

ANTON BRUCKNER

1824-1896

Among other distinctions, Anton Bruckner may be noted as a composer of symphonies whose creations begin not with No. 1, but with No. 0. There is a general awareness that Bruckner, like Schubert and Mahler in the Beethoven image, wrote nine symphonies so numbered. However, if Beethoven wrote ten or eleven, Bruckner's could be arranged to conform, by including the early work in F minor sometimes called the "School Symphony" and the D minor of greater esteem dubbed "Nullte" or "Zero."

The remarkable fact, however, is not how many symphonies Bruckner wrote, but that he wrote any at all. By background and development, Anton Bruckner would seem the arch example of a composer destined to tread a narrow path from home to church to organ loft. Both his father and grandfather had been provincial school teachers, and only the manifest musical talent possessed by young Bruckner saved him from similar oblivion. The best to which he might aspire, however, was the education granted a promising choir boy in a neighborhood monastery (St. Florian).

The fine organ of this institution inspired him to develop enough skill to win an appointment as an associate at the age of twenty-one, and title of organist six years later. What element in his nature rebelled against settling to this relatively honorable post is hard to isolate; save that his urge to self-expression had already produced a Requiem in D minor, though he was virtually self-taught in composition. Dissatisfied with his equipment for writing music, Bruckner at the age of thirty-one sought out the Viennese Simon Sechter (the same celebrated theorist whom Schubert aspired to study with in

the last year of his life, nearly thirty years before), and spent much of the next six years absorbing Sechter's vast erudition. While so engaged, Bruckner competed for, and won, an appointment as organist in the Cathedral at Linz, some miles up the Danube from Vienna.

In the twelve years from the ages of thirty-two to forty-four, Bruckner developed remarkable skill as a virtuoso organist, also creating the G minor overture (1863). In the next two years came the "School" and "Nullte" symphonies mentioned above, neither of which he considered representative of what he aspired to do. Most remarkably, from the status of auto-didact which had led him to Sechter in 1855, he had developed a command of musical materials, and a reputation therefore, that earned him the post of professor of harmony and counterpoint (also organ) at the conservatory of Vienna in 1868. It was, indeed, Sechter, who had died the year before, whose successor he became.

This attainment — which is one of the more remarkable in the history of an art studded with "impossible" progressions from obscurity to eminence — followed by three years another happening of profound influence on Bruckner's life and expression. That was his meeting with Wagner in Munich at the first performance of *Tristan und Isolde* in 1865. He had first been introduced to the Wagnerian influence during his years in Linz; but the personal relationship intensified the impression made upon him by the music. Doubtless the reaction can be traced in certain celebrated brass effects in the symphonies, the use of the Wagner "tuben" (a small version of the bigger instrument, introduced at Bayreuth and distinguished by a darker tone than the French horn which it parallels, to a degree, in range), the inscription of No. 3 as the "Wagner Symphony," and the dedication of the adagio of No. 7 to his fallen hero. But the loose

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terminology of Bruckner as a "Wagner symphonist" is no more supportable than the later long, and wrong, inclination to pair Bruckner and Mahler in the Debussy-Ravel manner.

The musical climate of the Vienna in which Bruckner took up residence in 1868 was in large part responsible for this, as a reading of Henry Pleasants' "Vienna's Golden Years of Music" (Simon and Schuster) will reveal. It was then not possible to be a Brahms-Wagner, or even a Wagner-Brahms man. Though the two mighty figures themselves had a well-founded regard for each other's abilities — Brahms more generously for Wagner than *vice versa* — there was the "partei" of each to be reckoned with: and they were by no means so tolerant. Thus, not only by writing symphonies which might be thought, justly or unjustly, to be in competition for favor with those that Brahms was writing — Bruckner had completed his first numbered two when the Brahms No. 1 had its premiere at Karlsruhe in 1876 — but in openly championing the cause of Wagner, Bruckner exposed himself to attack on two fronts.

