

Joachim Raff

(b. Lachen near Zurich, 27 May 1822 - d. Frankfurt/Main, 24 June 1882)

Symphony No. 10 “Zur Herbstzeit” Opus 213

There is a marvelous pun buried in the superstructure of Joachim Raff’s eleventh, and final symphony. But the joke has nothing to do with the fact that it was published as Symphony #10, Opus 213, even though it was actually the twelfth in order of composition. If we discount the lost early E minor symphony, “Symphony #10” should really be “Symphony #11.” No, the hidden joke here has to do with the relationship between the general understanding of its title versus the actual contents of its four movements.

Considering its subject, “Zur Herbstzeit” (“To Autumn Time”), the general perception of the Fall season is one of darkening colors, of leaves falling from trees, of brilliant summer in transformation to the death-like suspension of the sleep of winter. The Symphony, typical for its composer however, does quite the opposite. It moves from a subdued and relatively concise first movement to a raucous and energetic finale, even as the crackle of dried leaves are under foot. Indeed, although its principal tonality is F minor, each of its four movements move up by a major third relative to its predecessor. Thus, the first movement, in F-minor, is followed by a scherzo in A minor, which is followed by an elegy in C-sharp minor, and then a finale in F-major. The upward moving tonalities of the four movements not only gives the whole piece a very unsettled sense of harmonic movement, but is a very sly play on the concept, so to say. Furthermore, there are discrete references to *Im Walde*, the only other Raff symphony having F as a tonal center.

But there is more to it in that *Zur Herbstzeit* is the only example in Raff’s symphonic canon where extensive revisions were made after its initial performance. Additionally, there is the very charming fact of Mrs. Raff’s “official” instigation of the revision of the third movement of her husband’s symphony.

Composed in the summer and fall of 1879 in Frankfurt am Mein, *Zur Herbstzeit* was given its first performance on Friday, 12 November 1880 at the 30th Symphonie Konzert des Städtlichen Orchesters conducted by Louis Lüstner at Weisbaden’s Kurhause. During the course of 1881, as Raff was involved with the completion of his Opus 212 cantata “Welt-Ende – Gericht – Neue Welt” (“World’s End – Judgment – New World”), his dissatisfaction with certain structural aspects of the symphony lead him to make substantial revisions to it. In this, he was somewhat aided and abetted by his wife, Doris, who expressed her displeasure with the pathos and passion of its third movement. Furthermore, Raff’s reservations about the final movement led him to revise and extend it as well.

The third movement’s “before and after” evidence are plainly available. Raff chose not to fix the original, but rather to replace it altogether with a newly composed movement. The original Elegie was, however, retained as an independent piece, and was published in 2004 in Stuttgart by Volker Tosta who prepared the first modern edition of the piece for his Edition Nordstern [#0117-3200]. The revised symphony was published in Leipzig by C. F. W. Siegel in October, 1882 four months after its composer’s passing. Inasmuch as Raff usually did not keep manuscripts after they were published, it is not possible to know the extent of the other revisions.

Now as to the details of the symphony itself, an overview of its layout and methods will illustrate Raff’s compositional acumen especially regarding the concept of dramatic structure and emotional progression. The F-minor symphony’s first movement, “Eindrücke und Empfindungen” (“Impressions and Feelings”) (Allegro moderato) begins immediately with a

subtle reference to the opening of *Im Walde* (Symphony #3). In that opening, divided low strings and bassoon create a characteristic harmonic, rhythmic and thematic color which is answered by a horn call, and then an upwards moving string fragment. Its 3/4 meter is challenged by underlying triplets appearing somewhat later creating the effect of 9/8. The F-minor symphony opens in a triple sounding meter with very resonant bassoons playing in 10ths with lower strings in between them moving on the beat without rhythmic subdivision. This is answered immediately by another thematic fragment in the upper strings in which the compound-triple nature of the actual 9/8 meter is clearly revealed. In marked contrast to the preceding motive, a more complete theme emerges from it. Compared to the earlier symphony, this opening is telescoped and succinct. The entire movement plays with the contrast between forward thrust and static rhythm, a defining characteristic of much of Raff's music. However, where the earlier symphony takes its time reaching sustained climaxes, the present work is as concise in presentation as it studiously avoids extensive accretion or tutti. Indeed, the work's first movement does not even use the entire orchestra, thus creating a sense of intimacy and restraint.

