



Bisel Classics



**PIANO
SOLO**

Joachim
RAFF
**GRANDE
MAZURKA**
op. 38

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Preface

Joachim Raff had made the decision to follow his career as a composer in 1844 as a twenty-two year old largely self-taught pianist, with ambitions of being a professional musician. Before 1844, Raff's future as a teacher and his abilities in mathematics, Latin and German would have looked secure; afterwards, the young man faced many financial hardships as he struggled to get a foothold in the career of his choice.

He was assisted in his early days by Mendelssohn who recommended several of Raff's works to Breitkopf & Härtel who published these (opp. 2-7) in 1844. This appears to have been the defining moment for Raff who used his good fortune as a published composer to quit his teaching job and take up the profession, against the bitter protestations of his father who warned the young man would soon be penniless. It was a prophetic warning but Raff had found his calling and nothing, it seemed could deter him from his course.

Through the assistance of Franz Abt, Raff first made a meagre living for himself in Zurich teaching the piano, copying music and giving concerts and later, having made the acquaintance of Franz Liszt, Raff was taken in by the composer and soon found himself working in a piano store in Cologne. In these days, Raff was consumed with writing for the piano and it would be some time before he tried his hand at writing for anything else. 1847 was another pivotal year for Raff, a misguided article he wrote for the *Allgemeine Wiener Musik-Zeitung* had obliged him to leave Cologne for Stuttgart but his plans to study with Mendelssohn were soon thwarted by the composer's

untimely early death, and Raff's plans to work with Liszt were put on hold when Liszt was called away on tour. An uncertain time then, but even during the most unsettled periods of his life, the flow of original and brilliant works from his pen was undiminished.

In the *Grande Mazurka*, Raff is on familiar ground, writing in a popular form and there are moments of brilliance here that reveal the virtuoso at work but on the whole this is a work of uncomplicated dimensions. Difficult enough some might say but nowhere near as difficult as some of his other works for the piano from this time. Here is a work that is at home in the salon and dance hall alike though by the time this piece was written, it had long ceased to have been a piece that was any longer danced to. The explosive forward motion of the *Mazurka* ensured its popularity in art music long after the vogue for it in the dance hall had passed away. In this respect the *Grande Mazurka* dedicated to Lisette Stapfer was an instant hit and was published within weeks of being composed by Siegel & Stoll in 1847.

Stephen Begley, July 2010.