

## ***Anton Bruckner***

### **The pious revolutionary**

**In 2024, the music world will celebrate the 200th anniversary of the birth of Anton Bruckner (1824–1896). To mark the occasion, the Austrian National Library is dedicating a separate exhibition to this important composer in the State Hall from 21 March 2024 to 26 January 2025. This is made possible by her Bruckner collection, which is unique in the world and was included in UNESCO's National Memory of the World Register in 2014 and whose holdings include the original manuscripts of Bruckner's major works – so that all nine symphonies can be shown in the original for the first time. In the new, extensive show, these scores are supplemented by objects that refer to the circumstances of their creation and the dedicatees.**

**The special exhibition offers a fascinating insight into Bruckner's creative world and invites visitors to explore the cultural depth of his music. Music lovers and those interested in culture can immerse themselves in the musical legacy of the Tonkünstler and discover his unique works, his personal writings and his inspiring life story.**

In his will, Anton Bruckner stipulated that the handwritten scores of his major works should be placed in the then Imperial and Royal Court Library, which was done after his death in 1896. Since then, this Bruckner legacy has been regarded by the Austrian National Library as an obligation to systematically expand the holdings through acquisitions – both donations and purchases. In the course of the 20th and 21st centuries, important objects, including alternative versions of the symphonies, copies, prints, letters, personal documents and estates from Bruckner's circle, came into the holdings of the Austrian National Library. All objects directly related to Bruckner were also scanned and, in addition to the new show in the State Hall, can be accessed worldwide as part of the web portal "Bruckner Digital".

Anton Bruckner's personality was characterized by a polarity that is very important for understanding his individuality and therefore becomes the leading motif of the exhibition: the tension between the ecclesiastical, hierarchical environment of his Upper Austrian homeland and the liberal cosmopolitan atmosphere of Vienna in the second half of the 19th century. In fact, Bruckner's decision in 1868 to leave his previous environment and move to Vienna to accept a professorship at the Conservatory of Friends of Music can be seen as an essential pivotal point in his life, which coincided with his reorientation as a composer: after concentrating on choir and sacred music, Bruckner became a symphony composer who faced a critical public and experienced criticism of great severity.

His language, dress and manners were in contrast to the norms of the big city culture in which he moved. At the same time, he struck a new tone in his musical language as a symphonist, which was praised by his supporters and strongly criticized by his opponents. His symphonic movements reached an extent that was unknown before – they are perceived as harmoniously advanced and require a way of listening that also includes the "reverberation" in the active listening process.

Throughout his life, Anton Bruckner was a devout Catholic and met both ecclesiastical and secular authorities with a devotion that critics interpreted as subservience and occasionally also as

calculation. The new show in the State Hall of the Austrian National Library illustrates this contrast by presenting Bruckner as a "pious revolutionary" and thus portraying the person who was shaped by the tensions of the different social spheres of life and musical spheres.

Overall, the exhibition is divided into thematically concentrated chapters that follow the path of Bruckner's biography without getting lost in its details. An emphasis is also placed on the impact of the tone poet: the spread of his fame in the period after the First World War, combined with his kitsching as a "musician of God", on his appropriation as a specifically "German" composer during National Socialism and on his image after 1945, which was initially predominantly shaped by Catholic-conservative elements and only underwent a clear change after 1970 through the inclusion of socio-critical and psychological approaches.

### **A Life for the Symphonies**

Above all, his patron Moritz von Mayfeld encouraged Bruckner to become active in the symphonic profession. After two symphonic attempts, which were rejected as invalid, the first symphony in C minor was written in 1865/66. It was successfully premiered on 9 May 1868 in Linz's Redoutensaal under the direction of the composer. **For the first time, the essential characteristics of Bruckner proper can be found here: monumental themes, waves of intensification and harmonic audacity, "but Bruckner's outstanding talent is also resolutely opposed to us here," wrote the Linzer Zeitung at the time.** The main reason for Bruckner's move to Vienna was his teaching assignment as professor of organ playing as well as harmony and counterpoint at the Conservatory of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde as the successor to his teacher Simon Sechter.

**The Second Symphony in C minor was written in 1871/72 and was Bruckner's first work to be performed in Vienna on 26 October 1873.** The composer himself conducted the Vienna Philharmonic at the closing ceremony of the Vienna World's Fair. The critics highlighted the work's "undeniable originality," but also criticized the "insatiable rhetoric" and "decaying form." In his letter of thanks, Bruckner offered the orchestra the dedication of the work, which remained unanswered, as did the dedication to Franz Liszt. The Second Symphony was thus the only one to remain without a dedicatee.

The experience of "Tannhäuser" in Linz in 1863 made Bruckner a Wagner admirer, which he remained until the end of his life. **The Third Symphony in D minor was written in 1872/73. After completing the finale, Bruckner spontaneously travelled from Marienbad to Bayreuth at the beginning of September 1873 to present this and the Second Symphony to Wagner for dedication, who chose the Third.**

The first version of the Fourth Symphony was written in 1874, immediately after the completion of the Third, and was never performed during Bruckner's lifetime. It was not until the revision, completed in 1878, that Hans Richter performed for the first time on 20 February 1881 in a concert by the German School Association in Vienna. This was followed by two further revisions. **The symphony, which Bruckner himself described as the "Romantic", was one of his most popular and performed many times during his lifetime.**

