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PIANO

**RAFF**  
**COMPLETE PIANO SUITES • 1**

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**HYELIM KIM**

**JOACHIM RAFF (1822–1882)**  
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**HYELIM KIM, *piano***

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	<b>PIANO SUITE NO. 1 IN A MINOR, OP. 69 (1857)</b>	<b>11:06</b>
<b>1</b>	I. Preludio	01:58
<b>2</b>	II. Mazurka	02:31
<b>3</b>	III. Toccatina	01:23
<b>4</b>	IV. Aria	03:24
<b>5</b>	V. Fuga	01:50
	<b>PIANO SUITE NO. 3 IN E MINOR, OP. 72 (1857)</b>	<b>15:19</b>
<b>6</b>	I. Preludio	02:30
<b>7</b>	II. Minuetto	02:38
<b>8</b>	III. Toccata	02:03
<b>9</b>	IV. Romanza	04:17
<b>10</b>	V. Fuga	03:51
	<b>PIANO SUITE NO. 5 IN G MINOR, OP. 162 (1870)</b>	<b>21:10</b>
<b>11</b>	I. Elegie in Sonatenform ('Elegy in Sonata Form')	08:40
<b>12</b>	II. Volkslied mit Variationen ('Folksong with Variations')	12:46
<b>13</b>	III. Ländler	04:43
<b>14</b>	IV. Märchen ('Fairy Tale')	05:01

**TOTAL TIME: 58:12**

## JOACHIM RAFF (1822–1882) COMPLETE PIANO SUITES • 1

Joseph Joachim Raff's path to fame and distinction was an unusual one. He was born in 1822 in Lachen, on the shores of Lake Zurich, to a teacher from Württemberg and a Swiss innkeeper's daughter and taught himself to play the piano and compose. After receiving early encouragement and support from Felix Mendelssohn, he landed up at Weimar's Court of the Muses working as Franz Liszt's assistant. Growing disagreement with the circle around Liszt led to him leaving Weimar in 1856 for life in Wiesbaden as a music teacher and freelance composer – a precarious existence to begin with. While he was there, however, he became increasingly well known as a composer, and this enabled him to give up teaching. In the mid-1870s, his orchestral works were being played in concert halls throughout the Western world. The British *Monthly Musical Record* wrote in 1875: 'Among living German composers there are three who, by common consent, are admitted to stand in the front rank ... Wagner, Brahms, and Raff.' Raff's fame led to him being appointed as the founding director of the Hoch Conservatory in Frankfurt am Main, where his teaching staff included Clara Schumann, among others. In 1882, after five years of testing and exhausting labour, his life was cut short by a heart attack. By this time, the musical world's interest in Raff as a composer had waned, and by the centenary of his birth in 1922 he was long forgotten. The fact that his name is not completely unknown today is due to a revival of his work in recorded form and in programmes on the radio, starting at the end of the 20th century and still providing fresh recordings. As always, the live music industry has been slow in reacting to such developments. Nevertheless, three of Raff's six operas received performances during the 2020s (two of these being world premieres), and there were some stunning performances of his late apocalyptic oratorio in the town where he was born and in Leipzig. Musically speaking, Raff stood somewhere between the two German musical camps of his day – the traditionalists around Mendelssohn, Schumann and Brahms and the

'New German School' around Liszt and Wagner. His stated aim in this conflict was to reach the 'terra firma of neutral territory'. Taking Mendelssohn and Schumann as his starting point, he enriched his style by adopting elements from the New German School but also made an intensive study of Baroque and Renaissance music. His interest in pre-Romantic music also reveals a facet of his character: he mistrusted Romantic-style emotionalism and was more inclined to adopt a rational, intellectual approach to things.

