

Stories of **SYMPHONIC MUSIC**

A GUIDE TO THE MEANING OF IMPORTANT
SYMPHONIES, OVERTURES, AND
TONE-POEMS FROM BEETHOVEN
TO THE PRESENT DAY

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"PHASES OF MODERN MUSIC"
"THE MUSIC OF TO-MORROW" ETC.



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RAFF

(Joachim Raff: born in Lachen, on the Lake of Zurich, May 27, 1822; died in Frankfort-on-the-Main, June 25, 1882)

STORIES OF SYMPHONIC MUSIC

SYMPHONY No. 5, "LENORE": Op. 177

PART I. HAPPINESS IN LOVE

1. *Allegro*
2. *Andante quasi larghetto*

PART II. PARTING

3. MARCH TEMPO; *Agitato*

PART III. REUNION IN DEATH

(INTRODUCTION AND BALLAD AFTER BÜRGER'S "LENORE")

4. *Allegro*

Of this symphony in three divisions (composed at Wiesbaden in 1872) only the last part, strictly speaking, is based on Bürger's¹ celebrated ballad "Lenore." The first two parts illustrate phases of the experience of the two lovers which antedate the beginning of the story told by the poem.

In Bürger's poem the maid Lenore laments the absence of her lover William, who has gone to war "on Prague's dread battle-field";

¹ Gottfried August Bürger, born at Wolmerswende, near Halberstadt, January 1, 1748; died at Göttingen, in poverty, June 8, 1794. "Lenore" was published in 1773.

"Nor had he sent to tell
If he were safe and well."¹

The war ends, yet still no tidings come from the missing swain. Lenore, frenzied by doubt and longing, utters blasphemies. But that night a horse and rider draw up at the gate, and a knock summons her to the door. It is William. He bids her "bind her dress" and mount upon his horse behind him,

"... for to-day I thee
A hundred leagues must bear,
My nuptial couch to share."

Lenore complies, though after some questioning, and they make off through the moonlight. The pace is wild and terrible. They pass a train of mourners bearing a coffin to the grave, but at the behest of the bewildering bridegroom the funeral party leaves the body and joins in the mad ride. The croaking of night birds is heard, and spectres are seen dancing about a gibbet.

"How all beneath the moonbeams flew,
How flew it far and fast!
How o'er their head the heavens blue
And stars flew swiftly past!
'Love, fear'st thou aught? The moon shines bright.
Hurrah! The dead ride quick by night!
Dost fear, my love, the dead?'
'Ah! speak not of the dead!'"

¹ This and the following translations are from the English version of Alfred Baskerville (New York, 1854).

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Finally, as day begins to break, they dash through an iron gateway into a graveyard. Then Lenore beholds a horrid transformation in her lover:

“The rider’s jerkin, piece by piece,
Like tinder falls asunder.
Upon his head no lock of hair—
A naked skull, all grisly bare;
A skeleton, alas!
With scythe and hour-glass.”

The “snorting charger” vanishes in flame; dreadful cries fill the air; in the moonlight grisly spirits are seen dancing, and howling as they dance:

“For hear! for hear! though hearts should break,
Blaspheme not, lest God’s wrath thou wake!
Thy body’s knell we toll,
May God preserve thy soul!”

PART I. HAPPINESS IN LOVE

Allegro

Andante quasi larghetto

The first movement of Raff’s symphony (“Happiness in Love”) portrays the felicity of the lovers before the departure of William for the wars. “Tenderness and longing speak out,” changing to “anxiety and foreboding.” “The second part of the movement is a delightful representation of the discourse of the lovers, in which it is not difficult to imagine William listening to the anxious expressions of Lenore and seeking to quiet her and allay her apprehensions.”

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PART II. PARTING

MARCH TEMPO; *Agitato*

"War has broken out, and the lover must take his departure." As from a distance, the march is heard, at first softly; it increases in volume and emphasis, coming nearer and nearer. There is an interruption (*Agitato*), "which graphically depicts the parting of the lovers [an impassioned dialogue between violins and 'cellos] and Lenore's grief and despair." The march is resumed, gradually diminishes, and dies away in the distance.

PART III. REUNITING IN DEATH

Allegro

This, as has been said, is the only portion of the symphony which is explicitly derived from Bürger's poem. I quote Mr. George P. Upton's spirited commentary: "It opens with a plaintive theme . . . suggestive of Lenore mourning for her lover as she wakes from troubled dreams. Then follows an intimation of her fate in a brief phrase for the trombones. The Trio¹ of the march tells the story of her despair, for the army has returned without her lover. Her blasphemy and the remonstrances of her mother are clearly indicated. The recurrence of the first theme lands up to a rhythmical figure for the viola, representing the tramp of the steed bearing the spectre bridegroom. The bell tinkles softly,

¹ "Trio": see page 210 (footnote).

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and Lenore descends to meet her lover. Then the 'cellos take up the figure, retaining it to the close. The terrible ride begins. The bassoons and oboes carry on the dialogue between the spectre and his bride. One after another the constantly intensified and impetuous music pictures the scenes of the ride, the 'cellos and other strings keeping up their figure. A gloomy dirge tells us of the funeral train, and a weird theme in triple time of the spectres' dance about the gibbet, accompanied by wild cries of the night birds. More and more furious grows the ride until the graveyard is reached, when, after a moment of silence following the transformation, a chorale strain is heard, with a sad and tender accompaniment. The wretched maiden has at last found rest."