

Although it is a well-known fact that Anton Bruckner (1824–96) was very late to mature, and that his first great compositions date from his 40th year, it is often overlooked that he produced his first little organ pieces whilst staying with his godfather in Hörsching at the age of eleven, and during his years as a village schoolteacher at Windhaag (1841–43) and Kronstorf (1843–45) he also brought forth a number of small-scale, mainly choral, compositions. All of these, however, like his earlier works from the second St. Florian period (1845–55), are of minor significance and of interest to the music historian only. But the *Requiem in d minor*, which he began in 1848 and completed on 14th March 1849, is a different matter: it is Bruckner's first major composition, the first in which he included an orchestra, and the earliest work which has a true musical validity of its own.

When Bruckner returned to St. Florian as a schoolteacher after those for him so unhappy years in Windhaag and Kronstorf, he rapidly made many friends. Foremost amongst these was the judicial actuary Franz Sailer, who greatly admired Bruckner's talents and particularly his organ-playing; in Sailer's home Bruckner was a frequent guest. Sailer owned a Bösendorfer grand piano which Bruckner often played and which was his great envy, for on more than one occasion he remarked: 'If only I could afford an instrument like that!'. Then Sailer suddenly died in September 1848 and bequeathed his piano to Bruckner, in whose possession it was to remain to his dying day and on which he composed every one of his later works. (It now stands in the 'Bruckner Room' in St. Florian.)

It was in memory of his friend Sailer that Bruckner set to work on what was at that time

his most ambitious composition, the *Requiem in d minor*, which was to receive its first performance at St. Florian on the anniversary of his friend's death, in September 1849.

As dictated by the order of the Requiem Mass, the work falls into ten clearly defined sections, yet although it is an early work a sense of unity pervades the whole.

It must not be overlooked that at that time Bruckner was still steeped in the music of the great polyphonic age, of Haydn, Mozart and Schubert; he had only just discovered Mendelssohn, and Beethoven was still, on the whole, unknown territory to him. In view of all these facts it is amazing what he achieved, especially if we look at the great double fugue of the *Quam olim Abrahæ*, written at least six years before he even commenced his thorough contrapuntal studies with Simon Sechter!

It is true that the *Requiem* must not be viewed from the standpoint of the later Bruckner — the Bruckner of the three 'great' Masses and the nine symphonies — though there are many passages reminiscent of what was even then, in 1848/49, a past age (the very opening points irresistibly to Mozart's Requiem in the same key), and though the very inclusion of a figured bass for organ *continuo* strikes one as backward-looking, there are already several flashes of the later, great Bruckner to come.

It is perhaps symptomatic that in his old age, when he went through many of his earlier compositions, he did not reject the *Requiem* out of hand but made various emendations and in 1895 gave the score to his Steyr friend Franz Bayer as a present with the laconic comment: 'It isn't bad!'.
It is very much hoped that the present recording of this rarely heard work will serve

to prove the truth of this comment.

The *Requiem* is scored for four soloists, chorus, an orchestra consisting of strings, three trombones and horn (the horn only playing in the *Benedictus*), and organ *continuo*.

During the years following the composition of the *Requiem*, Bruckner wrote a number of small choral works as well as two works on a larger canvas: a *Magnificat* (1852) and the *Missa Solemnis in b flat minor* (1854). Strangely enough these do not quite measure up to the qualities inherent in the earlier *Requiem*. Then in 1855 he began counterpoint studies with the Viennese professor Simon Sechter, and until 1861 was completely absorbed by these studies.

As it was one of Sechter's fundamental principles that his students first had to acquire complete theoretical mastery before being allowed to engage in free composition, it is not surprising that Bruckner composed scarcely any works worth mentioning during that period.

Having concluded his studies with Sechter (and having meanwhile moved to Linz, where he now held the joint post of organist at the Old Cathedral and the principal municipal church), Bruckner, ever striving to increase and consolidate his knowledge, embarked on a further course of study with Otto Kitzler, conductor at the Linz municipal theatre. During these two years with Kitzler, Bruckner delved into matters of form and orchestration, and it was also at this late stage of his development that he first became acquainted with the music of Richard Wagner.

By way of 'student exercises' Bruckner now ventured into the realm of instrumental music, and his first attempt in this direction was the *String Quartet in c minor* of 1862 (a work which was not rediscovered until 1951).

Shortly afterwards he tried his hand at

purely orchestral composition, and the result are the *Four Orchestral Pieces* of 1862. Three of these, the pieces in F major, E flat major and e minor, are probably influenced by similar pieces which Kitzler used or composed as little interludes for theatrical performances.

The fourth is a March in d minor, and it is interesting to note that this March already contains a passage which recurs much later in quite a different context, in his Symphony No 8. This March, however, is the only one of the four pieces which has some slight indication of the Bruckner to come. The other three are charming, melodious little movements, scored for an orchestra employing only a trombone in addition to the orchestral complement required for a late Haydn symphony.

In style they are reminiscent of Mendelssohn and Schumann and bear witness to the type of music on which Kitzler based his teaching, but their main interest lies in the fact that with these four pieces Bruckner for the first time touched upon that field which he was to make his life's work: pure and absolute orchestral music.

Whereas in the case of the *Requiem* Bruckner's autograph score is still extant (namely the score which he gave as a present to Franz Bayer), the *Four Orchestral Pieces* only exist in a score copied (according to Göllerich and Orel) by the copyist of the Linz theatre. This score, however, must be considered authentic as Bruckner personally gave it to his friend Cyrill Hynais, together with the scores of the *Overture in g minor* and the very early *Symphony in f minor*, the so-called 'study symphony', both composed in 1863.

Hans-Hubert Schönzeler *Author's copyright 1970*