

BRUCKNER'S FIFTH SYMPHONY
THE SCHALK VERSION AESTHETICALLY CONSIDERED

At the time of his death, Franz Schalk (1863-1931) was one of the most respected conductors in Europe. For many years he had been the director of the Vienna State Opera and had been the principal conductor of the concerts of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde. Joseph Braunstein (1892-1996), a musician, musicologist and teacher whom this writer, together with musicologist Dr. Benjamin Korstvedt, had the pleasure of interviewing in 1995, had played viola in orchestras under Schalk's direction a great many times and remembered him clearly. In this interview he said "I had the highest regard for him. I still remember with greatest pleasure when there was a memorial concert for him, and when a critic -- Robert Konta was his name -- said that Schalk was not a musician, not a conductor, but was an Austrian institution. And it was true." Such was Franz Schalk's reputation. Today it is quite other. In the field of musicology, it would be difficult to find names that have been more reviled than those of Ferdinand Loewe (1865-1925) and the brothers Franz and Joseph Schalk (1857-1901), the reason being their alleged editorial interference in the first published editions of Anton Bruckner's Fourth, Fifth and Eighth Symphonies respectively. For all practical purposes these editions have been consigned to the dustbin of history and are virtually never performed. Were it not for the loyalty of one Hans Knappertsbusch to these versions, they would never have found their way into commercial recordings, and, for this reason, would be almost unknown today. The total dominance of the critical editions, published by the Musikwissenschaftlicher Verlag (Musicological Press) of Vienna, is long since an accomplished fact, there remaining only a residual battle between the Haas and Nowak editions, and it is not the purpose of this writer to challenge the rightness of this preeminence. Indeed, we have every reason to be grateful that the Bruckner we hear in concert halls and in recordings represents, for the most part, the composer's intentions with considerable accuracy. That is not to admit, however, that the critical editions are free of aesthetic problems. The fact remains that Bruckner's closest associates and ardent disciples, most notably the brothers Schalk and Ferdinand Loewe, felt it necessary to subject Bruckner's original manuscripts to revisions -- in some cases with the composer's permission and cooperation, and in other cases without -- in order to arrive at performing versions which they deemed audiences would be more likely to accept. While this can be seen as an enormous presumption on their part, it must be recognized that these disciples -- persons without whose devoted apostleship Bruckner's music might never have become part of the standard repertory -- were themselves highly qualified musicians (two of them destined to become Vienna's leading conductors), and that the revisions they made in the course of preparing the first published editions represent, at the very least, a sophisticated commentary on the composer's original manuscripts as seen from a conductor's per-

spective. This is not to be dismissed lightly, nor does their work deserve the contempt that has been heaped upon it by so many critics, scholars and commentators over the past half century. Indeed, the enormous success of these early editions, particularly of the above named symphonies, provides significant testimony to their impact upon audiences, as well as to the possible rightness of the judgment of their editors.

What was it about Bruckner's manuscripts that his disciples found problematic? Obviously it was not the music itself, or they would not have bothered with it. Indeed, they worshiped it. Leopold Nowak notes in his preface to the critical edition of the Fifth Symphony that, in the first published version, "the work in many places sounded softer than Bruckner had intended." As if to confirm this, Bruckner is reported to have said that he wanted his music to "overwhelm" the listener. Such an attitude on the composer's part might well point to the nub of the problem that the revisers found in the autograph scores. To overwhelm a listener with beauty and power is one thing; to overwhelm him with loudness is another. This can be offensive to sensitive ears. When one is engaged in conversation with someone who speaks very loudly, one is likely to become more aware of the loudness than of the substance of what is being said, and so it is with music. Then there is the question of tonal austerity, a quality that afflicts the 1878/80 version of the Fourth in particular, but also the Fifth (in the opinion of this writer). This is not as discernible in recordings as in live performance (where there is no opportunity to adjust volume or tone controls). On one occasion this writer attended a performance of the Fifth in Carnegie Hall in New York with a friend and musicologist who is a well-known Bruckner expert. It was the first time he had heard the Fifth in live performance, and after the concert had tears in his eyes and remarked "it's so cold, it's so cold." He knew the symphony well from scores and recordings, but couldn't get over the lack of warmth that the orchestra had projected and was blaming the conductor. This writer had thought the performance to be quite good, but it was the sixth time he had heard the piece live, and with respect to warmth, it had been no worse than the other performances he had heard. Some years earlier, this writer had been present at two performances of the Fifth by the New York Philharmonic under William Steinberg in Lincoln Center. During the Finale, eleven extra brass players had filed out onto the stage behind the orchestra. This was handsomely done and generated excitement in the audience, but when the brass players finally intoned the chorale, the effect, rather than the crowning glory we had been led to anticipate, was simply a louder dose of what we had already heard. It seemed more oppressive than liberating.

