat larger dimensions than is usual for Raff. While it is not unusual for a piccolo to appear from time to time, the use of a tuba and a percussion section (in this case, three players) occurs only rarely elsewhere, and certainly not in the symphonies, concerti and other non-operatic orchestral pieces by-and-large. In a primarily dramatic/theatrical work such as *The End of the World*, one can understand the need Raff felt to broaden his instrumental palette – even as the consequent broadening remains discreet and firmly under control. The work calls for 3 flutes and piccolo, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, triangle, snare drum, bass drum, strings.

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