

BRUCKNER AND POLITICS

By Paul Hawkshaw, Yale School of Music

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No composer has suffered more at the hands of special interest groups than Anton Bruckner (1824-96). Generations of supporters and adversaries have involved his name in furthering their own political or personal agendas, often coloring and negatively impacting the perception of Bruckner as a person and composer and hindering the dissemination of his music. As early as 1867, when *Kapellmeister* Johann Herbage and the powerful critic, Eduard Hanslick, fought in the face of heavy odds to bring Bruckner from the provincial capital of Linz to imperial Vienna, they thought they had found the contemporary Austrian symphonies who could serve as a suitable counterweight to the pernicious modernist influence of Richard Wagner. The composer's unabashed admiration for Wagner's music soon turned Hanslick into Bruckner's most powerful adversary. For the next thirty years the critic and his followers, in a segment of the Viennese press representing a strange combination of political liberalism and musical conservatism, vituperatively condemned what they described as the uncontrolled Wagnerians and decadence of Bruckner's "music of the future."

Hanslick's reaction played perfectly into the hands of Viennese Wagnerians. The Academic Wagner Society of Vienna propped Bruckner up on a pedestal, and he became the darling of the local anti-Brahms, politically conservative, and often anti-Semitic press. Young Wagnerians including Gustav Mahler, Hugo Wolf, August Göllner, Ferdinand Löwe, and the brothers Franz and Joseph Schalk were among his staunchest supporters and were often responsible for the publication and performance of his music. Bruckner received much of his contemporary critical acclaim from Wagnerian fundamentalists, many of whom belonged to what Margaret Notley has described as "the most extreme part of the *völkisch* fringe" of Vienna.

Wagnerian ideology and contemporary politics controlled Bruckner's legacy well into this century. Realizing that his young editors were not always scrupulous and sometimes even tried to make his music sound more like that of Wagner, he left the autograph manuscripts of most of his major works to the Imperial Library. His wish was to have accurate scores available for posterity. If he had expected these to appear in public soon after he passed away, he was mistaken. Powerful Viennese families with vested interests in the early editions (not to mention a few skeletons in the closet) intervened and, for forty years, most of the manuscript versions remained relegated to the library shelf.

One of the great ironies of the history of the Bruckner legacy is that a major impetus for the first officially sanctioned attempt to address the "editions problem" came as a result of a far greater political evil. In 1937 Adolf Hitler consecrated a bust of the composer in Regensburg's palace of Valhalla. Bruckner had become a paragon of Wagnerian virtue and prototypical German composer. As Bryan Gilliam observed in a recent essay, this native son of Hitler's own province of Upper Austria and hero of the Viennese conservative press (which Germany needed to support the *Anschluss*) had become a cultural icon of the Nazi party. An Austrian peasant genius victimized by Jewish (i.e. Hanslick's) criticism admirably served the National Socialists' agenda; it didn't matter that Bruckner was a devout Roman Catholic—a fact very much downplayed by the Nazis. In any event by now it was propitious to publish the pure "Original Versions" of this German master in a new musically and politically correct Collected Works Edition prepared by Robert Haas and Alfred Oriel.

Any benefits which accrued as a result of the appearance of the new scores were more than offset in many parts of the world by the negative implications of Bruckner's adoption by the Third Reich. After the Second World War public sentiment demanded the expurgation of Nazi influences on the preparation of the Collected Edition. Leopold Nowak began a new one with his own agenda. His policy for more than thirty years as Director of the Music Collection of the

Austrian National Library was to shield the primary sources from outside scrutiny even more rigorously and effectively than his predecessors at the beginning of the century. Only in the past fifteen years have performers and scholars from the international community been allowed consistent access to surviving materials and begun to participate in a systematic investigation of the sources for Bruckner's major works.

As a result of their work a major reassessment of Bruckner, his music, and its editions is taking place. For example, Benjamin Kristine and William Carragan have pointed out that questionable editorial practices, sometimes inspired by political ideologies, caused editors of the first Collected Edition to mislead performers and scholars by rejecting out of hand valuable evidence provided by some of the earliest printed scores. On a broader scale, that Bruckner remains cloaked in an almost exclusively Wagnerian mantle is no longer justifiable. There is no question he admired Wagner and often made references to his music; the "Meister aller Meister" certainly influenced his harmonic language and orchestration. Yet aesthetically, politically, and philosophically the two men could not have been further apart. Wagnerism has clouded the more pervasive traditional roots of Bruckner's symphonic and choral styles. As Timothy Jackson has demonstrated in his study of the Mass in F Minor, Bruckner knew his Bach; was well-versed in the Viennese classics—Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert; and spent considerable time with the music of more contemporary figures such as Berlioz and Schumann. All surviving evidence indicates that, during periods of self-analysis, he turned to these composers—not to Wagner.

