

Austerity versus Charm: Revisions in Bruckner's Fourth and First Symphonies

Two years ago, it was my great pleasure and privilege to be here to participate in the Bruckner Conference, which happily is becoming a regular event, and to present a paper in defense of the Schalk version of the Fifth Symphony -- a paper which **The Bruckner Journal** did me the honor of publishing in its March 2000 issue, albeit in a highly abridged that is to say "Schalked" -- version: a very good job of editing if I say so myself. That this journal exists is a tribute to the initiative of its editors and managers, as well as a blessing for scholars and admirers of the music of Anton Bruckner.

My subject today relates to revisions of the Fourth and First Symphonies -- primarily the Fourth -- and how these revisions reflect Bruckner's tendency toward austerity as contrasted with Loewe's pull in the opposite direction, namely toward greater richness and variety in both orchestration and expression. This same consideration also applies to Franz Schalk's revision of the Fifth Symphony, but, having already discussed this in considerable detail at the 1999 Bruckner Conference, I won't explore it today beyond saying that, in my opinion, it was the tonal austerity implicit in Bruckner's original manuscript that motivated Franz Schalk to undertake his remarkably thorough revision -- an anonymous labor of love for which he sought no credit and gained no glory -- and since his death has received nothing but opprobrium.

Unlike Schalk's revision of the Fifth, Ferdinand Loewe's revision of the Fourth was done with the composer's permission and personal involvement. Franz Schalk also became involved at some point, but the finger prints are primarily those of Ferdinand Loewe, as a study of parallel passages in his revision of the Ninth Symphony makes clear. In any case, it was this version which Loewe worked out with Bruckner that was first published in 1889 and, until 1936, with the publication of the 1878/80 version by the Musikwissenschaftlicher Verlag of Vienna under Robert Haas, it was the only version known to the musical world. It was rejected by Robert Haas precisely because of Loewe's finger prints, which led him to deem it inauthentic despite the composer's known involvement and cooperation. In Haas' defense, it cannot be denied that the orchestral sound is something other than what Bruckner himself was doing at this time. Bruckner's approach to orchestration was undergoing a considerable evolution towards brassiness during the composition of the Third, Fourth and Fifth Symphonies, in which works melodic material increasingly became carried by brass instruments, notably the trumpet. This resulted in a degree of loudness that many audience members might find hard to take, and in this connection, I have noted the several times that Colin Anderson, who writes reviews of concerts for *The Bruckner Journal*, has complained about "blatant brass" in some of the performances he has reviewed. Obviously much depends on the sensibilities of the conductor, but Bruckner's scores, in many passages, virtually invite blatant brass playing, this being particularly true in the Fourth and Fifth Symphonies, which abound in triple fortissimo dynamic indications. The resulting effects can be both awesome and austere, outweighing in the consciousness of listeners - such as myself - those portions of the music that are lyrical and charming, the net effect left in the memory being one of loudness. On the other hand, it must be admitted that many audience members revel in the sheer power of brass, and it seems likely that Bruckner was one of them. Fortunately for Bruckner's acceptance in the music world, however, audiences were shielded from the brassy austerity of the original versions of these two symphonies for nearly two generations -- a fact which I think contributed significantly to the huge and instant success of the first-published versions, as well as to Bruckner's reputation as a composer.

I would like to support this assertion with a summary of my own personal experience with the Fourth Symphony. To begin with, my acquaintance with Bruckner's music dates back to 1959, and one of the

recordings that was early in my collection was the Vox release of the Fourth Symphony performed by the Vienna Symphony under Otto Klemperer. While there was much in the music that I found beautiful, I was disturbed by the unrelieved intensity and loudness of the first movement -- a movement which, despite some beautiful passages, did not fulfill the poetic promise of the opening horn call -- and the finale seemed to fare no better. A musically sensitive friend for whom I played the record had the same reaction to the symphony. The problem was exacerbated by Klemperer's brutish approach, although I did not realize this until a couple of years later when Bruno Walter's recording with the Columbia Symphony became available -- a performance that put a friendlier face on the music. Meanwhile I was buying every Bruckner recording I could lay my hands on because, despite some problems I had with certain pieces, there was something profoundly spiritual and wonderful about this composer's music -- it was like no other and I was, as they say, "hooked."

