

Suite No.3 in E minor for Piano Op.72

By Alan H. Krueck

This short description was written by Dr Krueck for one of a series of four CDs issued by his AK Coburg label in 2003 and 2004. The CDs contained all seven of Raff's Piano Suites and his arrangement for piano of J.S. Bach's six Suites for solo Piano, all played by Alexander Zolotarev.

1. *Preludio*
2. *Minuetto*
3. *Toccata*
4. *Romanze*
5. *Fuga*

While spending some time in Weimar in 1857, Joachim Raff wrote to his fiancée Doris Genast, "Liszt was here this afternoon; he looked bad and his mood seemed to correspond to his appearance. Since Lassen had informed him of the existence of my Suite No.3 [Op. 72], he asked to take a look at it. I didn't hesitate showing it to him, even though he was under pressure to get to a Lohengrin rehearsal, and I implored him to play the Toccata and Fugue, which he did. He played both at sight amazingly well and the parents [sic!] were delighted as well. From his bearing and expression he indicated that he himself had found much to his taste."

A review of Raff's suites Opp.71 and 72 appeared in the July 1858 issue of the *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik*. By then it had been quite a while since the composer had lived in Weimar where, in the early 1850s, he had been accounted a member of the Liszt circle. His book *Die Wagnerfrage* [The Wagner Question] was critical of its subject and other publicly stated positions had made, made his distance from the *Neudeutschen* (New Germans) apparent, disappointing many in Weimar because the gifted composer had severed his ties. The review cited above, by one Rudolf Violen, reveals that bonds and contacts continued to exist with members of the Weimar circle. Violen, who died at an early age (1825-67), was himself an excellent pianist and a pupil of Franz Liszt, as well as a composer of 11 piano sonatas worthy of attention. Violen's judgment of the suites, couched in rather flowery prose, is as follows: "One must characterize both works as incontestable blossoms of the Weimar muse, dazzling stars in the Kühn catalog and important issues in recent piano literature [...] vitality and self-assurance are in abundance among the richly colored tonal pictures, and the piquant articulation and spirited flashes of invention lend the expressive means an effect of the unmistakably impassioned." After discussing Op.71, Violen turns to the E minor Suite, Op.72. He finds this "is composed with related intent and outline to the others, but one doesn't know whether to grant it the same measure of praise as that accorded its predecessor or judge it as an achievement of higher level because of the masterful, one might declare, genial concluding fugue." Violen analyzes the suite in detail and mentions that Raff quite obviously uses a major three note motif as the basis for the first, third and fifth movements and that its absence in the other two movements makes for charming contrast.