

SIDE ONE

1st movement: Allegro

2nd movement: Adagio

SIDE TWO

3rd movement: Scherzo

4th movement: Finale

ANTON BRUCKNER was born on 4th September, 1824, and was in his third year when Beethoven died. Not until he was nearly forty did he try to compose a symphony, in F minor, a 'prentice' work which is not today counted amongst his established if not immortal 'Nine.' He was a great organist, and his position as a representative composer of religious music was surely and permanently founded by his Masses. At his organ at St. Florian, in Ling, his slowly maturing musical faculties were nurtured by the reverberating tones of his beloved instrument. When he became a master symphonist, these organ tones remained in his mind, so that when in a symphony he suddenly cuts off the orchestral sound and makes a pause, we must endeavour to think that he is still hearing the encompassing echoes in the church at St. Florian after the organ's actual music had momentarily ceased.

Today Bruckner is accepted in Austria as the greatest symphonic composer since Beethoven. He is essentially an Austrian Catholic composer. He is still not generally recognised as a composer of anything like the Beethoven or even the Schubert symphonic stature in Great Britain, France or Italy. In this country he is finding an increasing public; but not yet does his music appeal to younger generations as promptly and excitingly as Mahler's does, for Mahler was the more obviously virtuoso composer and, also he was more varied, more protean, of imagination than Bruckner. Mahler at once reveals his wonderful instrumental technique. To the casual ear, Bruckner uses an orchestra with a sort of organ registration. In his symphonies we can almost see and hear him pulling out the stops. Moreover there is nothing 'modern' or eclectic in his outlook. He composes from two themes only, love of God and love of his homeland, love of Austria's mountains, meadows and remote (in his day) villages. There is no inner psychological change during the course of his nine symphonies, no complete sheddings of skin. There is a saying to the effect that Bruckner composed much the same symphony nine times. Nonsense, of course—but it is true that in each Bruckner symphony the blueprint, the ground-plan, the processes of musical thinking and organization, are much the same. From symphony to symphony Bruckner doesn't change in his imaginative and technical make-up. But he **grows**, grows universally and majestically.

The First symphony of Bruckner contains all the main unmistakable finger-prints—the sturdy onward treading rhythm, the string circlings and rushes of scales, repeated naively and persistently, the sudden interruptions of brass in a movement of meditation, uninhibited unison passages, signal calls in the brass, sudden melodic musings, a lyrical phrase in the strings wandering away into wood-wind sequences or constant echoes.

Bruckner rings the changes on this material, on these technical devices, and produces, in ears not versed in the essentials, much the same static contrasts of meditation and simple lusty peroration.

The stupidest thing ever said or thought about Bruckner is that his music has any point, any characteristic, in common with Wagner. He admired, even worshipped, Wagner. But spiritually and psychologically he was at Wagner's extreme. Bruckner's music is perhaps the most continuously religious music composed during and after his period of life on this planet. He was 'God-intoxicated.' There is not, in all his output, a hint of exoticism, or a single whiff of sex. But his simplicity of heart and his peasant blood did not extend to his musical powers of thinking. He is, in fact, a very subtle maker of a symphony. His themes or 'subjects' are not rigid or small-lengthed. Sometimes he puts into a single group a number of themes, each emerging from its predecessor. Consequently his development sections, and the duration of a Bruckner movement, are long, and put a strain on our attention. Without patience and faith it is not much use listening to Bruckner at all. Like religion and matrimony Bruckner asks from us faith and plenty of time.

Those of us who have lived years with him and have come to know his language and know it as a language wholly natural and instinctive, know also, beyond any doubt, that Bruckner was truly a great composer, a maker of music which in turn is deeply humane, devout, genial, utterly original and full of hearteasing curves of melody, honest to God chorales, gigantic stampings of rustic humour, ranging mountains of orchestral (and organ) unisons, and bold trusty marches on and on, to boundless faith.

The first symphony begins with one of these onward marches, which at the second bar breaks into a chirpy tune. To begin a symphony this indecorous way was in the 1860's an innovation. Mahler, in his sixth symphony, composed in 1904, also shocked the symphonic "Establishment" by beginning with an abrupt, impertinent march. But Bruckner was never acid or ironical, in Mahler's way. Bruckner, during the first movement of his first symphony, severely tests the uninitiated. There are interruptions of rhythm. The promise of a lyrical stretch in the second subject, a string legato, fades to wood-wind repetitions in the organ loft. The brass drops the authentic Brucknerian octave. Swirling strings keep the music on the move, while a complicated 'working-out' process goes on. Not yet has Bruckner learned to bend to his often apparently improvisatory uses the stern requirements of sonata-form.

The adagio with a 3/4 andante tells of the wonderful musings of the Bruckner slow movements to come. Two contrasting songs follow a groping opening passage. The string weavings have an angelic floating, inconsequential movement. And, at the end, another Brucknerian prophecy, a coda of gentle benedictory cadence.

The scherzo is almost mature Bruckner, a tone, a rhythm, not heard in music before. Bruckner set the Austrian **Heimat** to orchestral poundings and romantic nostalgia in tone.

The finale, too, is a blue-print of later masterpieces. Here, in the 'prentice' state, there is too much of repetition, too many sequences, one or two too many beginnings again. None the less, it is all genuine Bruckner. From this first symphony the way is clear to the grandeurs and humours of the Bruckner symphonies which go up, range on majestic range. By study and complete absorption (and digestion) of Bruckner First, the student wins his diploma.