

In nineteenth-century Germany musical opinion was sharply divided on the question of Bruckner's qualities as a symphonist: between the devotees of Wagner, who saw in Bruckner the symphonic counterpart to the composer of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, and the admirers of Brahms (headed by the critic, Eduard Hanslick), who took every advantage of Bruckner's proverbial naiveté and utter lack of sophistication to ridicule him and to claim that his symphonies had no formal cohesion and that his orchestration was too obviously influenced by the organ (though as Tovey pointed out, it is not an intrinsic fault for orchestral music to *sound* like an organ, nor can it do so unless it is completely free from the mistakes of the organ-loft composer). The superficial similarity to Wagner (whom Bruckner adored with what Ernest Newman described as 'dog-like devotion', although the master of Bayreuth never lifted a finger to help him) is of no more importance than the obvious dissimilarity to Brahms (of whom Weingartner wrote that 'he listened quite calmly and spoke of Bruckner with respect, but without warmth'); though Bruckner's symphonic designs may have the grandeur and the spaciousness of much of Wagner's operatic writing, their fundamental character is quite different.

In all, Bruckner wrote eleven symphonies, of which the first two were not regarded by the composer as mature works (although the second of them, in D minor, was later distinguished by Bruckner himself as 'No. O'), and the last remained incomplete, in three movements. The earlier symphonies, in particular, underwent numerous revisions, both at Bruckner's own hands and at those of his 'advisers' (particularly Franz Schalk and Ferdinand Löwe) and to this day there is considerable confusion as to the relative merits of the various printed editions—and this problem has not been eased by the fact that during the last thirty years or so two editions of the 'original' versions have been published, by Robert Haas and by Leopold Nowak. Fortunately the Seventh Symphony is beset by fewer such difficulties than any of the others, for it is the only one of which the autograph score is known to have been used as the basis of the first publication, and the discrepancies between the autograph (in its original state) and the early printed editions are mostly confined to slight modifications of tempo directions and occasional octave-doublings in the string parts; the most dramatic discrepancy concerns the cymbal clash in the *Adagio*, of which more will be said below.

Bruckner started work on the score of the Seventh Symphony on September 23rd, 1881 (three weeks after completing the sixth), but he did not finish the first movement until December 29th, 1882 (having attended the première of Parsifal in Bayreuth on July 26th, and having completed the Scherzo on October 16th). By January 23rd, 1883 he had made his preliminary draft of the *Adagio*, which he intended as a tribute to Wagner, whose death he considered to be

imminent. In fact Wagner died (in Venice) on February 13th, and according to August Göllerich the news was given to Bruckner just as he had reached the great C major climax at bar 177 (the bar of the cymbal clash); deeply moved, he added a coda in the style of a funeral lament (this was played at his own funeral on October 14th, 1896, in an arrangement for brass instruments, conducted by Löwe). The finale was sketched by August 10th, 1883, and completed on September 5th.

Early in 1884 Josef Schalk and Löwe played a four-hand arrangement of the symphony to Arthur Nikisch, and afterwards Schalk wrote as follows to his brother Franz: 'We had hardly finished the first movement when Nikisch, usually so sedate and calm a person, was all fire and flame . . . "Since Beethoven there has been nothing that could even approach it! What is Schumann in comparison?" and so forth—that's how he talked all the time. You can imagine how I looked forward to the effect the second movement was to make on him. We had only just finished (we were playing in Nikisch's flat, quite alone and undisturbed) when Nikisch said: "From this moment I regard it as my duty to work for Bruckner's recognition."' Nikisch had planned to give the symphony its first performance on June 27th, in the Leipzig Gewandhaus, but although the concert had to be postponed twice he made good use of the time by playing the symphony on the piano to the leading music critics and enlisting their support for the new work. The première took place on December 30th in the Municipal Theatre (since the Gewandhaus authorities had refused to present it), and was little short of a triumph—the first real success the sixty-year-old composer had enjoyed with any of his symphonies: the applause went on for a quarter of an hour, and Bruckner was presented with two laurel wreaths. Even greater success attended the second performance, given on March 10th, 1855 in Munich under Hermann Levi, when Bruckner dedicated the score to Wagner's generous patron, King Ludwig II of Bavaria, and the work was enthusiastically received almost everywhere else it was played, except in Vienna, to which city it was introduced by Hans Richter on March 21st, 1886, some months after Bruckner had expressly withheld his permission for the Vienna Philharmonic Society's request to perform it 'on account of the influential critics who would only be likely to obstruct the course of my dawning success in Germany'. That he was right in his misgivings is proved by Hanslick's declaration, soon afterwards, that 'Like every one of Bruckner's works, the E major Symphony contains ingenious inspirations, interesting and even pleasant details—here six, there eight bars—but in between the lightnings there are interminable stretches of darkness, leaden boredom and feverish over-excitement'.

