

Raff – Sextet & Grand Quintuor (2003)

Written by bluesever

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String Sextet in G Minor, Op. 178 1 *I. Allegro* 9:10 2 *II. Allegro molto* 4:07 3 *III. Larghetto*
10:22 4 *IV. Allegro* 4:54 Grand Quintuor in A Minor, Op.
107 5 *I. Allegro mosso assai*
11:28 6 *II. Allegro vivace, quasi presto* 6:04 7 *III. Andante, quasi larghetto mosso* 11:54 8
IV. Allegro brioso, patetico 7:42
Ensemble Villa Musica

Raff's Piano Quintet was considered by Hans von Bülow to be one of the very greatest works in its medium, and he wasn't wrong. Generously proportioned (37 minutes), expertly written, full of good tunes, and not a bit diffuse in its argument, it's surely one of the great Romantic chamber works, and yet it's barely known. The reason undoubtedly stems from the fact that Raff's compositional fecundity has counted against him; but he was a gifted composer, and at his best, as here, he rivals anyone. The basic, A minor key and passionate contrasts of mood and tempo tell the whole story. Unlike so many "moderato" openings, this piece starts "Allegro mosso assai" and maintains its intensity right up to the final bar of the last movement, marked "Allegro brioso, patetico". The Sextet in G minor is more pithy, but just as keenly felt, and beautifully textured. Raff's expert orchestral writing has often been cited, usually in connection with his assisting Liszt in orchestrating his tone poems, but his talent in this area is no less evident in these chamber works. The Ensemble Villa Musica plays both pieces with all of the necessary enthusiasm and energy, and the players are gorgeously recorded. This is one of those discs that no true chamber music connoisseur can afford to miss. ---David Hurwitz, ClassicsToday.com

Raff is one composer whose posthumous reputation has suffered enormously with his vast

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oeuvre almost completely forgotten. A recent revival of his symphonies on a variety of labels has shown that he has flair and charm if not always a top rank composer.

Dabringhaus & Grimm continually churns out precious chamber music gems that are fast becoming unique to the catalogue. This latest release is no exception and I would advise listeners who have found Raff's symphonies enjoyable to sample some of his most exquisite chamber works.

The Sextet, Op. 178 is probably the best work of the two recorded here with a highly enjoyable Allegro and a beautiful Larghetto, rather reminiscent of Beethoven's 2nd Symphony. Raff uses colour and has a fine palette that makes the music all the more attractive especially in the final Allegro.

The Grand Quintet is an earlier work and at times, I do feel that the piano part is a mite boorish but other listeners may digress from that view! It would be safe to say that the Ensemble Villa Musica are ideal interpreters and that the disc will appeal to chamber music lovers who enjoy seeking out such rarities. ---Gerald Fenech, classical.net

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