

Of all his symphonies, Bruckner's Ninth suffered most, perhaps, from editing. Bruckner died without completing it and Ferdinand Loewe had a free hand in revision. He went at it with a will, and it was not until 1934 and the publication of the original manuscript that the real stature of this Symphony, Bruckner's last will and testament, was revealed. The composer had struggled with his gigantic Eighth Symphony for six years and had begun the Ninth while the Eighth was being revised, working on it from September 21, 1887 until the day of his death, October 11, 1896. Brucknerites tend to rejoice that the Ninth was never finished, contending that the great *Adagio* is a farewell to life and that anything following it would be anticlimax. Nonetheless Bruckner wrestled with a Finale for two years, and finished the greater part of it in full score. He was haunted by the fear that he would not have time to complete the symphony, however; the physician who attended him in his final illness (in the luxury of the Belvedere Palace, where the emperor had belatedly granted him an apartment) once discovered him on his knees, praying "Dear God, let me get well soon; you see I need my health to finish the Ninth."

The Symphony is indeed dedicated to "Dear God" ("Dem lieben Gott"), and from the opening bars of the introduction, marked *Feierlich* (Solemn), Bruckner makes that clear. All eight horns sound this solemn note, supported by tremolo strings and echoed huskily by two trumpets. At first playing in unison, the horns shift into rich harmonies and at last come to partial rest in a magnificent cadence (bars 24-26) that is to be one of the focal points of the movement. Through a series of enharmonic figures rising in pitch and excitement the first theme is reached. This can only be described as megalithic: the entire orchestra, from the highest flute to the lowest contrabass tuba, gives out a great, grim, octave-leaping motif. It was such a motif as this at the beginning of Bruckner's Third Symphony that caused Wagner to describe him as "Bruckner, die Trompete" ("Bruckner, the Clarion"). Such music can no more be developed than a cataclysm can be prolonged; it lasts for thirteen bars and then frightened *pizzicati* support solo winds, which utter two-note phrases like lost souls.

The second subject-group, always song-like in Bruckner, comes as a distinct relief. The first of the three themes in this group is surrounded by a counter-subject in eighth-notes that is almost as lovely as itself, the second is a re-shaping of the enharmonic figures that had led from the introduction to the first theme, and the third is a broad, almost Brahmsian melody with a memorable six-note post-script for the cellos. Bruckner's large symphonic design necessitated the creation of still another group of themes. This third subject-group is generally heroic or turbulent, but in the Ninth Symphony it assumes a guise of sombre lyricism: a rocking theme, announced first by the oboe, then by horn and flute, grows into a melody of a Slavonic character that might well have been conceived by Dvorak.

The development section is at first exclusively concerned with the introductory motif and its mighty cadence, but gradually the counter-subject of the second theme comes into prominence. As always in the later Bruckner symphonies, development and recapitulation are so conjoined that it is difficult to say where one leaves off and the other begins: is it when the gigantic first theme is hurled forth by the brass against wild string figures (certainly the climax of the movement), or when, after a pause and a passage of exhausted triplet figures, the entire second subject-group returns? Certainly recapitulation never means obvious repetition in Bruckner's first movements but rather an opportunity for further exploration of thematic material: when the "Slavonic" third subject is heard again, it is disturbed by wrenching harmonic shifts. The coda begins with a quiet chorale for the brass, continues with the utterly weary triplet figure that had announced the second subject's return, and concludes—in tri-

umph or in despair?—with unison brass enunciating over a D minor pedal point, the rising octave (B-flat-F-B-flat) that had heralded the introduction's great cadential sequence. But the splendor of that cadence is heard no more.

Plucked strings, sounding like a gigantic Mephistophelian guitar, introduce the *Scherzo* and set its basic, insistent rhythmic pattern. Throughout the piece the air trembles with a suspense, a menace that breaks into open hostility. The vast integrity of the instrumentation—the sense of timpani, of woodwinds, above all the shattering artillery of the brass—is the initial wonder. But the harmony too is remarkable, with its puzzling insistence upon G sharp. The *Scherzo* is a series of earth-tremors, alleviated briefly (and curiously) by a few moments of pastoral jocularity provided by solo timpani and oboe. The Trio, with the unusual tempo indication *Schnell* (most of the Trios are *Etwas langsamer* or some such designation for a slowing-down-of tempo) is Mendelssohnian fairy music and obviously stems from the *Scherzo* of the *Midsummer Night's Dream*.

