

SYMPHONY NO. 5

Anton Bruckner was fated never to hear at all his unfinished Ninth Symphony and the two outer movements of the Sixth, and his Fifth Symphony was heard by the composer, in concert, solely in a transcription for piano duet! That was in Vienna in the spring of 1889, nearly ten years after he had completed the work. The only orchestral performance to be given anywhere during Bruckner's lifetime took place in Graz in 1894, when his health was beginning to decline, and he was already too ill to travel.

Franz Schalk conducted the orchestral première and supervised the publication of the score in Vienna in 1896, the year of the composer's death. In the process, he made more changes than any other Bruckner editor had ever dared—until Ferdinand Loewe's 1903 alterations in the posthumous edition of the Ninth Symphony. Schalk deleted 122 bars from the Fifth's *Finale* and rescored ("Wagnerized" is the usual descriptive verb) much of the rest. His version is now known as the Revised Version. It was not until 1937 that the correct, critical edition from Bruckner's true autograph (Original Version) was finally published by the Bruckner Gesellschaft under the editorship of musicologist Robert Haas, and republished under Leopold Nowak in 1951. Both Gesellschaft editors are agreed in rejecting Schalk's emendations *in toto* as having been done without authorization.

It is hardly surprising that the pragmatic-minded Schalk failed to find sufficient justification for the immense scope of the final movement. Here, for the first time in Bruckner's output, the *Finale* is by far the largest and most complex movement in the Symphony. The Fifth is indeed a "finale symphony" like Beethoven's Ninth, a symphony involving a shift in structural emphasis, insofar as the last movement—far from being simply a lighthearted rounding off, a dismissal, in the classical manner—is *the* crucial movement in the whole scheme. For it is only here that the musical ideas put forth at the outset are finally brought to their dramatic culmination.

In a sense, Bruckner's Fifth is his major symphonic tribute to the art of counterpoint and fugue, of which, as a church organist, he was a past master. Not until Mahler's Eighth Symphony of 1906, with its gigantic orchestral-choral fugue in the opening *Veni* section, was a sym-

prophet to present a fugal development of such strong marching impulse as Bruckner does in the central portion of this *Finale*. Needless to say, it was a generous chunk of that fugue, truly the very heart of the work, which Franz Schalk chose to eliminate in his first edition of 1896.

Another innovation of the Fifth is the manner of its inter-movement structuring. Not only are the main themes of the other movements passed in review near the beginning of the *Finale* (as in Beethoven's Ninth), but the two outer movements both begin with the identical bass figure in the same key, as do the two inner movements. This mirror imagery results in a key sequence not to be found elsewhere in Bruckner, nor in the standard symphonic literature: B-flat major/D minor/D minor/B-flat major.

And, finally, we have what might be called the apotheosizing (or triumphant climaxing) of the orchestral chorale or hymn—a type of melody much favored by both Bruckner and Mahler. The fact that such an orchestral hymn-apotheosis is featured so prominently at the conclusion of both Bruckner's Fifth and Mahler's Fifth points to some kind of tribute to Bruckner's monumental work on the part of his younger colleague.

I. Introduction (B-flat major). Bruckner has always been noted for his solemn and mysterious openings, but No. 5 is actually his only symphony with a formal slow *Introduction* leading into an *Allegro*. And never did he impart a deeper solemnity and mystery than in the steady rise and fall of the plucked bass, or the hushed reverential glide of the violins and violas with which we are ushered toward a sudden proclamatory outburst. The latter is given out alternately by the full orchestra in unison and by the harmonized brass choir. The tempo quickens momentarily, then yields to another broad statement.

The main *Allegro* begins with a restless and energetic theme in the violas and cellos under tremolo violins. The lyrical theme that follows is a long soulful cantilena for the first violins, over a *plucked* chorale! At least, we realize the accompaniment is a chorale when, later in the development section, it suddenly blossoms out in four-part horn harmony. This is the sort of thing that makes the exploring of Bruckner perpetually exciting and surprising. Another surprise occurs when the coda sets in with the solemn bass pattern of the opening speeded up to the *Allegro* tempo, and with even more lively syncopations between the notes.