All of the factors which played a role in the vagaries of the dissemination of Bruckner's music are in evidence on this evening's program, beginning with the two works for male chorus. The men's choral society was an important musical and social institution in German speaking lands during the nineteenth century. Any number of composers including Schubert, Mendelssohn, Schumann, Brahms, as well as Bruckner wrote for it. Texts varied from rustic, often nostalgic, poems such as *Abendzauber*, to drinking songs, to fervent patriotic expressions like *Germanenzug*. Their sentiments served to fan the rising flames of German nationalism to such an extent that the great Austrian statesman, Metternich, (1773-1859) banned male choral societies, referring to them as the "German poison." Their attraction for the National Socialists of the 1930s and 1940s is self-explanatory.

Bruckner composed *Germanenzug* during the winter of 1863-64 in Linz. He regarded it as his first work as a professional composer. He had just completed his studies with Simon Sechter and Otto Kitzler and wrote it for a composition competition held in conjunction with the inaugural Upper-Austrian Male Chorus Festival scheduled to take place in Linz in July, 1864. Bruckner's piece was one of the winners (only second place, much to his chagrin) and received its premiere at the festival. The prize included publication by the local firm of Kranzl that same year. *Germanenzug* achieved considerable popularity during the composer's lifetime, so much so that, of all his works, the middle section was chosen for performance at his funeral. It is another of the many ironies of the Bruckner legacy that this piece, at the height of its popularity and since almost forgotten, was selected to honor the death of its composer who's fame was only beginning to rise.

To the best of our knowledge *Abendzauber* was never performed during Bruckner's lifetime, perhaps because of the difficulty of coordinating the Alpine yodelers with the traditional male chorus. It was composed in Vienna in 1878. Special vocal effects were not uncommon in the nineteenth-century male-chorus literature, particularly in the nature songs. Nevertheless the use of yodelers is somewhat of a curiosity.

Psalm 146 is an enigma. When it was written, why, and for whom are all unanswered questions. It survives in two manuscript scores—an incomplete autograph and a complete copy with autograph entrances. Neither could have been used for a performance; there are too many mistakes. The handwriting in the autograph suggests it is a relatively early work, probably from the 1850s. Perhaps because it has never served the needs of any of the special interest groups promoting Bruckner's music, to date *Psalm 146* remains unpublished. The score for this evening's performance was prepared by this author and will be printed in Vienna next year as part of the Bruckner Collected

Works Edition. It is being heard for the first time tonight. Evident throughout are many formal and stylistic influences of the Bach cantata.

If *Psalm 146* suffered neglect as a result of its lack of value as grist for some social, political, or musical propaganda mill, Bruckner's Fifth Symphony has paid a very different price for other reasons. He composed the work between 1875 and 1878. during this period, in the face of stern opposition from Eduard Hanslick, he was vying for and eventually appointed to a post as lecturer in harmony and counterpoint at the University of Vienna. It has been speculated that his particular concern with these learned musical matters at this time explains the often extreme contrapuntal textures in the Symphony-especially the massive double fugue of the Finale.

Bruckner only heard his Fifth Symphony performed on two pianos. He was too sick to attend the orchestral premiere under the baton of his student, Franz Schalk, in Graz on 8 April, 1894. For the performance Schalk had prepared a much-abbreviated new score with a massive reorchestration including the addition of an extra brass ensemble to accompany the chorale in the Coda of the last movement. This score was printed by Doblinger in 1896 and remained in use until 1935 when Robert Haas published the "Original Version" as it is preserved in the autograph manuscript. Because the editors of the new score were able to demonstrate that Bruckner was not involved in preparations for 1896 edition, the Fifth Symphony was held up as conclusive evidence that the manuscript versions more accurately represented Bruckner's intentions and were therefore far superior to the first prints. Even though, as research has since shown, the evidence is not nearly so conclusive for many of his other works, the new edition of the fifth symphony served as a prototype of the "pure" Bruckner score. By extension, according to Christa Brüstle, it became a musical symbol of uncontaminated "innate [German] artistic genius" perfectly suited for National Socialist propaganda of the 1930's. The new score was performed after the consecration ceremony in Regensburg in 1937 and again that same year at the closing of the Nazi party convention. Schalk's version has all but disappeared.

This evening Leon Botstein and the American Symphony Orchestra allow us a rare opportunity to hear the symphony as it was known in Bruckner's lifetime and for a generation afterwards. At least one major conductor, Hans Knappertsbusch, refused to learn the work any other way, continuing to perform the Schalk version until his death in 1965. Referring to the Finale which he heard only in this version, the critic Theodor Helm wrote: "Not Bach, not Beethoven, not Wagner had such an inspiration. It is as though the genius of these three masters has been remolded into a new artistic personality which could be none other than Anton Bruckner."