In only one other Bruckner Symphony—the Eighth—does the *Adagio* come after the *Scherzo*. Bruckner was the *Adagio* composer. Beethoven has left us a rich legacy of *adagios* of this type, all from his last years—the *Benedictus* from the *Missa Solemnis*, the slow movements of the *Hammerklavier* Sonata, the Ninth Symphony, the String Quartets Op. 127 and Op. 132. But Bruckner never touched the form without transfiguring it: there is not a slow movement from his First Symphony to his Ninth which is less than magnificent. But in his last two symphonies the mighty Brucknerian song rises to its fullest. In the Ninth, the *Adagio's* opening theme has a strong resemblance to the Grail Motif of *Parsifal*, with its rising sixths and its ending in radiant E Major. Trumpets over and over again repeat a four-note phrase which Bruckner labeled in his manuscript the "Motif of Fate." Fragments of the fate motif cling quietly to the strings during a long passage for the trombones. Then—*Sehr breit* (very broad)—comes another motif labeled by Bruckner: the "Farewell to Life." It seems impossible that any melody could surpass this in sweetness but an even more ravishing one follows, faster in motion, with that kind of intoxicated exhilaration that Bruckner may have learned from Beethoven (Op. 132) but probably knew as an instinct, a condition of his being. The Farewell motif returns in the cellos, the *Parsifal* theme in the trumpets (but concluded in the strings, as if a purely human supplication had been taken up by angels). After a passage of peculiar, overlapping, cruel chromaticism, one continuous crescendo, the Fate motif appears in the full orchestra. A Brucknerian pause and then the exquisite second lyric theme is sung, *dolce*, by the strings, their last three notes being echoed by an oboe marked *dolente*. This signalizes a change in atmosphere: stiff, scale fragments give rise to an almost static passage, fluctuating slightly in a chromatic pool of harmony. Then the Farewell-to-Life motif brings relief. It is in a setting for strings, the second violins playing a Beethoven-like (Ninth Symphony) accompaniment in thirty-second notes. In this passage, for four brief bars, the high woodwinds softly intone the theme of the *Miserere* from Bruckner's early *Mass in D Minor*. The music builds to a tremendous climax in which the note of anguish is unmistakable. As before, agitation is followed by calm, uncertainty by reassurance: the dividing pause ushers in gentle antiphonies between horn and solo woodwinds, and the great *Adagio* closes quietly, the horns having the last word in the Symphony, as they had had the first.

David Johnson

"Mahler his whole life through was seeking God.  
Bruckner had found God."

As a salute to his eightieth birthday, Columbia Records issued an album called "Bruno Walter in Conversation." Dr. Walter felt much to say about Bruckner and Mahler, his relationship to them

and their own relationship to one another. Some of his remarks are reproduced here.

"I always loved Bruckner but I never could quite understand the vast forms in which he expressed himself. I always found him loquacious and I never could understand that with his wonderful thematic substance at his beck and call—he had unlimited resources—he had not found a more formal perfection to make a symphony out of it. Then one day I fell ill and I had pneumonia and I traveled back on the boat and went to Munich. And in Munich I felt terrible. I lay down and there came the physician and he said, 'Well, I don't wonder that you feel badly. You have double pneumonia.' So I was very ill—it came to digitalis and all this kind of thing. And after this—I understood Bruckner. That was my door to Bruckner, yes... Bruckner was a very funny kind of teacher. He was more friend, you know, and he talked and went to hear. And he was very anxious to hear everything that these kind of 'pupils' like Gustav Mahler or Klose—you know the composer Klose?—and other pupils had to tell him. Because he was not very cultured. He was not well read. You know, he was a primitive man with a great inner wisdom. He had not the world at his disposal. He did not know the teaching of great philosophers. So he was a naive and primitive person. And these men who surrounded him, they were enormously well read and they had drunk the cup of wisdom from the real sources. So he learned from his disciples. Of course they learned from his mastery. And so it was a give and take between them. But Mahler—one of the first things which Mahler told me was how much he felt he learned from Bruckner, not from the teacher but from the composer, how much he felt he owed to him. And when he wrote his Second Symphony there you feel the influence of Bruckner. Later on this influence is—not any more to be found. Mahler's first compositions were of astonishing originality and the influence of Bruckner came a little later. Perhaps you feel Bruckner's influence only around the time of the Second Symphony on. There is no influence to be felt in the First Symphony, and no influence in the songs and in the vocal music which Mahler wrote preceding that—*Das Klagende Lied*, for instance, one of his greatest first compositions... Mahler his whole life through was seeking God. Bruckner had found God. And there is the difference and the connection. You know? Because Bruckner was in knowledge as somebody who is so sure that there is no problem for him. For Mahler God was—his whole life—the one dominating problem. And each work of Mahler was a try—he tried to find a new musical expression for a new way to God... I must say that I could not think my life without Mahler and Bruckner and... I live with them. Of course you know what it meant to me when I was an eighteen-year-old boy to have met Mahler in person and from then until his death I had his friendship and came very near to him personally—as near as this difference of age made possible. This is the great difference—Mahler was a personal friend and at the same time preceptor and model, you know. Bruckner was a great composer whose works I studied, whom I never had the happiness to meet. But I met very many people who had met Bruckner and they conveyed to me their impressions. So later on it was to me like I had known him personally. Yet there is the big difference. And don't forget Bruckner was no performing musician and Mahler was a performing musician—the greatest I ever met, without any exception. So you can imagine what an influence this was on me, to have this model before my eyes."

\*Friedrich Klose (1862-1942), Swiss composer whose works, few in number but large in scale, show the influence of Bruckner.

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