After a fuller restatement of the opening, then, and before F-minor has a chance to become stuck in the ear, Raff moves quickly by means of common tone harmonic slippage to A-flat major for a secondary, and more focused theme. This secondary theme, which moves downwards from a starting peak even as the first set of motives tended to move upwards, nevertheless plays with cross rhythms such that at times it appears to be in duple, not triple meter. Even though the tonality at this point is "appropriate" given the key of the piece, it is barely 40 measures into the movement when this secondary material appears. Further, in typical fashion, Raff begins immediately to develop both of his highly concentrated ideas and, along the way, move through a number of different tonalities which take the whole further and further away from either the tonic or relative major tonal centers. It is 73 measures into the movement before we are given our first tutti – this after truncated material statement and partial development. The arrival, in C major, is both as sudden as it is preempted after only four measures by quiet woodwinds. Immediately, then, the only other tutti in the exposition of the movement interrupts the woodwind rumination. But it, too, is barely four measures long before the orchestra is summarily reduced to chamber music proportions. Here we are given an extension of the developmental materials previously heard, but also an unexpected shift of tonalities such that we wind up right back at the very opening. Indeed, the literal repeat of the exposition, complete with first and second endings, is the only such example of expository repetition in all of Raff's symphonies.

The emotional climate established in the exposition is one of muted color and restrained dialogue amongst the various thematic elements. There are plenty of swells, rises and falls in the shape of the musical argument, but no sustained big statement. Raff has set up a fundamental dramatic principle which will be maintained rhetorically throughout the first three movements.

The development follows a similar path of understatement. Its climactic moment is barely sixteen measures long, and is itself cut off as the movement lurches unexpectedly into its recapitulation. Initially moving to F-major, we are given a fuller restatement of material that was originally in A-flat major. Raff previously had demonstrated an original approach to sonata form by completely blurring the lines between exposition, development and recapitulation by making them all aspects of each other. In the present instance, the subsequent arrival of the original four measure tutti places the tonality in A major thus destroying F as the tonal center. As at first, Raff cuts off his abbreviated arrival point, complete with its horn and trumpet fanfares, but allows the music to wander back towards the tonic key. Gradually, a coda emerges out of what was originally the transition to the repeat of the exposition. Although the music aims for a more defined full statement, this never really occurs. A tutti tonic F-minor triad is permitted but one measure to sound before trailing off into a pianissimo cadence.

Indeed, there really is no formal recapitulation in this movement which otherwise appears to have all the landmarks of a sonata-allegro layout. The repeated exposition is clearly intended as a structural decoy! The original materials from the opening do not return as they were at first, nor do they confirm the tonality of movement. What little of it does reappear is used, functionally, to create the dramatic effect of thematic dissolution and harmonic ambiguity which only the final

measures are allowed to resolve. The very fragmentary nature of the movement, which otherwise stands in stark contrast to the smooth and free flowing progression its events, is the embodiment of “Feelings” and “Impressions.” In its way it is also anticipates the general methodology of what would become Impressionism. Carried to an extreme, one can see pointillism on the distant aesthetic horizon, too. But it is also, as we have previously discussed in relation to the A-minor symphony, *Der Winter*, a further development of Raff’s early intuitive expressionism and *durchkomponiert* technology!

The second movement (“*Gespenster-Reigen*”) (“Ghostly rounds”) (Allegro) concludes a long series of hobgoblin scherzi that play a significant role in Raff’s symphonic output. “Tradition” ascribes this to Raff’s supposed infatuation with Mendelssohn, specifically to the latter’s music for “*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*.” In truth, however, the musical depiction of spooks and unearthly spirits is a common enough venue in romantic literature. One could easily point to Beethoven (“*Geister-Trio*”), Carl Maria von Weber (“*Oberon*”, “*Der Freischutz*”), Marschner (“*Der Vampyr*”), Berlioz (“*La Damnation de Faust*”), Liszt (an early associate of Raff’s), or Wagner, among other contemporary composers who also featured various flavors of horror music in their works. Raff’s own take on the supernatural is typically unique and contrary. There is always a high degree of humor present in these movements, not nightmares or neuroses. In the present case, Raff achieves his most fully realized bogeyman scherzo.

Given the fundamentally eclectic nature of Raff’s music, imagine, then, that a Norwegian Troll (newly arrived from “*The Hall of the Mountain King*”, perhaps) met Lemminkäinen and Ilya Morometz on their way to Fafner’s Pub. And as they traveled, Mephistopheles fiddled a ghostly “*Valse Triste*” amidst occasional asthmatic wheezes and shrieks of high woodwinds and tremolando strings. (But all of it presented with child-like wonderment as only an adult could represent it: portly spooks with smiles on their faces.) In places Raff turns the orchestra upside down managing some thoroughly outlandish sonorities (for 1879, that is) which, to our ears today (jaded, perhaps, by so many science fiction and horror music film scores) are, nevertheless, remarkably fresh and original.