Then one evening in March of 1964, I attended a concert by the New York Philharmonic at Lincoln Center in what was then called Philharmonic Hall, now Avery Fisher Hall, in which the final work on the program was Bruckner's Fourth Symphony. The conductor was Josef Krips. Unknown to me was that this was to be my first exposure to the 1889 edition: the so-called Loewe version. As the performance began, I did not expect anything other than a very good live rendition of music experience of hearing both versions would lead one to think. Thus the various salient features, such as the horn and woodwind solos, the extended string passages and tremolos, brass ensembles, unison passages, etc., are all to be found in corresponding locations in both versions. The real differences lie in myriad subtle changes, a large percentage of these being in phrasings, dynamics and verbal directions in the score and parts, instrumental changes often being in the form of deletions or supplemental additions, as well as alterations in the blend of large ensembles. The final result, however, is an orchestral texture that is far more interesting to the listener, and which reveals Loewe's genius as an orchestrator. Bruckner himself referred to Loewe as "my Berlioz."

In the third and fourth movements, however, we find some changes in form. The Scherzo is given a first and second ending (before and after the Trio), and there is an unexpected cut in the reprise of the Scherzo, creating a sudden hush that Tovey describes a "highly dramatic." Also, the instrumentation includes the addition of a piccolo which, according to one editor, Bruckner tolerated but did not originate. In any case, it is used very tastefully. In the Finale, the differences in orchestration are more extensive than in the preceding movements, and include the addition of cymbals which are used in three places (one loud clash in the exposition and two soft strokes in the coda). With respect to form, the recapitulation of the first theme is eliminated, and since some authors characterize this as a "mutilation", it deserves some comment. In the 1878-80 version, this recapitulation appears as a completely disconnected and very loud brass enclave which, musically speaking, goes absolutely nowhere. It utterly fails to function in a true sonata-form manner, namely as a welcome return to home territory from which the development has led the listener, as one finds in a Mozart, Beethoven or Schubert symphony, but because the sonata form requires a restatement of the first theme, Bruckner stuck it there. I can see no other reason for its presence, and musically speaking, it's dead on arrival. In any case, it was rightly removed. Other refinements include an ascending 3-note unison arpeggio at bar 294 which, though fortissimo, actually eases in an otherwise horrendously abrupt, full orchestra triple-fortissimo entrance that rudely intrudes on an evanescent triple~pianissimo passage. The initial effect in the original version is almost-unbearably crude, although the 45-measure section it introduces is one of great power and majesty. Loewe's 3-note arpeggio is like the cracking sound that precedes the crash of a falling tree: it heightens the impact of the full orchestral fortissimo event and, in terms of one's ears, gives the listener a little warning. Then Loewe proceeds to enhance the extended dramatic passage with a series of crescendoed tympani rolls, creating the effect of heaving seas. This

awesome passage is brought to an end with a Wagnerian tremolando descent of the strings to pianissimo, the tremolando marks being the most important difference vis a vis Bruckner's original. The effect is superb. The last important change is the suppression by Loewe of the climax immediately preceding the coda. The music is the same, but played piano instead of the fortissimo of Bruckner's original. Apparently Loewe thought that too many climaxes detract from the effect of the important ones, and with that it's hard to disagree. In actuality, we cannot say which alterations are Loewe's and which are Bruckner's. We know from a letter from Joseph Schalk to his brother Franz, dated 9 May, 1887, that the revision of the Fourth was taking place and that Bruckner himself was supporting the emendations; and we know from a letter from Bruckner to Hermann Levi, dated 22 February, 1888, that he made some changes of his own initiative, and requested that Levi have them incorporated into the parts. In any case, whatever the amount of Bruckner's input, we know that the guiding spirit behind the revisions was that of Ferdinand Loewe, whose abilities Bruckner held in such high regard. In summary, we can say that Loewe's revision, for the most part, comprises extremely perceptive retouches that allow the more subtle beauties inherent in the score to emerge to a fuller light. The symphony in its revised form was performed 17 times in Bruckner's lifetime, several of which performances he attended. This version obviously delighted audiences and represented a great triumph for the composer. I doubt that the original version would have fared as well, although it must be admitted that its premiere in 1881 was also a success.

