

BRUCKNER Symphony No. 4 (1878 Version, ed. Korstvedt) • Warren Cohen, cond;
MusicaNova O • MusicaNova (55;41) Live: Scottsdale Center for the Performing Arts,
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For those of us who began falling in love with the music of Anton Bruckner in the 1960s, the journey toward comprehension of the different performing editions has been convoluted. It seems that the more we learn, the less we know. Here we have a live recording of the world premiere of the newly edited 1878 version of Bruckner's Fourth Symphony prepared by Benjamin Korstvedt. This is not a matter of a few changed dynamic, tempo markings or subtle differences of instrumentation. The last movement, which Bruckner titled "Volksfest" (Folk Festival), is totally different from the finale that we know.

There are some textual differences in the first three movements as well, fairly minor in the first and third but more extensive in the *Andante*. I will quote from Korstvedt's helpful notes about this movement: "What makes this 1878 version most special, though, is a passage about two-thirds of the way through. As the music grows calm following the second appearance of the viola song, we encounter a remarkable stretch of music that Bruckner cut during rehearsal when the Fourth was first performed and that has not been heard since! This is quietly evocative music, with falling figures in the woodwinds and strings interspersed by solitary horn and trumpet calls, leading into a widely sweeping passage that builds steadily to conclude the movement." This stretch, which begins about nine minutes into the movement, is quite lovely, and I am delighted that Korstvedt has rescued it from oblivion.

The Volksfest finale has some material that anyone familiar with the symphony will recognize alongside a great deal that is new. As usual with Bruckner, there are sudden changes of mood throughout. He seems intent on capturing the atmosphere of the dances found at a folk festival. A first hearing is jarring because of the juxtaposition of musical ideas we know with new and unfamiliar ones. You think the music is going to go in a certain direction, and then it doesn't. Repeated listening, however, allows one to absorb the threads of this alternate finale as they inspired Bruckner in 1878, and to appreciate his accomplishment before he had second thoughts.

Criticism does not have to play a zero-sum game. Preferring one version should not mean never experiencing the other. While I feel that the 1880 edition as edited by Leopold Nowak or Robert Haas remains the best Bruckner Fourth, this transitional version has a great deal to offer, and anyone seriously interested in the symphony should hear it. Korstvedt's notes give us a detailed history leading up to the preparation and completion of a version that Bruckner considered complete in 1878. However, before any performance was arranged, he made further modifications.

MusicaNova Orchestra is a professional ensemble located in Phoenix that specializes in unfamiliar and new repertoire. While one would not mistake it for one of the world's great orchestras, MusicaNova plays at a solid professional level. Warren Cohen is music director, and while I can imagine a more dramatic reading, he leads a performance that indicates his familiarity with Bruckner's idiom and presents the score well enough.

The recorded sound is a bit dry and congested; I cannot tell whether the fault lies with the hall's acoustics or the engineering. But this should not deter Brucknerians from going to John

Berky's invaluable website, abruckner.com, and ordering a copy. There have been a few recordings of the Volksfest finale as an independent movement. See Huntley Dent's review in *Fanfare* 45:4 of Jacob Hruša's recording of the Volksfest finale and three other versions of the symphony. This, however, is the first recording of the entire 1878 version of the score, and should therefore be of prime interest to Bruckerians.

Henry Fogel

Five stars: This is essential for fans of the music of Bruckner