To be sure, the nature of the symphonies themselves — with their unconventional length, enormous apparatus of performance, and prevailing seriousness of tone — did not make for ready acceptance. If one considers the number of years during which Brahms was characterized as an academician whose orchestration was "muddy," the present popularity of his symphonies would seem unthinkable. Speaking as one who has spent nearly twenty years in professional concert-going in New York, I do not think the works of Bruckner have been often enough played to permit a final judgment. Opinions, yes; they are long, they are complex, they are manifestly a challenge. But the attitude has tended too much towards that expressed in a recent conversation with Dimitri Mitrop-

oulos. He related an experience during the early thirties when he was director of the Athens Conservatory of Music, and one of his activities was a course in musical history. Eventually he came to the works of Bruckner, and prefaced his discussion with the question "Does anyone here know anything about Bruckner?" A bright young miss immediately offered the opinion that his works were too long, overwritten, etc. Somewhat startled, Mitropoulos asked: "Where did you hear them?" "Oh!" she answered, "I have never heard anything by Bruckner. I read about it in a book." Such ready-made thought need no longer prevail. Recordings such as this, especially, in which the continuity of Bruckner's thought is subject to study, analysis, absorption will do much to clarify the measurement of a body of music whose mere creation, certainly, is a major phenomenon.

Why "Original Editions?"

The length and complexity of Bruckner's writing have created a situation in his repertory unique among composers of recognized standing. It is only during the last decade and a half that the substantial part of that repertory has been available for study and performance as he created it. Even so, the third and seventh symphonies still circulate in editions at variance with the manuscripts.

The cause here was two-fold. Under the influence of well-meaning friends, Bruckner himself may have made "cuts" designed to facilitate performances; and the publishers of the day, disinclined to risk more than necessary on projects of staggering size no matter how edited, may have ventured others. Much of this is conjectural, for all the facts are not known. It is known, however, that if Bruckner reluctantly agreed to "cuts" for performance purposes, he wanted the published scores to be complete. This wish, however, was not always respected. Only in this recent era have most of the symphonies been reproduced in accordance with the manuscripts. Thus, the pocket edition of the Eighth Symphony, which was begun in 1884 and finished in 1890, did not appear in its complete form, as a 'miniature score' of 174 pages, until 1935.

SYMPHONY No. 8

I Allegro moderato (C minor, Alla breve). The quiet opening little suggests that the tonal resources required for this work include eight horns, three varieties of trombones (alto, tenor, and bass), three each of other brass and woodwinds (they were usually employed in pairs), with strings in proportion. It may be mentioned, also, that Bruckner's "first-movement" (sonata) form characteristically used groups of themes rather than the clearly-defined, strongly contrasted first and second themes of traditionally symphonic structure. Further deviation may be found at two critical points in the structure: a treatment of the closing portion of the exposition as, in fact, development; a treatment of the closing portion of the development as, in fact, recapitulation. In other words, the inclination in both instances is to dissolve hitherto rigid compartmentation, with a view to overall interest, contrast, and variety. Unity is enforced by gathering representative thematic elements of the earlier movements into the pattern of the finale (See below).

As numbered in the miniature score of the Bruckner-verlag, the main points to be noted are these: Measure 2, first motive, Measure 11, second motive, Measure 18, third motive of the first group. These are extended until measure 51, at which point the first fragment of the second group enters (this is a broadly melodic phrase beginning on D, in a rhythm of two quarters and a triplet figure up to B then down to C sharp, which is easily recognizable without the score). Measures 59 and

63 introduce other subordinate phrases, leading to a third group of motives in measures 97, 107, and 110. This dissolves, at 128 into the development, of which an important occurrence is at measure 183 where the second motive of the first group is heard in broadened form. The broad development leads back (Measure 283) to the recapitulation, which follows the succession of ideas in the first section.

The coda of fifty measures begins in measure 368, with the final forty or so measure fading out, piano.

II Scherzo (Allegro moderato, 3/4, E flat). Rather than being a mere scherzo in the sense customary for classic symphonies, this is almost a separate "scherzo fantastique" of the kind Dvřák considered an independent work, or Dukas allied to a program in *L'Apprenti Sorcier*. The first material is elaborated and expanded for nearly two hundred measures, before the trio (*langsam*) appears. Its geniality and rustic freshness make reasonable its association, in the composer's mind, with the symbol of Austrian peasantry called *Deutscher Michel*. The scherzo is repeated without alteration.

