

Bruckner - Symphonies No.1 (1866 ed. Carragan), No.2 (1872 ed. Carragan), No.3 (1874 ed. Carragan)

Philharmonie Festiva / Gerd Schaller

Recorded in Ebrach, Germany, July 2011 3CDs Profil PH12022

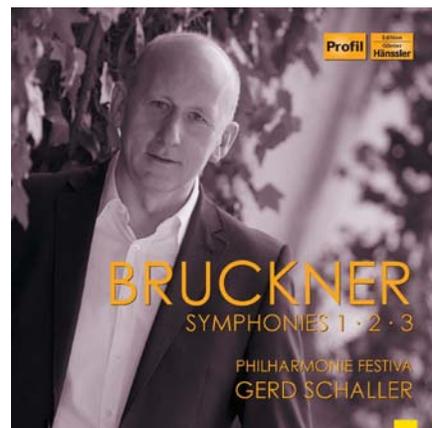
Following on from the set of Bruckner Symphonies 4, 7 and 9 performed by Gerd Schaller and the Philharmonie Festiva (reviewed in *The Bruckner Journal* Vol 16, No 1), Profil has now released a set of Symphonies 1-3 by the same forces. Whereas the first set was notable for the inclusion of William Carragan's completion of the finale of the Ninth Symphony, this release is distinguished by the use of Professor Carragan's editions of the first versions of the First and Second symphonies as well as a previously unrecorded version of the Third Symphony.

The First Symphony has a history longer than that of any other Bruckner work, a quarter of a century having passed from the start of composition in Linz in 1865 to the completion of the final revision in Vienna in 1891. The first version of the symphony was completed in 1866 and premièred (conducted by Bruckner) two years later. Bruckner subsequently revised the symphony in 1877, making minor amendments to the orchestration and structure. This 1877 revision, made during Bruckner's time in Vienna, has traditionally been regarded as the first definitive version of the symphony. Unfortunately, it has also traditionally been referred to as the '1866' or 'Linz' version, giving the potential for much confusion now that the true 1866 score has become prominent as a separate entity.

At present, the only other recording of the 1866 score available is that by Georg Tintner, one of the best performances in his cycle for Naxos. However, Schaller's performance is considerably more persuasive. Indeed, I'm inclined to regard it as the finest performance of the dozen or so recordings of the First Symphony I have in my collection, irrespective of edition. Schaller adopts a straightforward approach to Bruckner interpretation, eschewing extremes of speed or interpretative quirks, but brings a persuasive forward sweep to the first movement's allegro passages and a moving profundity to the Adagio. The latter movement's introspective passages are beautifully played, and if the main climax doesn't quite have the ardour of Jochum's 1965 recording with the Berlin Philharmonic, the serene passage that follows is ineffably moving. Similar qualities inform the rest of the interpretation, the finale in particular building a tremendous level of excitement (although I miss the thrilling motif for trumpets that Bruckner added to the closing bars of his 1877 score.)

The first version of the Second Symphony was completed in Vienna in 1872. Bruckner subsequently revised the symphony in advance of the first performance in 1873 (including reversing the inner movements) and made further alterations in 1876 and 1877. A final set of amendments was made in advance of publication in 1892. Although the 1872 score was quickly superseded, it is notable for a number of features that were lost in the later revisions, including the scoring of solo horn rather than clarinet at the end of the slow movement.

There is more competition with regard to recordings of the 1872 score, including versions by Tintner, Marcus Bosch and Simone Young. As in the First Symphony, however, Schaller's performance of the Second Symphony is so eloquent that it can be compared with the best performances in the catalogue. Schaller brings a natural forward momentum to his account of the outer movements, but also ensures that Bruckner's more lyrical passages are given their voice, including the wonderful hushed passage at Figure F in the Finale. The Scherzo and its exquisite Trio are characterfully played, and the Adagio is serene and meditative. The solo horn at the end of the movement, heard as if floating across alpine valleys, is sublime. Much of the credit for this, as elsewhere, is due to the orchestra, Philharmonie Festiva, an ensemble largely made up of players from the main Munich orchestras as well as the Munich Bach Soloists. The standard of the playing is world class, both in terms of ensemble work as well as the contributions of



individual soloists. The playing of the brass is especially eloquent. If I have a criticism, it's that the playing rarely achieves a true pianississimo when requested by Bruckner.

To supplement the three established versions of the Third Symphony, Professor Carragan has prepared a version of Bruckner's score as it stood in 1874. This involves a richer texture than that found in the original 1873 score, especially in the first movement, and is unique in having features that Bruckner chose not to carry forward to the 1887 and 1889 versions. Some of the more noticeable changes from the 1873 version of the first movement include more complex brass notation brass just before Figure C, a trill in the first violins immediately before the quotation of the 'Magic Sleep' motif from Wagner's *Die Walküre*, and the use of repeated notes on the horns to give a more dramatic close to the movement.

As it happens, I don't find Schaller's performance of the Third Symphony quite as compelling as the other two performances. The orchestral playing is as fresh and luminous as before, but the performance doesn't convey the intensity that Bruckner's longest score ideally requires. There is no lack of attention to detail in the interpretation, but the results are not quite the same.

All three symphonies were recorded live in Ebrach Abbey in Bavaria July 2011. The abbey's acoustic has a reverberation time of some five seconds. However, the microphones were placed close enough to capture orchestral detail without losing a sense of space, and the result is ideal for Bruckner's music. Applause has been edited out and the only evidence of an audience is a faint cough in the slow movement of the Second Symphony. The booklet note includes a note about the editions by Professor Carragan. In summary, this is a highly recommendable set of Bruckner's first three symphonies, and even if the performance of the Third Symphony isn't quite on the same level as the other two, it's nevertheless valuable for being the first recording of the 1874 score.

Christian Hoskins

Published in *The Bruckner Journal* November 2012