Essentially written in an arch form, the movement begins with timpani repeatedly tapping out E – E – A (mi-mi-la) off the beat, followed by divided contrabassi, then divided ‘celli. Two bassoons join in with a creepy A minor tune harmonized low diatonic thirds. The bassoons’ tune is joined by low clarinets, then divided low violas, and finally by violins pizzicato. The proceedings are quickly enmeshed in upward moving transitional development. A second theme now appears, our “*valse triste*.” The new tune, consisting of a long chain of unvarying dotted half-notes, plays off against a waltzing accompaniment resulting in a counterpoint of textures. An ascending melodic thread overlaying duple phrasing on a triple meter is reflected antiphonally between various instruments. Eventually, this rhythmic construct passes to high winds as an arhythmical chorale with pizzicato violas plucking, gnat-like, against it. Periodically, divided violins add a bit of ascending triadic tremolando, a species of ghostly wailing. Parenthetically, the whole passage slyly references not only the 8th and 9th Symphonies, but also the 2nd Violin Concerto. Gradually, this leads to an understated tutti where our first theme is given a fuller set of orchestral clothes. In the midst of all this, the strings divide up into as many as eleven parts, some playing tremolando, some playing pizzicato, and some playing *col legno*. Raff then turns his orchestra upside down. The earlier chorale re-appears entirely in the subterranean regions of the orchestra with much corresponding low-end divisi. The earlier upward moving string tremolandi are now joined by three flutes giving a slightly more asthmatic wheeze to their supernatural shrieks. A transitional passage follows in which alternating low growls and high woodwind pecking eventually thickens in texture. This arrives at a second understated tutti along with its restatement of the original theme. Gradually sinking back into acoustically subterranean regions, the coda of the movement takes form complete with passing references to the “*Tanz der Dryaden*” (“*Dance of the Dryads*”) movement of *Im Walde*. In the end, we are left with a decomposing version of the opening of the movement which ends, spookily, in disemboweled A minor, and with a pianissimo plop from the timpani.

Like the first movement, the second also does not use the entire orchestra. Raff replaces the

trumpets with trombones. And, in spite of its wide range of orchestral effects, it is even more understated and “impressionistic” than the first movement. In the third movement, Raff reduces the size of the orchestra yet again by keeping only the winds, 2 horns and strings.

The most intriguing history of this fascinating piece concerns the third movement “Elegie.” According to Helene Raff, the composer’s daughter, “In der "Elegie" hatte er die starke Farbenpracht des Herbstes und das damit gepaarte letzte leidenschaftliche Aufflammen der Seele schildern wollen.” Thus, the original version of the movement was conceived as an eight and a half minute long essay that, while beginning simply enough, quickly becomes enmeshed in highly uncharacteristic emotional rhetoric. As a piece by itself, it works well enough. However, within the context of the symphony, its climax and relatively abrupt resolution are effectively too much too soon. Had the whole been longer and more discursive, thus allowing an appropriate amount of time for development, and the accretion and release of dramatic energy, the resultant internal structure would have been more satisfying. More importantly, however, by making the slow movement the symphony’s rather unprepared emotional climax, the effectiveness of the finale, as well as the symphony’s overall dramatic balance was compromised. In the end, Raff intuitively understood this to be the problem, and this explains why contrary to his usual manner, he returned to this movement and completely rewrote it. The new movement extends the primary dramatic concept with a now subdued and restrained ruminative counterpart to the first and second movements.

The “new” Elegie is a Raffian tripartite adagio of 150 measures wherein the more extensive development occurs towards the end of the movement. Its ten and a half minutes performance time neatly balances both the first movement and the scherzo. The initial eight bar theme, in the strings, is echoed by an oboe, and followed by developmental extension which lands in A major. A second thematic idea in the cellos is accompanied by upper pizzicato strings and arpeggiated figuration from the three flutes. Eventually, the first theme is presented in counterpoint against this secondary idea as the tonality shifts back to C-sharp minor. Although scored more fully here, the dynamic does not rise above mezzo-forte. Ultimately cadencing in G-sharp major, the tonality shifts enharmonically to D-flat major for the movement’s central section. It is here that Raff’s most famous tune is now heard. This melody is world renowned because it appears, albeit in more elaborate and extended guise, as the principal theme of the Andante cantabile movement of Tchaikovsky’s fifth symphony (written in 1888 – six years after Raff’s death)! Raff’s “version” of it, although cooler, allows the movement to reach its only sustained forte tutti. As in the first movement, though, this lasts barely four measures before it quickly cools down. A second tutti is approached, but the arrival points are chopped off in dramatic diminished sevenths with pianissimo horn and bassoon echoes – the very essence of Tchaikovskian pathos.

