

Kronstorf

Anton Bruckner

Anton Bruckner (1824-96) lived in Kronstorf from the beginning of 1843 until the autumn of 1845 – not even three full years. Nevertheless he accomplished great things during this time, which can partly be ascribed to the fact that his schoolmaster, Franz S. Lehofer, and his wife made him feel truly at home. Furthermore Bruckner found a new circle of musically active friends, especially Födermayer, a farmer, who even provided a spinet for his schoolroom.

In addition to St. Florian, which Bruckner visited regularly, the nearby towns of Enns and Steyr were of great importance for his musical development. In Enns he became friends with the choirmaster, Leopold von Zenetti, who accepted the task of further instructing him in music theory. Apart from conventional training in figured bass, Zenetti mainly made Bach's chorales and *The Well-Tempered Clavier* the basis for his teaching, thereby laying a sound foundation on which Bruckner built his later work.

The parish church in Steyr impressed on Bruckner the beauty of the German Gothic style, which he sought to express in his music later. In addition he found a friend in the parish priest, Joseph Plersch, who encouraged him to improvise on the church organ to his heart's content. Bruckner also came into contact with the music of Franz Schubert via the music tradition of Steyr.

St. Florian, Steyr and Enns revealed new dimensions to Bruckner, and represent the true roots of his music: the Baroque and Gothic styles, as well as the great masters of Italian polyphony and Romantic music whom he had long admired.

Bruckner produced a number of compositions in his years in Kronstorf, which bear little indication, however, of his subsequent greatness.

It was around this time that Bruckner also had to prepare for his final exam, which all assistant teachers at elementary schools had to take four years after their first exam. Bruckner passed with flying colours in May 1845, and he especially surprised his friend and teacher Dürrenberger with his contrapuntal organ improvisation in the musical section of the exam. According to contemporary reports, Bruckner's improvisations possessed much more maturity than the compositions he wrote down on paper at this time.

Bruckner's stay in Kronstorf followed a hard time as an assistant teacher in the Upper Mühlviertel, and when asked about Kronstorf in later years, he replied that it had felt "like heaven"!

History of Kronstorf

Archaeological findings from the Neolithic period bear testimony to early human settlements in and around Kronstorf.

The first documented mention of 'Granesdorf' can be dated back to the period between the late 4th and early 5th century. There is much speculation as to the origin of the name

Granesdorf. One possible explanation is that Granesdorf is an abbreviated form of 'Gramanesdorf', which means 'the town of Graman'. The historical family of the Gramans played a significant role in Bavaria in the 9th century and possibly owned estates on the land around today's Kronstorf.

Kronstorf today

The municipality of Kronstorf lies on the river Enns between the cities of Enns and Steyr. It consists of 12 villages with an approximate total of 3,200 residents and is well connected to the road network, therefore easily accessible.

The 'Kronstorfer Au' (flood-plain of Kronstorf) is the only location on the Enns that is still subject to regular flooding, thereby providing a favourable environment for a large number of amphibians and birds. This area also offers the residents and visitors to Kronstorf many recreational possibilities that are not to be underestimated, such as the facilities for sailing and windsurfing around the Thaling-Rubring dam. The area around the 'Little Enns' is especially attractive, with its unique flora and fauna and the aquatic life so typical of this flood-plain.

Kronstorf parish church: The exterior of the parish church (dedicated to Saint Bartholomew and Saint Catherine) dominates Kronstorf's aspect and documents about 700 years of architectural history and also parish life. The oldest preserved structural elements of this church date back to around 1300. These are the small tufa archway (on the exterior south wall) and the Early Gothic mural on the interior north wall. This red chalk mural – originally 35 m² in size, but unfortunately now decimated – presents us with two scenes that were painted in long horizontal strips, one upon the other. The upper one shows Christ as the central figure of two apostolic processions, reigning on a cloud and surrounded by Instruments of the Passion. The remnants of the lower painting lead to the assumption that this was a profane scene. The mural is still fully preserved behind the pillar that was later erected in front of it.

The disposition of the *church organ* (built 1879) was probably made by Anton Bruckner himself. To this day the unaltered Bruckner organ remains a valuable testament to the Romantic organ sound.

Burial mounds: In the woods between Kronstorf and Schmieding/Unterhaus lies a field of burial mounds from the Middle Bronze Age. They are easy to discern, being between 10 and 15 m in diameter and about 1 m high. Archaeological excavations undertaken approximately 70 years ago revealed noteworthy grave goods that experts dated back to the period between the 15th and 13th centuries B.C.

Schieferegg Castle: Although it first appeared in historical documents in 1361, the first substantial account of Schieferegg Castle was given in 1466, in which it was reported that the landlord at the time, Heinrich Geymann, sent the townspeople of Steyr a letter of feud, whereupon they decided to place the castle under siege. In 1485, Schieferegg Castle was seized by the Hungarians, who then set it on fire when they withdrew. Thereafter, Schieferegg came under the administration of the Gleink dynasty, was rebuilt and to this

day corresponds by and large with G. M. Vischer's description in his 'Topographie von Oberösterreich' ('Topography of Upper Austria') from 1674.

Bruckner Museum: The old school building (Kronstorf Nr. 9) comprised a schoolroom on the first floor that was 5.5 m long and 4.2 m wide, as well as a small room of 6 m² with two windows, in which Anton Bruckner lived.

The 9th September 1989 saw the opening of the mini-museum 'Bruckner Room'. Bruckner's violin, a chest typical of Kronstorf in Bruckner's time, a diorama (class of ca. 1840), as well as hand-written scores and works composed by the master in his Kronstorf years are on show here. 'Der Spielmann Gottes' ('God's Minstrel'), 1936, a film about Bruckner, can be viewed on request.

Kirchschräger memorial: From 1924-38 the aforementioned school building was also the home of the later State President of Austria, Dr. Rudolf Kirchschräger (1915-2000; in office 1974-86). The bronze bust is a memorial to this great politician and honorary citizen of Kronstorf, whose father (1865-1926) was an organist and also a composer of masses and choral works.

Information:
Kronstorf municipal office
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Further places of interest regarding Anton Bruckner in the vicinity of Kronstorf (in alphabetical order)

Ansfelden:

Anton Bruckner's birthplace, in the former school building; museum since 1971

Enns:

Oldest civilian town in Austria (3rd century)

The Zenetti house: Leopold von Zenetti was Bruckner's music teacher in his Kronstorf and St. Florian years

Linz:

1840-41 Bruckner's training to become an assistant teacher

1855-68 Bruckner was the organist in the parish church as well as in the old cathedral, where he was also the music director

Studied music theory with Simon Sechter in Vienna

Composed 1st symphony in Linz

1974 Opening of the concert hall 'Brucknerhaus' in Linz

St. Florian:

1845-55 Bruckner employed as teacher and monastery organist

Bruckner's sarcophagus in the crypt under the organ in the monastery church

1986 Austrian premiere of Bruckner's 9th symphony, including the completion of the unfinished 4th movement by William Carragan (New York), in the monastery church.

Steyr:

1886-94 During the summer months of these years Bruckner worked on his 8th and 9th symphonies

1898 First Bruckner memorial

Bruckner staircase

Translated into English by Mag. Elisabeth Kaplan-Nowotny

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