When the music theorist Heinrich Christoph Koch published his benchmark *Musikalisches Lexikon* in 1802, he only included a brief historical entry on the suite: 'This term was applied to a class of composition for the piano or other instruments comprising a sequence of standard dance tunes such as the allemande, courante, sarabande and gigue that used to be extremely popular but has now entirely fallen out of use.' The suite had in fact lost currency by the mid-18th century and remained out of use until into the 1830s. The mid-19th century, however, was characterised by a marked trend for historical reappraisal, with Johann Sebastian Bach's music in particular being widely studied and revived. It wasn't long before the first suites were being written. Wilhelm Taubert's *Op. 50* grouped a *Prélude, Ballata, Gigue* and *Toccata* to create a suite for piano. The work was immediately given a positive review by the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* and suites by other composers followed during the 1840s and 1850s, prior to Franz Lachner's and Joachim Raff's near-contemporaneous contributions to the genre. Raff wrote seven suites for piano (*Opp. 69, 71, 72, 91, 162, 163* and *204*) – his most substantial contribution to piano literature. By contrast, he contributed just one conventional piano sonata to a genre that stood very much in the shadow of Beethoven – his *Sonata in E flat minor, Op. 14*. (It does come in two completely different versions however.) By writing suites, Raff wasn't just able to give a musical expression to his intensive study of music history. It also gave him a lot of freedom as a composer, starting with the dance forms he adopted. Alongside the historical models presented by the Baroque suites, it was

easy for Raff to incorporate dances from his own era, and later arias, romances and variations that didn't have any dance connections at all. And even the pieces headed 'Allemande' or 'Mazurka' often bore no relation to the dances. In an age of innovation and growing historical awareness, reviving an antiquated genre gave Raff a chance to express himself in a more playful, unfettered manner, sidestepping the weighty demands of the sonata. The success of this calculation is demonstrated by many reviews where the critic is more lenient in his judgement simply because of the choice of 'Suite' as a title. What is interesting is that Raff didn't start this series of piano suites until 1857, when he'd already left Weimar and was embarking on his long years in Wiesbaden, and it can probably be seen as a shift away from the 'music of the future' being promulgated by Liszt and Wagner's circle in Weimar.

In *Suite No. 1 in A minor, Op. 69* Raff combines traditional dances with others that were then in fashion in a way that is convincing, without resorting to writing early-18th-century pastiche. The opening *Preludio* already captures the listener's attention. Whilst the melodies are reminiscent of Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words*, they are about as far removed from them as Schumann's portrait of Chopin in *Carnaval* is from the Polish composer's music. Raff's highly expressive sevenths, on the other hand, are suffused with an element of Schumannesque poetry. The same is true of the start of the *Mazurka*, the most recent dance in the suite. Raff only superficially follows the pattern of Chopin's mazurkas, and this only in the odd bar. In between times, he takes his motifs on a harmonic journey through a variety of different keys, already touching on the distant realm of D flat major which will become so important as the suite progresses. For now, however, he returns to his starting point of A minor for the *Toccatina*, which is once again strongly reminiscent of Mendelssohn. In the *Aria* that follows, Raff makes the listener aware of the tension between A minor and D flat major, opening with a modulation from the suite's home key of A minor to D flat major, the destination key for the *Aria*. Interestingly, the modulatory process is repeated later on when A minor is again

reached before the theme of the *Aria* returns in D flat major. In the ensuing *Fuga*, the process is reversed. A unison sequence initially utilises elements of the scale of D flat major, then insists on the note C, which is common to both keys. After a general pause, this motif is transposed into A minor before the fugue gets going.

A similar sequence of movements to that of *Op. 69* is found in *Suite No. 3 in E minor, Op. 72*. This time, a *Minuetto* and a *Romanza* are placed between the Baroque movements *Preludio*, *Toccata* and *Fuga*, already familiar from the first suite. Unlike the earlier suite, here the Baroque movements, I, III and V, share the same central motif. This unifies the work, while the 'modern' second and fourth movements present a delightful contrast. Despite their falling-out the previous year, Liszt was taken with the work. Raff wrote to his fiancée Doris Genast: 'Liszt was here this afternoon ... Having been informed of the existence of my *Suite No. 3 [Op. 72]*, he demanded to see it. I had no hesitation in showing it to him ... Judging by his demeanour and what he said, he too seemed to find it very much to his liking.'