The arrival of a long G-sharp pedal creates second inversion tonic cadential tension. Over this, our secondary theme reappears now shifted to C-sharp minor. A brief excursion to F-sharp minor followed by another curtailed tutti eventually leads to C-sharp major, thus allowing the secondary theme a degree of development. As before, this grows into another four bars of tutti, forte, which is similarly answered with quiet strings. A plagal cadence (F-sharp minor -> C-sharp ... major!) allows the piece to end calmly with its piccardy third intact. Our original theme will not have been brought back, however. Altogether, for all its subtle shading and swellings, Raff allows only 14 measures for dynamics above mezzo-forte.

From the first notes of the finale (“Die Jagd der Menschen”) (“The hunt of men”) (Allegro) we know that the long awaited dramatic release has arrived. The title and sub-titles (“Auszug; Rast; Jagd; Hallali; Rückkehr”) (“Departure, Rest, Hunt, Hunting Calls, Return”) can be understood in much the same way as the others in the symphony – as extra-musical guides to the dramatic flow of the music. There is, of course, a hidden agenda to the sequence of names: Auszug and Rast refer to the exposition of a sonata form – Jagd and Hallali refer to its development, and Rückkehr refers to its recapitulation and coda. And, in considering Raffian titles and extra-musical subject matter for a moment, as ghosts, goblins and spirits occupy many of the scherzi, so do wild rides and hunts (demonic or otherwise). Symphonies #1, #3, #5 and #8, in addition to the present work, all have their furious galloping chases. In keeping with the succinct nature of the earlier

movements, the present finale is just long enough to throw off the preceding reticence such that its furious hunt and celebratory conclusion neatly balance out the entire work. It is not a measure too long.

After a dozen measures of introduction which will act as a kind of motivic glue throughout the movement, the four horns give out a long and vigorous hunting song which is immediately answered by the rest of the (now full) orchestra. As usual, the initial material is immediately subjected to extension and development through several subsidiary sections and tutti all of which lead to a restatement of the horn's hunting song, but now accompanied and supported by swirling violins above and punctuating, doubling strings.

Quite suddenly, the tonal center drops by common tone to D-flat major. The next hundred measures are taken up by a calm secondary theme whose augmented rhythmic values (the same device that gives much of the 1st Symphony its great length) have the effect of slowing down by half. From time to time, there are little reminders of the "principal tempo" from three bird-like flutes. Ultimately, though, as the passage fades, a single horn gives us a much augmented version of its original "call to action." A similarly telescoped version of this is taken up by clarinets. After a very brief accelerando, we land in F-minor, and at a considerably faster tempo. For the next 204 measures the hunt is on.

In the development (i.e. Jagd/Hallali) Raff executes the basic process which a much later generation of film composers would understand as "chase music." At the outset, a four layered ostinato construct is established as follows: 1- a quadrupally repeating, rhythmically infectious four-measure phrase (clarinets), 2- a constant rush of roughly articulated sequential eighth notes (cellos), 3 – sharp and irregular, but metrical pizzicato punctuation (violins and violas), and 4- pedal tone punctuation embellished with leading tone appoggiaturas (basses). The whole ostinato device is presented as a series of sixteen measure units which are repeated some twelve times (plus a single incomplete 12 bar extension). The repetitions are not literal in that one or more of the layers will be shifted to a different instrumental group each time. Along the way, fragments of earlier materials appear overlaid on top, or buried within the construct. With each repetition, the instrumentation becomes fuller, the tonal centers less stable, the overall direction upwards. Later on, one or more of the layers will be emphasized over the others. Cumulatively, a tremendous forward thrust is achieved producing an almost unbearable dramatic stress. Forty-eight years later, in 1927, Maurice Ravel would rediscover the same principle in the composition of his "Bolero" – a much simpler version of the same accumulation by repetition procedure, as would the minimalists another fifty years further on.

When the orchestra lands on four tutti dominants of F with antiphonal answers from the timpani, the chase is over. The pace slackens to its original tempo, and a concise, truncated recapitulation (Rückkehr) begins. This "return" consists of two full statements of the horn quartet's hunting song, but given all due embellishment and flourish from the entire orchestra. Raff achieves the complete release not only of the furious hunt music, but also the resolution of the emotional energy largely held back for most of the symphony. Indeed, the celebration is almost as energetic and "over the top" as the earlier portions of the symphony were sedate. A shift from 6/8 to 2/4 signals a concise 37 measure coda ending the work in a distinctly anti-autumnal, but heroic F major.

Dr. Avrohom Leichtling, 2004

For performance material please contact the publisher Kistner und Siegel, Cologne. Reprint of a copy from the Music Department archives of the Leipzig Municipal libraries Leipzig.