It takes a long time for a Bruckner lover to admit, let alone come to terms with, the existence of an aesthetic flaw in one of the masters universally acknowledged masterpieces, yet this writer's experience with six live performances and three rehearsals of the symphony points to some kind of problem. The fact of the matter is that the music

itself is not cold. The principal theme of the first movement is airy and uplifting; the second theme of the Adagio is as impassioned as any Bruckner ever wrote, while the transformation of the forlorn first theme when it reappears toward the end of that movement can only be described as radiant; also, laendler-rich Scherzo, with its *gemuetlich* Trio, has much folksy charm. Only the Finale seems formidable, but even that has cheerful moments, most notably the fast-trotting second theme. There is, nonetheless, an objective quality to the music which tends toward the impersonal, and for this reason the orchestration should be such as to minimize this quality -- if the piece is to sound friendly. Bruckner's penchant for heavy brass-writing does just the opposite, and this must be what Franz Schalk saw staring him in the face when he made the decision to mount the premiere performance, a performance which eventually took place on April 9, 1894. Clearly, he wanted the premiere to succeed, and he naturally felt responsible for its success. It is undoubtedly safe to say that it was for this reason, and no other, that he undertook the revision. As early as July 14, 1892, Franz wrote a letter to his brother in which he said: "My work on the Fifth proceeds very slowly, but nonetheless ever forwards. Just now I am at the concluding measures of the first movement. -- The accomplishment of this was of enormous difficulty." This letter makes clear the thoroughness of his review of Bruckner's orchestration and the fact that it was undergoing a substantial revision. While there is no evidence that Bruckner had any knowledge of this correspondence or of the extent of Franz Schalk's intended revision, he had authorized him to mount the premiere, undoubtedly with a certain amount of freedom with respect to detail; he was well-acquainted with the orchestral ideals of his former pupil, and, because of delays in getting the premiere firmly scheduled, must have known that something was going on. On May 17, 1893, Joseph wrote to Franz "Bruckner speaks about the Partitur of the Fifth. He has naturally become suspicious, since you have not yet brought about a performance." Other correspondence clearly reveals delay tactics on the part of the brothers so that Franz would have time to complete the revision. It is not the purpose of this writer to justify such tactics, but it should be recognized that the motive behind them was a sincere desire to assure the success of the premiere.

In terms of orchestration, Franz Schalk followed generally the same principles that Loewe had utilized in the preparation of the 1889 edition of the Fourth Symphony, which had been carried out with Bruckner's full permission and involvement. With respect to the premiere of the revised Fourth, Bruckner wrote to the conductor Hermann Levi, "the success in Vienna is unforgettable to me." Indeed, this version, deemed to be corrupt today's musicological establishment, was performed 17 times in Bruckner's lifetime, several of which performances he attended. It obviously delighted audiences and represented a great triumph for the composer. He never disowned it. Clearly the brothers Schalk hoped to create a similar triumph for their master.

Shortly before the premiere, Franz visited Bruckner in Vienna in order to review in detail the plans for the premiere which was about to take place in the Theater am Stadtpark in Graz. It was during this meeting that Franz obtained explicit permission to have the final statement of the Chorale played by a separate brass ensemble standing on risers behind the orchestra. How much more of Schalk's revision was communicated to the composer is not known. Without doubt some of it was, and it seems likely to this writer that Bruckner, being ill, but wanting the symphony to be performed (with compromises, if necessary), had decided to allow his disciples have their way for the time being, with at least some degree of approval -- meanwhile bequeathing the original manuscripts to the Imperial Library, thereby protecting his legacy "for later times", as was his wont to say.

With respect to Schalk's emendations, it must be admitted that they are very far reaching, amounting to a substantial re-casting of the work which leaves scarcely a bar untouched. Except for the Finale, the net effect of the changes is quite subtle, however, amounting to a softening of the tone without any changes in the music. As with Loewe's revision of the Fourth, the salient passages are all there, with important solo and ensemble passages in the same locations as in the original. There is much more blending of instruments, however, and a tendency to transfer to the woodwinds many passages that had been in the brass -- even in quiet passages. In the first three movements there are no changes in form, except that in the third movement, the conductor is directed back to bar 246 of the Scherzo for the da capo, thereby limiting the Scherzo's reprise to its recapitulation. There is nothing to prevent a conductor from going back to bar 1, however. In the Finale, the changes have a significant effect on the form, transforming it from a carefully balanced, though very complex, 4-theme sonata form, with triple counterpoint fugal development, a full recapitulation and extended coda, to an Exposition and Fugue, and only a partial recapitulation which completely omits any restatement of the second theme, plus, of course, the coda. Schalk obviously felt that the movement was too long, so he shortened it by two large cuts of 29 and 86 bars, separated 20-bar passage which he left in place. In addition, 2 bars were cut from the introduction and 4 bars from the coda, bringing the total cut to 121 (not 122) bars. The size of the cut should not shock anyone, however, since Bruckner himself, in the original manuscript, authorizes a cut of 103 measures, omitting most of the fugal development, but preserving all of the sonata-allegro. Schalk's cuts, however, are very skillfully made, so that even a person very familiar with the music would have difficulty recognize the exact points where they occur. The result leaves an utterly seamless continuity of fugal development, which by-passes the recapitulation of the first two themes, changing thereby the outline of the form. Another significant consequence of the cuts is elimin-

