

SIDE ONE:

**Movement I**—*Bewegt, nicht zu schnell*

**Movement II**—*Andante quasi Allegretto*

SIDE TWO:

**Movement III**—*Scherzo. Bewegt*

**Movement IV**—*Finale. Bewegt, doch nicht zu schnell*

**H**ereditary, upbringing under peculiar environmental conditions, and profound religious belief formed the personality and artistic credo of Anton Bruckner to a degree unmatched by any other composer of similar stature. His ancestors, traceable back to 1449, were at first peasants; later they were artisans and teachers. Bruckner was a robust man of considerable physical strength—a hereditary characteristic—and when he became a rural school teacher he followed the family tradition.

Upper Austria, with its churches, libraries and medieval fortifications, is the area in which Anton Bruckner and his art had their roots. The dances and *ländler* of the peasants were an inexhaustible source of creative ideas for his exuberant, rustic scherzos. It was an inspiring region: here learning and creativity had flourished since the Middle Ages. Apart from the great medieval and Renaissance masters, Bruckner was the most religious of all Roman Catholic composers. He was a believer of total commitment. Franz Schalk, one of his advocates, once said that out of his orchestra resounds an immense *Credo* that even today's world must accept.

Bruckner was a man of the 14th century untimely thrust into the 19th—a time of tremendous scientific development, strong political liberalism, and intellectualism that often collided with church doctrine. It was the era of Nietzsche, of Marx and the burgeoning of communist ideals. Despite the ferment of ideas going on, Bruckner lived apart from the world around him. Just as Fra Angelico painted the most beautiful of angels in the calm of his small cell in Florence's San Marco, so Bruckner, too, created for the greater glory of God. In this respect he acted as did Haydn, who wrote into his autographs, *in nomine Domini*. It is known that Bruckner always spoke of God in a soft, whispering voice; it is not by accident that the designation *misterioso* can be found in several of his scores.

The Brucknerian symphony, as such, evolved from the mystical elements of the Mass. He actually wrote eleven symphonies, although two are not included among the canonical set of nine works. The very first, in F minor, is usually called *Study Symphony*; while the other, in D minor (1869), was put aside by Bruckner and was christened by him *Die Nullte (No. 0)*. It is noteworthy that the first five symphonies are in minor keys. This fact points up the great mental struggle reflected in Bruckner's *oeuvre*. Two outstanding elements are characteristic of his symphonic output: a solemnity stemming from the Mass, and its monumentality.

Beethoven's *Third*, *Fifth*, and *Ninth* are weighty symphonies in which the "finale problem" was taken on and solved. Schubert's *Symphony in C major* (1828), another monumental symphony, is in several respects a prototype of Bruckner's works in the same genre. There, the artistic and spiritual fulfillment lies in the finale, the crown of the symphony. Bruckner described the exposition of his symphonic movements as *Thema*, *Gesangsperiode*, and *Schlussperiode*. Often we observe that in the latter stage the tempo seems to slacken and that solemnity and calm prevail

before the symphonic struggle rises to a climax in the development section. A similar situation arises in the recapitulation, before the coda, which gradually unfolds in awe-inspiring orchestral splendor culminating in complete triumph.

The history of Bruckner's *Fourth Symphony* from the jotting down of the first sketches on January 2, 1874, until the appearance of the score in print, September, 1889, encompasses more than fifteen years of bitter struggle for economic security and artistic recognition. This also was a time when acts of humiliation and painful disappointment came Bruckner's way, with very few significant successes. The version of 1874 was longer than that which is recorded here. There was another scherzo then, and its finale differs greatly from that of the familiar version.

Bruckner revised the symphony in 1878, replacing the earlier scherzo by the now well-known "*Hunting Scherzo*"; he also remodeled the finale, which he rechristened "*Volksfest*" ("*Popular Fête*"). He was not satisfied with his revisions, however, and subjected the finale once more to a critical going-over. Leaving aside the *Study Symphony* and the *Symphony No. 0*, there were, before 1881, three unplayed symphonies on his shelf, *Nos. 4, 5, and 6*. The music-political situation prevailing in Vienna in those days accounted for Bruckner's troubles and setbacks.

The imperial city lacked a symphony of its own. The members of the court opera ensemble formed the Philharmonic Orchestra, a musical republic which gave only nine yearly concerts. In order to have one of his symphonies performed by this group, Bruckner needed the influence of the conductor Hans Richter, one of Wagner's most devoted paladins. An excellent musician and fine conductor, he was also a shrewd diplomat. The man who conducted the first Bayreuth festival in 1876 was very well liked by the Brahms camp and by its journalistic spokesmen, particularly Eduard Hanslick, the leading critical adversary of Wagner.

