



Joseph Joachim  
**RAFF**

# **Complete Violin Sonatas • 2**

## **Sonatas Nos. 3, 4 and 5**

**Laurence Kayaleh, Violin • Jean-Fabien Schneider, Piano**



## Joseph Joachim Raff (1822–1882): Complete Violin Sonatas • 2

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<sup>1</sup>, 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.'

The enduring success of the first two violin sonatas (see Naxos 8.573841) in the late 1850s and early 1860s prompted Raff to compose three more in quick succession between 1865 and 1868. The first of these, the *Violin Sonata No. 3 in D major, Op. 128* was written in Wiesbaden in 1865 and was dedicated to the famous violinist, and colleague of Mendelssohn, Ferdinand David. After the premiere at the Leipzig Gewandhaus on 8 December 1866, at which he was accompanied by the composer Karl Reinecke, David wrote to Raff that the work was 'a proper college piece, for which God can't fail to reward you'. It is a measure of the rise in Raff's reputation that the work was first given by two such prominent musicians in such a prestigious venue. The piece was published the next year and its popularity merited two further editions, the last in 1891.

The D major *Sonata* shares the four-movement layout and generally genial character of its predecessor, but lacks its expansiveness. Raff opens this compact work with a confident, carefree *Allegro*, maintaining the mood by employing complementary rather than contrasting themes, but the movement is saved from blandness by the charm of the material and the busyness of Raff's ever-changing textures. The fleeting second movement, a fiery *Allegro assai* in D minor, is in ternary form – the furious outer sections enclosing a brief, sweetly tuneful, slower trio in B

flat major. Here Raff plays to his strengths, as he does in the slow movement which follows. The tender *Andante, quasi larghetto* (G major) is a lyrical outpouring of pensive melody, the violin's melancholy musings only briefly interrupted by a stormier passage before the piano echoes the opening theme and brings the movement to an elegiac close. Raff's finales can sometimes be diffuse, but this *Sonata* is blessed with one of the most effective closing movements his chamber music has to offer. The sunny, joyous *Allegro vivace* returns us to D major and seems to be dashing towards its close almost before it has begun.

Finished only a few months after the *Third Sonata* in the early months of 1866, the *Violin Sonata No. 4 in G minor, Op. 129* is unique amongst Raff's canon. Firstly, it is the only one of the five to be cast in a single large sonata-form movement. Secondly, it alone has a sub-title: *Chromatische Sonate in einem Satze* ('Chromatic Sonata in One Movement'). Finally, Raff's piano writing is denser and more symphonic in style than in the other works, almost as if the piece was an arrangement of a concerto, although this is definitely not the case. Uncharacteristic chromatic harmonies, a certain abrasiveness, and concision also add to its individuality. The indication '*quasi recitativo*' appears several times in the score, indicating that Raff may have taken as his model a vocal *scena*, as had Ludwig Spohr earlier in his *Violin Concerto No. 8, Gesangscene*.

The *Sonata* is dedicated to the great Belgian violinist and composer Henri Vieuxtemps, an ardent enthusiast of Raff's music, and it was published in 1867. Quickly taken up by violinists, two further editions followed. It consists primarily of a sustained, ardent and dramatic *Allegro*. This is briefly interrupted by a couple of short lyrical sections, the first marked *Andante (non troppo lento, ma largamente)* in E flat major, but after each the tumultuous *Allegro* reasserts itself leading ultimately to a *stretto* dash to the close.

In the *Violin Sonata No. 5 in C minor, Op. 145* Raff returned to the four-movement model of the first three sonatas. He composed it in Wiesbaden in 1868, as he was approaching the zenith of his career, and dedicated it to another Belgian violinist, Hubert Léonard, probably in recognition of the latter's efforts to popularise his music in France and Belgium. The work was published in 1869 and

Léonard probably gave it its premiere in Paris at the end of January 1870, but wrote to the composer that the Sonata was 'less easy for the Parisians to understand than the other four', although musicians appreciated it, 'because they see that you're continually striving for greater things.'<sup>2</sup> The work proved popular enough for two further editions to be published and, despite the Franco-Prussian war only a few months after it was introduced to French audiences, there was also an edition published in Paris, specifically for France and Belgium.

Thoroughly Romantic in style and characteristically melodic, it is not a sunny work. The *Allegro patetico* opening movement sets the mood, its declamatory opening soon overtaken by anxious tension – a feverish violin underpinned by a seething piano. Contrasting, more lyrical material only continues the feeling of unease which ebbs and flows throughout the movement, only briefly relieved towards the end by the second theme appearing in a warmer guise, before being overwhelmed. The second movement, an *Andante* in A major, is calmer, and is typical of the melancholy, reflective slow movements, abounding with glorious, but never saccharine, melody with which Raff graced so many of his chamber works. Continuing the mood of the first movement, Raff alternates calmer and more turbulent episodes whilst maintaining a mood of heartache. The brief fleet-footed *Presto* which follows comes as a relief to the ear, if not to the heart. Oscillating between C major and D flat major, there's little warmth or jollity to be found in it. The galloping opening theme of the *Allegro agitato* plunges the listener back into the anxieties with which the work began, but soon gives way to a more lyrical theme which at least promises some relief. Gradually a more positive mood asserts itself until the movement closes in an affirmative C major peroration, perhaps not happily but at least confidently.

Gordon Boyd

<sup>1</sup> Cobbett, W. (1930) Cobbett's Cyclopedic Survey of Chamber Music, Vol. II. London: Oxford University Press.

<sup>2</sup> Raff, H., trans. Howe, A (2012) Joachim Raff – Portrait of a Life. [www.raff.org](http://www.raff.org).

## 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, comprising 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](http://www.montrealpianoduo.com)

Joachim Raff enjoyed enormous prestige with a reputation as Germany's leading symphonist of his time. He also wrote music for the violin, an instrument he had mastered when young, and for which he wrote with great sympathy. The enduring success of his first two sonatas (8.573841) prompted him to write three more: the charming, genial and joyous *Sonata in D major*, the symphonically conceived *Sonata in G minor* which, uniquely for Raff's violin works, is cast in a single movement, and a *Sonata in C minor* that, while often melancholic in tone, is still suffused with his trademark lyricism.

Joseph Joachim

**RAFF**

(1822–1882)

## Complete Violin Sonatas • 2

### **Violin Sonata No. 3 in D major, Op. 128 (1865) 26:05**

- |          |                                     |             |
|----------|-------------------------------------|-------------|
| <b>1</b> | <b>I. Allegro</b>                   | <b>9:08</b> |
| <b>2</b> | <b>II. Allegro assai</b>            | <b>3:54</b> |
| <b>3</b> | <b>III. Andante quasi larghetto</b> | <b>7:18</b> |
| <b>4</b> | <b>IV. Allegro vivace</b>           | <b>5:32</b> |

### **5 Violin Sonata No. 4 in G minor, Op. 129 'Chromatic Sonata in One Movement' (1866) 17:02**

**Allegro – Andante, non troppo lento, ma largamente – Allegro**

### **Violin Sonata No. 5 in C minor, Op. 145 (1868) 30:06**

- |          |                            |             |
|----------|----------------------------|-------------|
| <b>6</b> | <b>I. Allegro patetico</b> | <b>8:53</b> |
| <b>7</b> | <b>II. Andante</b>         | <b>8:57</b> |
| <b>8</b> | <b>III. Presto</b>         | <b>4:11</b> |
| <b>9</b> | <b>IV. Allegro agitato</b> | <b>7:55</b> |

**Laurence Kayaleh, Violin**  
**Jean-Fabien Schneider, Piano**

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