

## BRUCKNER

### Symphony No. 2 in C minor

Anton Bruckner, one of the most controversial figures in the history of music, is treated with a devotion almost bordering on reverence by his adherents, while his denigrators are utterly contemptuous of his achievements. There seems to be no middle course and one is either "pro" or "anti" Bruckner.

Many writers have gone to some lengths to stress Bruckner's indebtedness to Wagner, but apart from the spaciousness and leisurely gait of their music, the two composers appear to have little in common, despite Bruckner's use of Wagner tubas in his last three symphonies. This alleged indebtedness to the German master is attributable to the fact that Bruckner, a gentle, easy-going soul, permitted certain friends and admirers—Herbeck, Joseph and Franz Schalk, Ferdinand Loewe, August Gollerich and Gustav Mahler among them—to tinker with his symphonies by making various "cuts". They not only produced abbreviated versions, but altered the orchestration and harmonies, the orchestration (on the evidence of these "improvements") being pronounced "Wagnerian". The real Bruckner was unknown until as recently as 1932, when his works began to be published in their original form. It was then seen how Bruckner differed from so many composers, who first think of an idea and then dress it up with their orchestration. A good many composers (they shall be nameless!) think pianistically and their finished scores sound like orchestrated piano music. Bruckner's orchestration seems to be the result of a natural intuition. A characteristic of Bruckner's harmony is his extensive use of the sequence; his modulations are also most effective and the organ point plays a considerable part in his harmonic scheme. Bruckner was a master of all the contrapuntal devices—augmentation (a lengthening of note values), diminution (shorter note values), inversion (turning the theme upside down), and stretto (the drawing together of subject and answer in fugal writing)—and makes much use of them.

The second Symphony in C minor, which was begun on October 11th, 1871, and completed on September 11th, 1872, was long in reaching this country; what was reputed to be the first performance here took place at St. James's Church, Piccadilly, London, on January 24th, 1959, when John Warrack, writing in *The Daily Telegraph*, stated: ". . . I was . . . unprepared for the scope and power of this beautiful neglected work. . . ."

It has had a very uneven career, undergoing revision many times (Haas reckons four versions, dated 1872, 1873, 1876-7, and 1892) before being published in December, 1892, in a version differing from the original of 1872. The premiere was

given in Vienna by the Philharmonic Orchestra, hired for the occasion, and directed by the composer. It was enthusiastically received and Bruckner wished to dedicate it to the famous orchestra, but he was told, in no uncertain terms, that it was the last thing they wished. He later dedicated it to Liszt, but when he heard that the score was carelessly left behind by Liszt when on his travels he was so hurt that he cancelled the dedication.

The first movement (*Allegro moderato*) begins with a tremolo on violins and violas, under which the 'cellos give out the first theme, with quiet exclamations from the horns. A climax develops and is succeeded by a diminuendo before the entry of the second theme, which is also announced by the 'cellos. Shortly after, the unison strings play a third theme, which is given the limelight for some time before being followed by a passage introduced by solo oboe, which is imitated by flute and bassoon. The development section opens with the initial phrase of the main theme. A short coda brings the movement to a close.

The second movement, an Adagio (*feierlich, etwas bewegt*), opens with a beautiful cantilena on the strongs. The second theme has two contrasting motives. The strings set forth a pizzicato rhythm while the solo horn enunciates a legato phrase. There is not so much polyphony as usual in this movement and the melodic line predominates. The coda, for muted strings and clarinet, is like a song without words.

The third movement is a Scherzo (*Schnell*), and the principal theme is at once announced fortissimo by strings and wind. This is of rustic character, but there is a temporary change of mood with the entry of flute and clarinet, the scoring being reminiscent of Weber. The trio is an attractive *landler*, played by the violas under a string tremolo. The scherzo section is repeated and is succeeded by a lively coda.

The Finale (*Mehr schnell*) is based on three themes, which undergo elaborate development. The first theme is heard at once from the strings, and the second theme, which is the most important, starts at the thirty-third bar fortissimo. The lyrical third theme is heard on the strings, horns accompanying with sustained notes, while the double-basses play pizzicato. An impressive climax is built up on the second theme and this brings the symphony to a close.

The scoring is for two flutes, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons, four horns, two trumpets, three trombones, timpani, and strings.