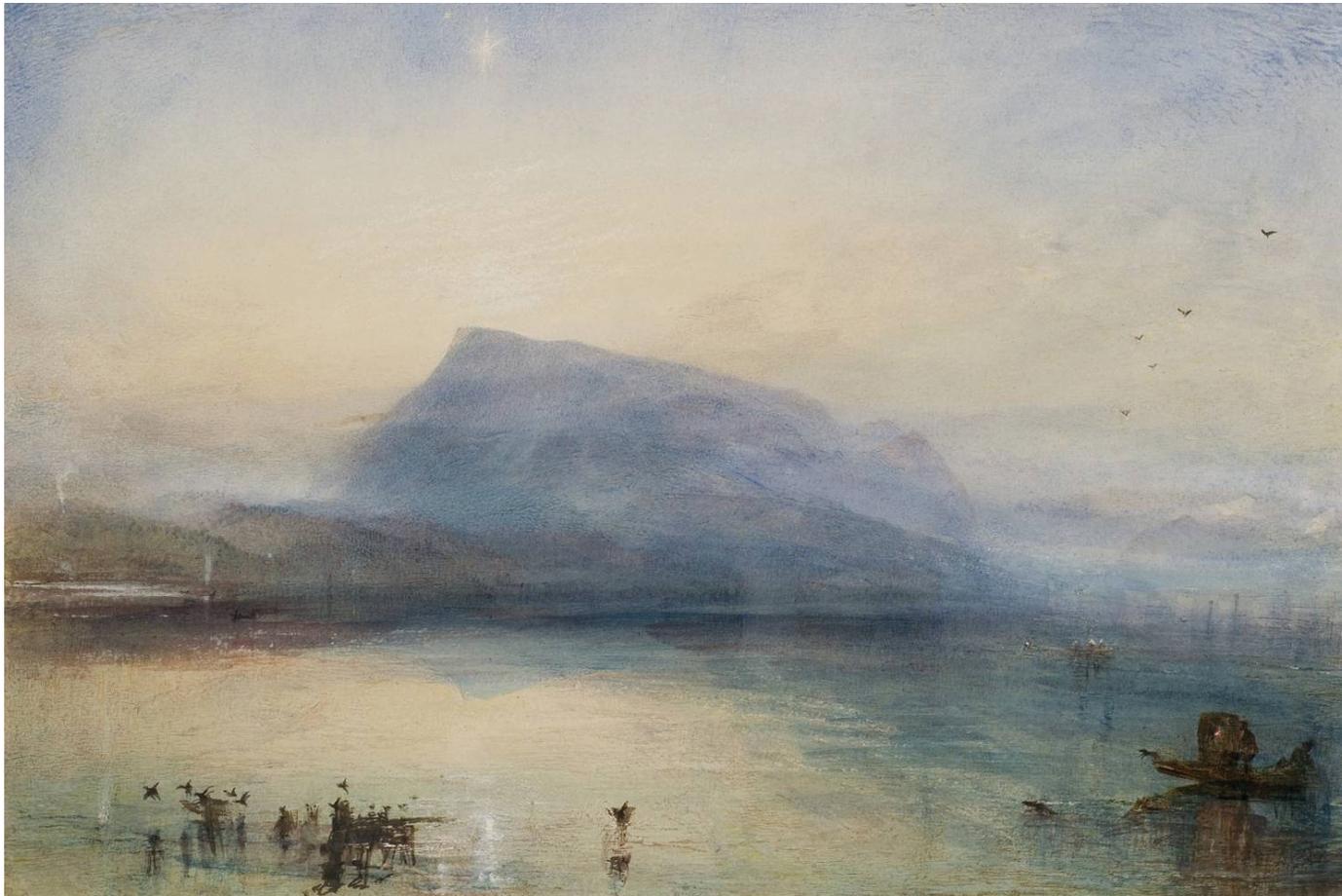




Joseph Joachim
RAFF

Complete Violin Sonatas • 1
Sonatas Nos. 1 and 2

Laurence Kayaleh, Violin • Jean-Fabien Schneider, Piano



Joseph Joachim Raff (1822–1882)

Complete Violin Sonatas • 1

Joseph Joachim Raff (1822–1882) was born in Switzerland, the first son of a German refugee father and a Swiss innkeeper's daughter. Fiercely intelligent, he defied his father's attempts to turn him into a child prodigy and began a promising career as a schoolteacher, before his interest in composition became an obsession which led him to seek Mendelssohn's opinion of his talent. Receiving a very positive endorsement, he abandoned teaching in 1844, but was soon reduced to destitution, from which he was rescued by a chance meeting with Liszt. The great virtuoso found menial musical jobs in Germany for his entirely self-taught protégé and, when he moved to Weimar in 1850, took Raff on as his amanuensis. By this time Raff had produced many piano compositions, and was beginning to progress to larger forms: his first opera, *König Alfred*, was completed in 1849. The relationship between the two men slowly soured as Raff emerged with an individual musical voice, somewhere between the relative conservatism of the Mendelssohn/Schumann tradition and the 'New German' camp of Liszt and Wagner. He left in 1856 for the spa city of Wiesbaden, where he gradually overcame the poverty of his early life, taught music, and was able to support himself modestly as an independent composer for the next 21 years. His breakthrough came in 1863 when both his *First Symphony* and a cantata won major prizes. From then on, his reputation steadily rose until he was regarded for a time as Germany's leading symphonist. In 1877 he became the founding director of the prestigious Hoch Conservatory in Frankfurt. Although primarily known, then as now, as a symphonist, Raff was prolific in most genres: in addition to orchestral works, operas, choral works, chamber music and songs abound in his catalogue, but by far his largest output was for the piano.