The Fifth – composed between 1873 and 1875 – is one of the symphonies that Anton Bruckner himself never heard in orchestral form. However, a group of committed Bruckner students set

themselves the goal of presenting the works of their revered teacher to the Viennese audience, at least in the piano version. **However, the events surrounding the piano premiere of the Fifth Symphony in April 1887, which Anton Bruckner wanted to ban, show that working with the artist was by no means easy.**

**The Sixth Symphony, composed between 1879 and 1881, takes a back seat to Bruckner's entire symphonic oeuvre, although Bruckner connoisseurs ascribe high qualities to it.**

**The Seventh is the symphony that brought Anton Bruckner world renown, which met with broad approval from the very beginning and is still considered Bruckner's best-known and most popular work today.** The tone philosopher therefore did not revise them, in contrast to most of his symphonic creations, which have survived in two, occasionally even three versions. And yet it is not entirely free of modifications – for example, in the second movement, the wide-ranging Adagio, which Bruckner says he wrote in anticipation of the death of Richard Wagner, there is a change of a strange, almost bizarre character: a pasted-in strip of paper that contains almost only pauses, but also a cymbal beat – which never occurs in the rest of the work – and that in a remarkable place. After a long, great build-up, the action has reached its climax on a C major chord. The brilliant effect of this passage has already persuaded Arthur Nikisch, the conductor of the Leipzig premiere of 1884, to persuade Bruckner to use the certainly "theatrical" but highly effective cymbal. This is evidenced by a letter from Bruckner's pupil Josef Schalk, who happily reported this to his brother Franz. An "adopted idea" – controversial to this day.

**In the Eighth Symphony, Bruckner portrayed a broad spectrum of human states of mind: the arc ranges from combative drama in the 1st movement to powerful perseverance in the 2nd movement and religious visions in the 3rd movement to triumphant certainty of faith in the finale. This Eighth Symphony is dedicated to Emperor Franz Joseph I.**

### **Criticism and recognition**

The public recognition of his work was very important to Bruckner throughout his life. Early on, he was recognized as an organ virtuoso. However, his works met with harsh, sometimes very polemical criticism in Vienna. Eduard Hanslick, the critic of the "Neue Freie Presse" and Max Kalbeck, who published reviews in several journals, proved to be the spokesmen. Bruckner felt these criticisms as a serious personal denigration. On the other side were the Viennese Wagner friends, such as Johann Paumgartner, Hugo Wolf or Theodor Helm. After Wagner's death, he was appropriated by this side as a "Wagner replacement", without him being able to defend himself. Anton Bruckner considered the award of the Knight's Cross of the Order of Franz Joseph in 1886 to be a high honour, and it was also associated with an audience with the monarch himself. On this occasion, Bruckner asked the Emperor to influence Eduard Hanslick not to judge him negatively – a request that Franz Joseph refused. This was followed by numerous honorary memberships in musical associations; Anton Bruckner, however, considered the award of an honorary doctorate by the University of Vienna, which took place in 1891, to be the highest honor.

### **The last years of his life and the unfinished Ninth Symphony**

From the late 1880s onwards, Bruckner's health deteriorated noticeably. He suffered from heart failure and diabetes. In 1891 he had to resign from his position as a conservatory professor, and in

1893 he ended his service in the court music orchestra. In 1895, imperial intervention gave him an apartment on the ground floor in the "Kustodenstöckl" of the Upper Belvedere, where he worked until the end on the Ninth Symphony, which he was unable to complete. Anton Bruckner died on October 11, 1896. At his request, he was buried under the organ of St. Florian Abbey – where his musical career began.

### **Bruckner digital**

In addition to and in the run-up to the comprehensive exhibition in the State Hall, the Austrian National Library already implemented a major digitisation project on the Bruckner collection in 2023. In addition to all the original manuscripts that have already been digitised, all objects directly related to Anton Bruckner that are kept in the archives of the Austrian National Library have now been scanned and can be accessed in full on the web via the web portal "Bruckner digital". Other objects include letters, first editions with some contemporary entries, pictorial representations and early Bruckner literature.

### **The Vienna Symphony Orchestra visits the Austrian National Library**

In the course of three concerts with members of the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, the unmistakable musical idiom of the great musician Anton Bruckner will be heard in a special way in the magnificent premises of the Austrian National Library. Tickets are available through the [www.wienersymphoniker.at](http://www.wienersymphoniker.at) website.

On **28 March 2024**, the Glière Quartet will perform Anton Bruckner's String Quartet in C minor WAB 111 in the Oratorio of the Austrian National Library under the title "A View into a New Country".

On **2 May 2024**, the Vienna Classical Players, conducted by Martin Kerschbaum, will present the String Quintet in F major WAB 112 in an arrangement for string orchestra and the work "Locus iste" WAB 23 in the oratorio of the Austrian National Library in honour of the "Musician of God".

Bruckner lovers will enjoy a special highlight on **3 June 2024**, when the horn players of the Vienna Symphony Orchestra interpret an excerpt from the 7th Symphony and the finale of the 8th Symphony, among other things, in the magnificent ambience of the State Hall of the Austrian National Library and in special arrangements.

### **Exhibition information**

#### **Anton Bruckner. The pious revolutionary**

Exhibition in the State Hall of the Austrian National Library, Josefsplatz 1, 1010 Vienna

Curated by Dr. Andrea Harrantdt and Dr. Thomas Leibnitz

21 March 2024–26 January 2025

Tue–Sun: 10 am–6 pm, Thu: 10 am–9 pm

June, July, August and September additionally Mon: 10 am–6 pm

Admission: € 10,– / Guided tour: € 4.50 / Discounts / Free admission for everyone under 19 years of age

Exhibition catalogue: € 34,–