Although the first movement follows the same general plan as that adopted in the corresponding movements of the earlier symphonies (extended sonata form, with three

main subjects), the flow is continuous and entirely free from the sectional breaks that are usually such a distinctive feature of Bruckner's method. The first subject (which, the composer said, came to him in a dream, played on a viola) is the longest that he ever wrote: a supremely eloquent melody notable both for its wide compass, (two octaves) and for its organic growth. Its two most important features are the broken chord of its first three bars and the rhythmic arch of its tenth and eleventh bars, which is echoed in the last half of the second subject. This incorporates a Wagnerian four-note *gruppetto* and is initiated in B major by oboe and clarinet, above repeated quavers on horns and trumpets that recall the string tremolandi that accompanied the first subject; it is discussed at some length and culminates in a powerful climax. The most noticeable feature of the third subject is its dactylic rhythm, though it has three distinct melodic offshoots. The development begins softly with a return to the first subject (the initial arpeggio inverted), which is soon joined by the rhythmic pattern of the third subject and the inversion of the second subject. The inverted arpeggio motif is then presented in C minor by the full orchestra, *fortissimo*, the trombones joining in with electrifying effect in *stretto*. From this point onwards the key modulates towards E major in preparation for the recapitulation. There are many marked changes in instrumental layout and key-sequence in the last part of the movement (notably in the impassioned treatment of the second subject), although the themes are repeated in the same order as in the exposition; it is concluded by a powerful coda based on the first subject.

The slow movements of the last three symphonies owe much of their solemnity to Bruckner's use in them of a quartet of Wagner's tubas reinforced by a contrabass tuba. The *Adagio* of the seventh (which, as we have seen, was conceived as a tribute to Wagner and ended by being an elegy on his death) is modelled on the slow movement of Beethoven's ninth Symphony, and is in the form of a slow rondo, with three statements of the refrain and two appearances of a contrasting episode. The refrain begins in C sharp minor and is based on another extended theme, which incorporates, in the string passage beginning in the fourth bar, a reference to the 'non confundar in aeternum' motif of Bruckner's *Te Deum* (composed between 1881 and 1884, and thus contemporary with the symphony). The music of the episodes (the first of which is in F sharp major, the second in A flat major) is in slightly faster tempo, and with its Viennese lilt and smiling grace it provides appropriate relief from the elegiac dignity of the refrain. The treatment of the latter becomes more elaborate at each reappearance, and at the third and final reprise it is joined by running sextuplets on the first violins that propel it, by a chromatic series of upward steps, to a stupendous C major outburst that extends over four bars. Whether or not the cymbal (and triangle) stroke at the peak of this climax (bar 177) had

Bruckner's final approval has been much debated. Its inclusion was suggested by the Schalk brothers and supported by Nikisch, and the autograph score was adjusted accordingly. However the words 'gilt nicht' ('not valid') were subsequently added in the margin beside the alteration, perhaps by Bruckner, perhaps by someone else. But even if the authenticity of this one small feature cannot be guaranteed, there is no doubt that the use of percussion instruments (as in this recording, which otherwise adheres to the original version of the score) to add further emphasis to this great climax, is easily justifiable. (There is, incidentally, a parallel, authentic cymbal stroke at the corresponding point in the slow movement of the Eighth Symphony.) The movement's sombre coda, which at length resolves on a chord of C sharp major, is based on melodic material from the refrain.

The Scherzo is in A minor and has three main elements, the most important of which is (characteristically) an ostinato figure, here consisting of two quavers followed by two crotchets; the other two are the leaping trumpet signal of its fifth bar (suggested to Bruckner by the crowing of a cock), and the falling sevenths which act as its answer—and which, to English ears at any rate, have an Elgarian flavor. The Trio (in F major and in slightly slower tempo) provides a lyrical contrast to the incisive rhythms of the Scherzo (although discreet reminders of them can occasionally be heard on the timpani); the modulations are noteworthy, and there is prominent use of the two-plus-three rhythm that is an unmistakable Brucknerian fingerprint.

The finale (which also calls for the Wagner tubas) only loosely conforms to the requirements of sonata form, for although there is a clearly recognizable exposition and development, the recapitulation is irregular in the extreme and is merged into the development at one end and the coda at the other. Moreover, despite the fact that there are three distinct 'subjects' that we would expect to find in Bruckner, the first and third of these—both angular in rhythm and clearly de-

scended from the broken chord motif of the first movement's main theme—are so similar in shape that they can hardly be regarded as independent themes. The chief difference is one of mood: the first questioning and elusive (observe its unexpected sidestep into A flat in the ninth bar), the third awe-inspiring with its gigantic strides and its massive unisons. The second subject, which separates them, is a chorale-like melody (also with a quasi-Wagnerian *gruppetto*) that is as beautiful as it is simple; richly harmonised and supported by a gently moving pizzicato bass that may possibly have been suggested to Bruckner by a passage in the first movement of Schubert's Octet. It is, however, the driving rhythm of the joint first and third subjects that gives the movement its essential tissue, and urges it forward to its resounding conclusion.

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