*Suites Opp. 162* and *163* were published 14 years after the first three (*Opp. 69, 71* and *72*). In the meantime, Raff had become world famous as a symphonist, and his engagement with large-scale symphonic forms is reflected in the *Suite in G minor, Op. 162*. Abandoning the Baroque reminiscences and dance forms, he writes music that looks to the piano sonata for its inspiration. The very first movement is entitled *Elegie in Sonatenform* ('Elegy in Sonata Form'). It makes an audible distinction between the two groups of themes, though the tone remains melancholy and pensive throughout despite the relatively fast tempo. This movement is followed by *Volkslied mit Variationen* – a set of variations on an unknown 'folksong' that appears to be Raff's own invention – he liked to marry the technical and intellectual demands of his music with his gift for writing memorable tunes. The simple theme is followed by a sequence of ten variations that demonstrate the full range of Raff's artistry in this area and require a high level of virtuosity on the part of the pianist. The title of

the following movement, *Ländler*, also evokes the popular culture of the German-speaking territories, but Raff eschews the stamping of the folk dance and instead writes a rather smooth, flowing movement. The central section reveals some bold harmonic ideas, with a direct modulation from E flat major to B major. Its melancholy reprise at the end of the movement already anticipates the world of Edvard Grieg's *Lyric Pieces*. The final movement, entitled *Märchen* ('Fairy Tale'), is mildly baffling. It should on no account be interpreted as a symphonic poem based on an imaginary fairy tale. Instead, it's a will-o'-the-wisp of a rondo that evokes the eerie, supernatural world of the German fairy tale. Whilst the sequencing of the suite's four movements initially seems fairly random and there aren't any thematic links between individual movements, it is possible to intuit an underlying idea that gives the work a common thread, namely the intention of giving a musical representation of core aspects of German national life, in the spirit of the 19th century.

**Volker Tosta**

*English Translation: Susan Baxter*

## HYELIM KIM

Hyelim Kim is a prizewinner of major international piano competitions, including the Clara Haskil (Vevey) and Arcangelo Speranza (Taranto) International Piano Competitions, Hastings International Piano Concerto Competition, Les Étoiles du Piano (Roubaix), and the Annarosa Taddei International Competition (Rome). She made her orchestral debut at the age of ten with the Filarmonica 'Mihail Jora' Bacău and has since appeared with the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra, Southbank Sinfonia, Zermatt Festival Orchestra, Orchestre de Picardie, Gürzenich Orchester Köln and Orchestre Philharmonique du Maroc, among others. Kim has performed in Korea and across Europe at venues such as the Elbphilharmonie Hamburg, Tonhalle Düsseldorf, Kölner Philharmonie, Flagey Brussels and TivoliVredenburg Utrecht. She has been invited to perform at festivals including Piano Folies du Touquet, Festival de Saint-Riquier and Musica Nigella. Born in South Korea, she began learning the piano at the age of five and moved to Germany at seventeen to study with Georg Friedrich Schenck. Kim holds a Bachelor's degree from the Robert Schumann Hochschule Düsseldorf and a Master's degree from the Hochschule für Musik und Tanz Köln, where she is continuing her Konzertexamen with Claudio Martínez-Mehner and Nina Tichman. In 2023, she received a scholarship from Fondation Clavarte in Bern.

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Joachim Raff was a largely self-taught composer whose style stands somewhere between the German traditionalism of Schumann and the newer school of Wagner. Raff composed seven *Suites for Piano*, a form he preferred to the sonata, and this provided him with greater freedom as a composer, resulting in his most substantial contribution to the piano literature. This is reflected in the Mendelssohn-like lyricism of the *First Suite*; contrasts between Baroque and Romantic styles in the *Third Suite*, a piece admired by Liszt; and more nationalist inclinations in the memorably melodic *Fifth Suite*.



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**TOTAL PLAYING TIME: 58:12**



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