Despite this preponderance of piano works, he was not a virtuoso pianist and, in his youth, showed more promise with the violin. His earliest known composition is a waltz for violin and piano from 1840, and he went on to write a total of 21 works throughout his career for this

combination of instruments, substantially more than for any other genre of chamber music. Raff was frequently accused of lacking self-criticism, a charge which contributed to the posthumous collapse of his reputation, but the corpus of five violin sonatas seems always to have been highly regarded by violinists and audiences alike. Walter Cobbett, writing in the 1920s*, noted 'I would not willingly be without his sonatas for piano and violin, they are not severely classical, but they are delightfully written for the violin. A great virtuoso, Sarasate, spoke to me with enthusiasm of Raff's music, which he played very frequently, and it is certain that whenever he introduced into his programmes such works as the sonatas [...] he was rapturously applauded by the public. Solo violinists would not find their audiences unsympathetic if they revived the memory of Raff by an occasional performance of pieces written by one who was, after all, a master musician, with real insight into the inner life of the violin.'

It was not until autumn 1853 that Raff began to compose his first violin sonata, by which time he had already written ten other works for the instrument. His deteriorating relationship with Liszt had curtailed his activities as Liszt's assistant sufficiently to allow him more time to devote to his own compositions. The *Violin Sonata No. 1 in E minor, Op. 73* was completed early the following year, but had to wait until 27 March 1855 for its public premiere at the Great Hall of Weimar Town Hall, given by the violinist Edmund Singer with Dionys Pruckner at the piano, both of them lifelong friends of the composer. Dedicated to the virtuoso Ferdinand Laub, who performed the Berlin premiere with Hans von Bülow in 1856, it was published in 1859 and, bolstered by Raff's growing reputation, became quickly established in the repertoire, prompting publication of three further editions. Raff also arranged the work as a *Sonata* for piano four hands.

Although not without its moments of relaxation, the *First Sonata* is an ambitious composition with a generally nervous character, which may perhaps stem from Raff's frustration with his situation in Weimar and his repeated

inability to secure a post away from the city. Wilhelm Altmann* wrote that the *Sonata*, 'grandiose in style, is far more difficult than many a concerto', and the opening movement *Bewegt, mit elegischem Pathos* ('Agitated, with elegiac pathos') certainly has a sweeping grandeur to it with its contrasting moods of nervous energy and melting, but sad tenderness. The *scherzo*-like second movement in C major is of a type at which Raff excelled, combining highly rhythmic busyness, *Sehr rasch und fein* ('Very quick and precise') with lyrical melody in the central trio. Here Raff is at his most subversive, inserting myriad fleeting changes of metre into what at first sight appears to be a standard Mendelssohnian *scherzo*. Raff's slow movements are often the centre of gravity of his compositions, and so it is here. In A minor and marked *Nicht zu langsam* ('Not too slow'), its flow of passionate but unsentimental melody exudes an atmosphere of dramatic lament, ultimately turning to wistful regret. The finale – *Bewegt, sehr bestimmt* ('Lively, very determined') – finally establishes a more positive atmosphere, led by an heroically vigorous opening theme, contrasted with one of real charm and grace. Although Raff composed another four violin sonatas, it was the *First* which remained the most frequently played in his lifetime.

The *Violin Sonata No. 2 in A major, Op. 78* was composed over the winter of 1857–58, by which time Raff had moved to Wiesbaden to join his fiancée, Doris Genast. Here, away from Liszt's circle, he was slowly gaining recognition as a composer of merit, while earning a modestly independent living as a music teacher. Dedicated to the great Austrian violinist Joseph Hellmesberger, the *Sonata* was published in 1861, and its first public performance was given by Friedrich Seelmann (violin) and Bernhard Rollfuss (piano) at Kronefelds Hall in Dresden on 8 March 1862. Although never quite

attaining the great popularity of the *First Sonata*, it was also successful enough to merit three more editions, and Raff again arranged it for piano four hands.