Before taking leave of this symphony, a word needs to be said about Bruckner's first version, which he composed in 1874. I will limit my comments to the first movement, except to say that the second movement is very similar to that of the 1878/80 version (except for the coda), whereas the scherzo is a totally different piece from the famous hunting scherzo, and the finale, while utilizing much of the thematic material found in the later version, is also a totally different piece. The first movement opens with the familiar horn call set against the tremolando strings, the second and third themes following the pattern of the 1878/80 score quite closely. The exposition is developed more lyrically and extensively, however, with cheery countermelodies and contrasting dramatic sections which are far less violent than in the later version, and comes to a close with a greatly relaxed passage which ends in hushed, church-like chords in the strings, reminiscent of the sleep-motive from Wagner's Die Walkure. What we have thus far, is a piece that is happier, less brassy and more varied in content than the later revision, and one which better fulfills the title "Romantic." While it offers plenty of drama, it also offers something completely missing from the 1878/80 version, namely a sense of rest and repose, in the passage just cited and again in the development following the chorale, with an even more explicit reference to the afore-mentioned sleep-motive. After the recapitulation, which contains beautiful variants of the exposition material, something wonderful begins to happen: the listener is taken for an incredible ride through the clouds, with kaleidoscopic changes in harmony, the horn theme resounding against pulsating ostinato figures in the strings, along with trumpet fanfares and a sense of ever-brightening skies, bringing to mind the prophet Elijah's ascent to heaven in a flaming chariot. It goes on for about 120 measures, to the end of the movement. Why Bruckner chose to revise this piece the way he did is truly bewildering to me. Leopold Nowak, in the preface to this score, states that "Bruckner's revisions and substitutions represent a substantial tautening of the whole structure." An understatement if ever there was one! From this listener's point of view, what Bruckner did was to strip out most of the passages that provide lyricism, warmth and repose; harden the sound and replace the spontaneous charm with an almost Calvinist austerity.

Interestingly, Loewe's revision of the 1878/80 version, while it does not significantly change the music, does much toward restoring the sense of charm that Bruckner had bulldozed under in the course of making his own revision. With regard to making revisions, Bruckner was often his own worst enemy. His first

versions typically reveal excellent and sensitive musical instincts, but they also tended to be very complex; and in the process of tightening the structures he often excised the very passages that reveal the spontaneity of his initial inspiration, the trend invariably being toward austerity. The two published versions of the First Symphony reveal this tendency very clearly -- and Bruckner himself was the sole reviser. The first version, known as the Linz version, was composed in 1865 and 1866, and received a successful premiere in 1868. Before allowing it to be published, however, Bruckner, very late in life, subjected it to extensive revisions, aimed at tightening up the structure and regularizing the metrical periods. As a result, we once again see the excision and suppression of the spontaneous passages that give the Linz version its fresh vitality. The following examples should illustrate this. In the first movement of the Linz version, there is a beautifully prepared preliminary climax toward the close of the recapitulation's developmental extension (already the coda according to Robert Simpson's analysis) in which a full orchestral fortissimo (bar 308 Linz) is anticipated by an impassioned, four measure crescendo in the strings -- like a gust of wind before a cloudburst. In the revised version, known as the Vienna version, this anticipation is suppressed in favor of a pianissimo ostinato in a slightly lower register, so that the orchestral fortissimo bursts in rudely (bar 301 Vienna), without passion ("like a brazen harlot!" -- according to Simpson). In the second movement -- an exquisite sonata -- there are two passages of exceptional beauty, the first of which occurs in the recapitulation of the second part of the first theme, which begins softly in the horns, against oscillating violins, is picked up by the oboe and then taken up by the 'cellos in an impassioned digression into the treble clef -- accompanied by ascending staccato arpeggios in the violas -- a passage that can only be described as luminescent in the Vienna version, this digression is completely suppressed and replaced by a continuation of the theme in the horns -- possibly because the composer thought the digression to be stylistically inconsistent, whereas it is precisely this type of diversity that gives the score its freshness. The second moment of exceptional beauty in this movement is the coda, the ending of which is somewhat serene and radiant, but which in the revision emerges somewhat less beautiful, its inspiration sacrificed to fussy adjustments.

In terms of orchestration, it should be noted that the Vienna version tends to replace solo passages with sectional ones, resulting in some loss of intimacy and, hence, warmth. The Vienna version was published in 1893, whereas the Linz version had to wait until 1935 for publication.

In this paper I have tried to show how Bruckner's own revisions tend to move in opposite directions to those undertaken by his disciples, who invariably sought to develop more variety of tone and expression, whereas Bruckner's tended toward greater economy, simplicity and austerity, even though it is highly doubtful that he explicitly wished his symphonies to be characterized by this last-named quality -- certainly not one with a title like "Romantic."

I thank you for your attention.

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