

Anton Bruckner's Symphony No. 2 in C minor reflects, in structure and conception, the outer destiny of its composer. In the early autumn of 1868, only a few months after his 1st Symphony had been performed in Linz, Bruckner gave up his post as organist in Linz cathedral and moved to Vienna. There he accepted a post as teacher at the Vienna Conservatory and became organist of the Hofburg (court) chapel. It was something he had dreamed of for years. However the new surroundings in which he found himself, the musical affluence of musical life in the capital and all the many new impressions, artistic and personal, which crowded in on him had first to be assimilated. Bruckner himself said that he was "quite terrified" on reaching Vienna. The type of music all the rage in Vienna at that time differed widely from the individual style he had developed in Linz (a town that was then somewhat off the beaten track). Not that Bruckner's creativity was hampered in any way. He wrote a Symphony in D minor in 1869 but later struck it off his list of works. The individualist's reactions to new musical surroundings had been too violent.

Almost two more years were to pass before Bruckner acquired the necessary artistic clarity to get down to his next major work, the 2nd Symphony. The autograph copy of the score carries dates ranging from October 1871 to August 1872. One can safely assume that work on it began somewhat earlier. The inner crisis of the first years in Vienna has already been overcome. The uncertainty of purpose characteristic of the D minor work of 1869 is replaced in the 2nd Symphony by an image of serene equilibrium, such as hardly recurs in any of Bruckner's later compositions. He himself called it a "tame" work. In fact, though, it represents a major advance in the master's life work. It completely succeeds in bringing order to all the confusing novelties associated with the artist's move to Vienna, assimilating them and fitting them into a fresh type of tranquillity.

The "original version", published for the first time in 1938 by R. Haas in the Complete Edition of Bruckner's works, differs in several important respects from the first printed edition which appeared in 1892, although the engraver's MS for the latter (dated 1875 and based on the autograph score of 1872) is still extant. Several corrections

are known to have been made, however, while the engraving was in progress. Just as with his 1st Symphony, Bruckner kept on revising his 2nd Symphony and making alterations, many of them based on critical comments supplied by friends. As far as the 2nd Symphony is concerned R. Haas has shown that one of these advisers was Johann Herbeck. The alterations that can be attributed to his influence certainly have "the most honourable intentions". As R. Haas points out, however, in his preface to the definitive score, they were only incorporated by Bruckner under protest notwithstanding the fact that they were necessary for actual performance. Herbeck, it should be remembered, was one of the composer's most fervent patrons and it was he who had engineered Bruckner's transfer to Vienna.

The first version of the 2nd Symphony (1872) was also used for the first performance of the work under Bruckner's own baton (on 26 October 1873). It was a great success. The second version of the work was that heard when Bruckner conducted his Symphony for the second time (on 26 February 1876) at a concert given by the Vienna Society of the Friends of Music. The third version (which must be dated before October 1877) is available in a copy of the score containing Herbeck's alterations. This was the MS used for engraving the first printed edition. The "original version" is textually based on this third version but retains many details of the first version so as to reproduce Bruckner's intentions in their entirety and, as R. Haas puts it, to "liberate Bruckner's symphonic work from transient exterior influences".

Ludwig Speidel, in his review of the première, writes of Bruckner's "numerous opponents who do not even deserve to loosen his shoe-laces". This is sure proof, if any were needed, that Bruckner's first appearance in Vienna — with his "tame" 2nd Symphony — was sufficient to unleash controversy about his work.

— Translation by David Hermges