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XXVII— JOACHIM RAFF: 1822-1882

The Leeds Festival of 1883 in England had on its programme a choral work entitled "The World's End, the Judgment, and the New World," which was the last composition of the celebrated musician Joseph Joachim Raff, which was thus brought to a public performance in England more than a year after its composer's death. Raff called it an "Oratorium"; but it is more than that, for it is not only a vocal composition, but it contains several purely orchestral pieces, descriptive of sensations or states of feeling, such as were so frequently found in this composer's music. The work is divided into three parts, as the title would suggest, the text having been selected by the composer himself from the Revelations. The first part, "The World's End," is again divided into subsections under the headings, "The Vision of St. John," "The Apocalyptic Riders," "Petition and Thanksgiving of the Martyrs" and "The Last Signs in Nature and Despair of Mankind."

As may be supposed, the whole work is a piece of programme music, the vocal portions being freely interspersed with orchestral intermezzi. The bass voice, as the representative of St. John, has nearly all the recitatives. The first part opens with the vision of St. John in the Isle of Patmos, the section ending with the angelic chorus, "The Lamb that was slain." Next we have a series of orchestral pieces (broken by recitatives) descriptive of the apocalyptic riders, and the scourges of Pestilence, War, Famine, Death and Hell. It is soon obvious that Raff has made more or less extensive use of two leading motives, which have been labeled in Germany (where the work was given in German) as the "Deity" motive and the "Destruction" motive. After all this turmoil and bustle the two choruses of martyrs come as a relief. The last section of this part is entitled "Last Signs in Nature and Despair of Mankind." It opens with a contralto solo "Thrust in thy sickle and reap," followed by an orchestral piece descriptive of "The Last Signs," and closing with an admirable chorus of people, "Fall on us and hide us."

The second part of the oratorio, "The Judgment," may be considered the most dramatic and effective portion of the work. The bass narration is twice broken by

orchestral pieces, “The Trumpet Call” and the “Resurrection” — the latter an elaborate affair. After more recitatives we arrive at a highly effective double chorus in which the saved sing placidly, “My Lord, I hope in Thee, let me never be confounded,” while the damned sing, “Oh, Lord, chastise me not in Thy great wrath, destroy me not in Thy great anger.” The effect, as the two choruses answer one another from different sides of the orchestra, is very great. More recitative, and we come to an important orchestral piece descriptive of the Judgment, and the section ends with a brief arioso and a chorus, “Thy Throne an Eternal Throne,” probably the finest number of the work. The third part, “The New World,” opens with an orchestral piece, and after a recitative narrating the rise of the new heaven and new earth, the contralto has a solo, “Behold the house of God is with men.” A chain of choruses broken once by a bass solo and finishing with a fugue end the work. “The World's End” may not be popular with vocalists, because it curiously enough contains no solo for either soprano or tenor. It, however, requires a fine orchestra and the best chorus obtainable.

Raff was born at Lachen, Switzerland, June 27th [sic], 1822, and died at Berlin [sic] June 26th, 1882, lacking one day of completing his sixtieth year. In his boyhood he was able to devote himself to the study of music only at intervals, owing to poverty. He supported himself by teaching until, when twenty-four years old, he became acquainted with Mendelssohn through a correspondence about some compositions which he had submitted to Mendelssohn, who recommended them for publication to the famous firm, Breitkopf & Haertel. Mendelssohn also invited Raff to join his class of scholars, but before Raff could manage to go to Leipsic, Mendelssohn had died.

His next hope was Vienna, to which place he carried some of his compositions, and a letter of introduction from Liszt to Marchetti, the publisher. But when, on his way, he reached Stuttgart, he heard of the death of Marchetti, he realized another disappointment. Twice, now, had death intervened to frustrate his plans. He resolved to remain in Stuttgart, and entered a life of composing and practice on the piano and violin. But he could not get his compositions performed. The antagonism of Lindpainter, the then musical autocrat of Stuttgart, was powerful enough to keep Raff in the background.

The young musician began almost to despair, when, Hans von Bulow, who, notwithstanding his brusque eccentricity, possesses a kind heart, at last secured a hearing for some of Raff's pieces, which immediately became famous. The tide now turned, and he entered on a career of prosperity. Schumann praised him in the *Neue*

Zeitschrift für Musik, and his compositions no longer went around begging for a publisher.

From this hour till his death his pen was busy. His list of published works numbers over two hundred. Ten symphonies, three operas, orchestral suites, songs, pianoforte and other instrumental pieces, mark his activity and prolificness. He was an ardent champion of Wagner, and on intimate terms of friendship with that composer. When Wagner wrote his "Huldigungs Marsch," for a military band, for the coronation ceremonies of the King of Bavaria, he entrusted it to Raff to score for the orchestra.

In scoring Raff was an adept. He followed Wagner's methods in this, as far as one could follow that unapproachable master.

A few years before his death he was appointed director of the Conservatory of Music, at Frankfort-on-the-Main, which position he held till his death.

Raff was just one degree short of being a genius. His music is brilliant and forceful; his piano solos are in high favor with concert-players, and his symphonies and other orchestral compositions find frequent place in concert programmes. Many of them have been played by our Philharmonic and Symphony Societies. His death was a distinct loss to musical art.