ation of three loud statements of the Chorale theme (plus two inverted ones), deferring thereby all reference to this theme until the coda, the effect of which is to heighten the drama of its final appearance. On the other hand, there is no doubt that much magnificent was sacrificed in the revision, notably the recapitulation of the second theme and its stunning climax of ricocheting activity in the brasses. The third theme is recapitulated but greatly toned down in the revision, lessening the drama of the return of the theme from the first movement so as not to detract from the steady build-up towards the coda.

In terms of orchestration, Schalk greatly reduces the role of the brasses, particularly the trumpets -- and often to the disadvantage of the music if a point-by-point comparison is made. There is, however, an aesthetic logic to his over-all plan, which carries with it a sense of inevitability as the music moves steadily and gratifyingly to the enormous power of the coda, which, with added brasses (heretofore held back) and percussion, has an effect that is truly extraordinary. Six stunning and ingeniously placed cymbal clashes, with gleaming sparks from the triangle provide the jewels in the crown that is the Chorale as the symphony ends in a blaze of glory. Up until the coda, the music has been pressing the listener towards a new tonal dimension that the original version utterly fails to deliver (the brasses having already been over-used), whereas Schalk's emendations provide that new dimension of sound that is so uplifting. After the premiere, Schalk wrote an enthusiastic letter to Bruckner, who had been too ill to attend the performance, in which he said, "No one who has not heard it can imagine the crushing (niederschmetternden) power of the Finale." This writer would change the word "crushing" to "liberating." It is the original version that crushes the listener.

On January 13, 1995, the American Symphony Orchestra, under Leon Botstein, gave an all-Bruckner concert in Avery Fisher Hall at Lincoln Center in New York City. The final work on the program was the Schalk version of the Fifth Symphony, and the event attracted musicologists from as far away as Berlin. Knowing the version from the old Hans Knappertsbusch recording on London Records, and feeling the sound on the old LP to be a bit opaque, this writer anticipated experiencing some of this opacity in live performance, because of Schalk's blending of instruments. However, while attending the rehearsals, he was struck by the radiance and gentle warmth of the sound -- very much the impression he remembered from a performance by the New York Philharmonic of the Loewe version of the Fourth Symphony under Josef Krips. One has to hear the piece live to experience the incredible atmosphere that fills the concert hall. There is no way that the original version can deliver the benevolent sense of enveloping sound that this version yields, and its instant success at the 1894 premiere is no wonder to this writer at all. Theodore Helm, a critic and contemporary of Bruckner, attended the premiere and reported that

"the enthusiasm of the audience grew with each successive movement; again and again the orchestral players had to rise from their seats to acknowledge the tumultuous applause." In 1911, the composer Jean Sibelius wrote in a letter: "Yesterday I heard Bruckner's B major symphony, and it moved me to tears. For a long time afterwards I was completely enraptured. What a strangely profound spirit, formed by religiousness! And this profound religiousness we have abolished in our own country as something no longer in harmony with our time." Suffice to say, it was the Schalk edition that the Finnish master heard.

Regardless of the conspiratorial aspects of its beginnings, the Schalk edition of ~~the Fifth Symphony~~ the Fifth Symphony cannot be dismissed as being totally inauthentic. The music is entirely Bruckner's, even if the orchestration is not, and the score contains many performance directions which reflect conductorial practices of the time, some of which may have come from Bruckner himself through discussions with Schalk. The fact remains that Bruckner did approve of a similarly re-cast Fourth Symphony, and he may have authorized a similar re-casting of the Fifth, had he lived longer. The Schalk brothers and Loewe knew Bruckner intimately, and had a very good sense of what might have been approved in the future, especially if he had been present at a triumphant performance of the Schalk version as had been the case with the revised version of the Fourth. It was the expressed desire of both the composer and the Schalk brothers that another performance of the Fifth take place in Vienna under Schalk, at which the composer would be present. Would they have ambushed a totally unprepared composer whom they revered with a *fait accompli*? This seems hardly likely. What is important for us today, however, is that the score exists, and that it is a creation of stunning beauty. Like Rimsky-Korsakov's revision of Moussorgsky's Boris Goudonov, it is in itself a work of genius and is entitled to a life of its own.

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