III Adagio. (Feierlich langsam: doch nicht schleppend, D flat). Even those to whom Bruckner's music as a whole was of debatable worth, granted him unqualified right to be called *Adagio-Komponist* for the ability to command mood and eloquence in such slow movements as those of symphonies five, seven, eight, and nine. In this instance, time almost seems suspended as the unwinding melodic fancy stretches on and on (in the 78 rpm predecessor of this LP, the adagio alone covers eight sides). In form, it may be described as a rondo-sonata, with the first long-breathed subject alternating three times with another basic idea which first appears in measure 47. The concluding coda (beginning at measure 259), with chorale-brass and reflective strings, is a fitting culmination for a movement Hugo Wolf called "powerfully stirring."

IV Finale. Feierlich, nicht schnell. (C major, Common Time) Even more elaborate in plan than the opening movement, this finale carries forward the concept of sonata form as elucidated previously, with the recapitulation and the development organically related. Three principal ideas, in all, are utilized (the second appears at measure 69, the third in measure 135). In the development they are used together, in inversion, imitation, etc. In the coda, the whole plan of the symphony stands revealed when (measure 717), the scherzo theme ("Deutscher Michel") returns, broadly phrased, in the horns, followed (measure 735) by simultaneous sounding of the first movement theme in the bassoons, horn, trombones, basses, and cellos; the adagio subject in first and second horns, with the scherzo theme surmounting the mass in flutes, clarinets, and trumpet. All of this makes for a proud panoply of sound, and a striking conclusion to the whole work, though the contrapuntal problem is somewhat facilitated by the family relation of the themes, and their firm foundation on the tonic chord.

TE DEUM

In Bruckner's catalogue, this *Te Deum* immediately precedes beginning of work on his Symphony No. 8: that is to say, it was completed in 1884. It was in work for several years, since 1881; and its completion at that particular time is usually considered an aftermath of Richard Wagner's death in 1883. This greatly affected Bruckner, as noted above; and the lament of the seventh symphony was but one outcome. Out of depression and grief came the affirmation of the *Te Deum*, which is not without depression and doubt itself. Some conductors have appended this *Te Deum* to the incompleting Ninth

Symphony, as a kind of choral counterpart to the Beethoven No. 9; but the best Bruckner thought is that the works are self-sufficient, and had best be left alone.

The text, and tempo divisions:

- I Feirlich mit Kraft.* (C major, common time)
Te Deum laudamus, te Dominum confitemur
Te aeternum Patrem omnis terra veneratur
(Solo quartet: Soprano, alto, tenor, bass)
Tibi omnes Angeli
Tibi coeli et universae Potestates
Tibi Cherubim et Seraphim, incessabili voce proclamant
(Chorus)
Sanctus sanctus sanctus
Dominus Deus Sabaoth
Pleni sunt coeli et terra majestates gloria tuae
Te gloriosus Apostolorum chorus
Te Prophetarum laudabilis numerus
Te Martyrum candidatus laudet exercitus
Te per orbem terrarum sancta confitetur ecclesia
Patrem immensae majestatis
Venerandum tuum verum et unicum Filium
Sanctum quoque Paraclitum Spiritum
Tu Rex gloriae Christe
Tu Patris sempiternus es Filius
Tu ad liberandum suscepturus hominem non horruisti
virginis uterum
Tu devicto mortis auleo aperuisti audentibus regna
coelorum
Tu ad dexteram Dei sede in gloria Patris
Judex crederis esse venturus.
- II Te ergo* (Moderato) (F minor, common time)
Solo quartet
Te ergo quaesumus
Tuis famulis subveni; quos pretioso sanguine redemisti
- III Aeterna fac.* (Feierlich mit Kraft, D minor, common time)
Aeterna fac, cum sanctis tuis in gloria munerari
- IV Salvum fac.* (Moderato, D minor, common time)
Solo quartet, with chorus
Salvum fac populum tuum, Domine, et benedic hereditati
tuae
Et rege ea, et extollo illos usque in aeternum
(Allegro, C major)
Per singulos dies benedicimus te
Et laudamus nomen tuum in aeculum saeculi
Dignare, Domine, die isto sine peccato nos custodire
Miserere nostri
Fiat misericordia tua Domine super nos que admodum
speravimus in te.
Mässig bewegt (G major)
In te, Domine, speravi
- V In te Domine, speravi* non confundar in aeternum
Fuge (Im gleichen gemässigten Tempo)
Text as above: "In te Domine, etc." Irving Kolodin