No doubt reflecting the positive change in his circumstances triggered by Raff's move to Wiesbaden, this is an altogether more relaxed work than its predecessor, and is the largest of his violin sonatas. The genial and expansive opening movement's marking of *Rasch, mit Wärme und Bewegung* ('Quick, with warmth and animation') is an apt summary of the piece, which bowls along rapidly in a generally good-natured way while never lapsing into commonplace. The slow movement in A minor, *Nicht zu langsam* ('Not too slow') is placed second, and is a set of variations on an original theme which Raff describes as *Im Volkston, zart, naiv – schwermütig* ('Folksy, tender, naïve – melancholy'). The movement develops rhapsodically through a succession of contrasting variations, leading to an impassioned final section. So typical of his mature slow movements in its lyrical intensity, it is a real gem. Raff moves to F major for the brief, dance-like third movement, *In raschem Zeitmaße, doch nicht zu bewegt* ('In quick tempo, yet not too lively'), which, while not as melodically rich as the first two, still provides an effective interlude before the arrival of the lively finale. In this movement, marked *Rasch und feurig* ('Quick and fiery'), Raff offers contrasting passages of virtuoso fireworks and sweet lyricism in one of his most effective conclusions to a major work. Echoing the genial character of the first movement, it satisfyingly rounds off this warm-hearted, open-air work.

Gordon Boyd

* Cobbett, W. (1930) *Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music*, Vol. II. London: Oxford University Press

Laurence Kayaleh



Laurence Kayaleh has performed as guest soloist with many distinguished orchestras, including the Tonhalle Orchester Zürich, the Russian National Orchestra, the National Symphony Orchestra (Washington), Orchestre Lamoureux, the Orchestre symphonique de Montréal, and the major orchestras of Cleveland, St. Louis, Caracas, Basel and Mexico City, under conductors such as Leonard Slatkin, Mikhail Pletnev and Hiroshi Wakasugi. She has performed at the Bolshoi and Tchaikovsky Concert Halls (Moscow), the Salle Pleyel and Salle Gaveau (Paris), the Suntory Hall (Tokyo), Victoria Hall (Geneva), Verdi Hall (Milan), the Teatro Teresa Carreño (Caracas), the Place des Arts (Montreal), The John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts (Washington) and the Mie Center for the Arts (Japan). A guest of major festivals such as Lucerne, Blossom and Cervantino, she has shared concerts with Victor Pikayzen, Ida Haendel and Igor Oistrakh. She has recorded the complete works for violin and piano by Medtner, Honegger and Catoire for Naxos. She plays a 1742 Guarneri which belonged to the eminent violinist and pedagogue Carl Flesch.

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Jean-Fabien Schneider



Jean-Fabien Schneider is a French Canadian pianist, regularly performing as a soloist and chamber musician in both Europe and North America. His broad musical activities range from classical concerts to the areas of musical theatre, art direction and avant-garde music. Schneider graduated with honours from the Moscow Tchaikovsky Conservatory and holds a doctorate in performance from the University of Montreal. He has won several awards in international competitions, notably First Prize in the Maria Yudina International Piano Competition, and has given recitals in more than ten countries. Schneider is a member of various chamber music ensembles including the Montreal Piano Duo, with which he performed throughout Canada, and Ensemble Quatrix, comprised of two pianists and two percussionists. An active pedagogue, Schneider is the chair of the piano department at the McGill Conservatory in Montreal, and the director of Les Saisons Russes de Montréal, the first Canadian classical music festival entirely devoted to Russian repertoire.

www.montrealpianoduo.com

Though he was known primarily as a symphonist, and despite his large portfolio of piano works, Raff's first love was the violin and his pieces for the instrument were promoted by no less a virtuoso than Sarasate. The *Violin Sonata No. 1* is a powerful work teeming with expressive intensity and lyrical beauty – it remained the most performed of his violin sonatas during his lifetime. The large-scale *Violin Sonata No. 2* offers his characteristic lyric impulse and virtuoso fireworks.

Joseph Joachim
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Complete Violin Sonatas • 1

Violin Sonata No. 1 in E minor, Op. 73 (1854) 32:48

- | | |
|--|------|
| ❶ I. Bewegt, mit elegischem Pathos ('Agitated, with elegiac pathos') | 9:54 |
| ❷ II. Sehr rasch und fein ('Very quick and precise') | 4:32 |
| ❸ III. Nicht zu langsam ('Not too slow') | 9:16 |
| ❹ IV. Bewegt, sehr bestimmt ('Lively, very determined') | 8:58 |

Violin Sonata No. 2 in A major, Op. 78 (1857–58) 39:53

- | | |
|--|-------|
| ❺ I. Rasch, mit Wärme und Bewegung
(‘Quick, with warmth and animation’) | 11:47 |
| ❻ II. Nicht zu langsam ('Not too slow') | 11:06 |
| ❼ III. In raschem Zeitmaße, doch nicht zu bewegt
(‘In quick tempo, yet not too lively’) | 6:29 |
| ❽ IV. Rasch und feurig ('Quick and fiery') | 10:22 |

Laurence Kayaleh, Violin
Jean-Fabien Schneider, Piano

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