II. Adagio (D minor). The slow movement has two main sections, presented in the sequence *A-B-A-B-A*. First, there is a new, mysterious pattern for plucked strings, a pattern which becomes the equally enigmatic background for an oboe solo in a totally different rhythm. The string pattern is one of the steady triplets, six to a bar, while the oboe melody is in 2/2 meter; and this crossing of rhythms continues to characterize the *Adagio's* somberly questioning *A* section. *B* brings a complete contrast in expression and tonality. It is led off by one of Bruckner's noblest and most beautiful string melodies, in C major. The hymnlike quality of its harmonization comes with heart-easing warmth after the dark melancholy of the main section. On its second occurrence, it begins softly and hauntingly in D major. The main section reaches a great climax on its last appearance, striving toward its own realization of tragic nobility. Then, over a soft drum roll, it dies away more enigmatically than ever, albeit in the major.

III. Scherzo (D minor). The immediate repetition, in the same key, of the preceding slow triplet pattern in a fast 3/4 rhythm comes as a kind of "dance" on what we have just heard, as does the wind melody that appears above it. This is the sort of inter-movement variation in which Mahler was later to specialize (e.g., in the *Adagietto* and *Rondo-Finale* of his Fifth Symphony). At a sudden pause, the music immediately slows down to the typical *Ländler* (country-dance) beat of which Schubert, Bruckner and

Mahler were all exceedingly fond: strong accent on the first beat, like a waltz, but slower and heavier ("hard-shoe"). Then the dance gradually speeds up again and becomes quite wild. There are several such alternations as the music is developed and restated in regular sonata form, winding up in D major, as the principal middle section (*Trio*) of the movement finally arrives after 382 bars.

The *Trio* is in the main key of the Symphony, and is quite whimsical in expression. The woodwinds make several attempts at a naïve melody in B-flat major (2/4 time), while a one-note horn signal keeps insisting on G flat. Then, under soft string chords, the string bass stealthily plays the melody upside down, and we suddenly recognize that it is in fact a dance variant of the solemn and mysterious *Adagio* bass progression from the opening of the Symphony! It has no sooner whispered its identity than it begins to mix openly and convivially with a host of bucolic dance figures, finally storming in the trombones and then stealing quickly away.

The main *Scherzo* is repeated verbatim, as always in Bruckner's original, unedited scores.

IV. Finale (B-flat major). The first movement's solemn string processional returns in its original form—almost! Added is a pair of interjections by a clarinet, each like some strange, slow cuckoo call, spanning a full octave, to which the processional seemingly pays no attention until it suddenly halts a few bars short of its previous span. The clarinet figure is now speeded up and extended into a sort of quizzical fanfare, ending in a rising inflection (another octave!). This unaccompanied fanfare is repeated insistently three times at brief intervals, introducing (1) a short fragment of the *Allegro* theme from the first movement, (2) a fragment of the slow movement, and (3) a loud, gruff echo of itself in the string bass, which then continues on as the statement of a fugue—the first main theme of the *Finale*. This apparent quasi-parody of the corresponding section of Beethoven's Ninth has thus drawn us magically and imperceptibly into Bruckner's most complex sonata-fugue construction. Nothing more Mahleresquely macabre than this conjuring process has come from Bruckner's pen.

The usual pause and new lyric theme follows (in D-flat major) before the fugue has proceeded very far, for this is only a foretaste. The principal fugue on this material is yet to come: a double fugue, whose second theme is taken from the chorale that is presently to be announced alone in harmonized form. After a stormy interlude, based on the falling octave, and a hushed transition, this chorale is proclaimed proudly by the brass, with whispered echoes in the strings.

The double fugue comprises the *Finale's* development section. The unharmonized chorale theme is brought in first, beginning in the strings, with some additional figurations in the woodwinds. Then, the other theme is gradually added, and their wholly different shapes and note values keep them distinct from each other through some 150 bars of the most dazzling intertwining textures. The end of the fugue, and beginning of the reprise section, is signalled by a fortissimo statement of the chorale, once more harmonized in the full brass against the other theme in the unison strings and woodwinds. Then, the music relaxes and pauses, at last, for the return of the lyric theme, now in F major. That is followed by the stormy interlude as before, to which, however, the *Allegro* theme from the *first* movement is now added; and this combination is also developed at length before dying away again.

For the coda, there is a final crescendo and gathering together of forces, with the great themes pitted against each other in growing excitement, until the harmonized chorale comes sailing into port with all its notes doubled in length. This carries the music in an expansive wave of sound to one of the most exhilarating conclusions in symphonic literature.