At one time on good personal terms with Bruckner, Hanslick turned against him critically after Bruckner's *Symphony No. 3 in D minor*, dedicated to Wagner, was published. Richter, carefully watching the situation, scarcely considered advocating Bruckner's cause in the programs of the Philharmonic Concerts; that would surely have cost him Hanslick's benevolence. He did not refuse, however, to conduct a Bruckner symphony when the Philharmonic was hired for a special concert. Although the musicians were suspicious of the composer and had rejected the first version of his *Fourth Symphony* as *verrückt* (crazy), they were obliged to grapple with the difficulties of that score when called upon to do so for a concert of the German School Society (*Deutsche Schulverein*). The symphony had been given a tryout by the Vienna Conservatory's student orchestra during two rehearsals, the second conducted by Bruckner himself, at which Josef Hellmesberger as soloist played the second movement's viola cantilena.

Although the concert, February 20, 1881, earned Bruckner an unqualified success, Richter remained aloof. The audience consisted for the greater part of Wagner partisans and members of the Academic Wagner Society, which had sponsored the event. The program did not designate Bruckner's symphony by its familiar subtitle—"Romantic." The composer had won an important battle but not a decisive victory; years of struggle lay ahead.

When the International Bruckner Society and the Austrian National Library began to issue a critical edition of Bruckner's compositions, painstaking research and considerable preparatory work brought to light the startling fact

that the printed scores showed considerable deviation from Bruckner's original autographs. The composer's devoted pupils and closest friends, aware of the difficulties that these gigantic creations pose for performers, advocated changes and cuts in view of the standard of orchestral playing (particularly as pertained with second-class ensembles) as well as the limited perception of audiences of those days. These dubious mutilations were tolerated by Bruckner as makeshifts; after a generation, however, they had lost whatever justification they may once have had. Thus the version presented herewith is the unadulterated one of 1878-80.

The symphony is scored for pairs of flutes, oboes, clarinets, bassoons, four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, bass tuba, kettledrums, and the customary strings. The symphony has been compared with Beethoven's *Pastoral Symphony* because external impressions influenced Bruckner's musical thinking; yet the *Romantic Symphony* is less programmatic than Beethoven's *Sixth*. Bruckner did, however, connect imaginary landscape and certain events with his musical conception. For instance, the horn call at the beginning of the first movement was interpreted by the composer as the morning call sounded from the church tower of a medieval town; and the call of the titmouse is imitated in the *Gesangsgruppe* with a characteristic motif shaped rhythmically as short-short-long.

Calm prevails at the end of the exposition. It is a "preparation stillness" (Ernst Kurth) before the thematic events gather momentum in the development section, where the religious aspect is stressed by a majestic chorale intoned by brass instruments. There is also a powerful coda in which the opening call has the last say.

The principal melody of the second movement (Andante, C minor, 4/4) has the quality of a funeral march. The *Gesangsgruppe* is represented by a deeply felt cantilena of the violas accompanied by plucked strings. Incidentally, this passage was dreaded by violists for nearly half a century. There is a climactic highpoint communicated with overwhelming orchestral splendor which, however, is not sustained in the fading conclusion.

The "*Hunting Scherzo*" (*Bewegt*, B-flat, 2/4) hardly needs any comment. It is Bruckner's only scherzo in duple time (although he used this meter in the Trios of the *Fifth*, *Sixth*, and *Eighth Symphonies*). The orchestra is considerably reduced in the Trio section (G-flat, 3/4). Bassoons, horns, trombones, trumpets, kettledrums, and double basses are silent. The autograph contains the following entry: "Dance tune played during the meal at the hunt."

The Finale (*Bewegt*, 2/2) contains many musical ideas; several of these appear in the opening section, which decreases in tempo. The typical Brucknerian rhythm of the first movement and Scherzo, achieved by the combination of twos and threes within the measure, is resumed, as is also the principal idea of the initial movement. There are dramatic moments in the development section as well as in the recapitulation. The coda evolves from a three-note motif heard in the opening passage of the Finale; its characteristic feature is the octave leap (downward in the case of the final movement's beginning); in the coda it appears in inversion upward, which might be taken as a religious gesture. There follows a chorale-like melody given by the horns; this also includes the principal motif of the first movement, a motif which in the concluding passage achieves great splendor. Josef Schalk, one of Bruckner's closest students, said about the *Schlussperiode*, "It rises in solemn quiet above all earthly desiring."

—Joseph Braunstein