

Bruckner East and West

THE American battle for Bruckner began on December 5, 1885, when Walter Damrosch introduced the Third Symphony to a startled New York audience. A few months thereafter Anton Seidl, who soon was to join forces with Theodore Thomas in promoting the Bruckner cause, informed the composer that he might be able to find an American publisher for the much tampered-with Fourth Symphony. Delighted with this unexpected prospect, Bruckner carefully went over the score once again before sending it off to Seidl, who never returned it, even though nothing came of the contemplated publication. Now in the library of Columbia University, it was apparently unknown to Robert Haas, the editor of the so-called original version. But, convinced that its cuts represented Bruckner's final independent views on the matter, Leopold Nowak made it the cornerstone of his authoritative postwar edition.

This "American version" has now finally been recorded, most fittingly by the same American combination that created such a stir in Bruckner circles with the Ninth of a year ago, Bruno Walter and the Columbia (West Coast) Symphony Orchestra, (Columbia M2L-273, \$9.96, M2S-622, \$11.98).

Instead of the vague Teutonic mystique that incapacitates so many Wagnerian interpretations, Walter (at eighty-five more fervent than ever) brings to the Fourth a truly commensurate outlook on human existence, an outlook that sees no conflict between Bruckner's gentle faith and his cosmic visions his utter humility and his romantic passion. Moreover, since he views the Austrian composer as part of a solid tradition which linked Mozart and Schubert, as well as Johann Strauss, to Mahler, even Schoenberg and Webern, he uncovers a rhythmic vigor and a sense of structural unity where others plod from chord to chord, seeking refuge in mere expansiveness. Interestingly enough, his tempi are almost identical with van Otterloo's standard rendition of the Haas edition. But where the Dutch conductor is merely serious, Walter is also tender; where the former is but religious, the latter's spirituality transcends the confines of human institutions altogether. Under the spell of Walter's irresistible powers of communication the orchestra

exceeds itself. Few of its engrossing qualities have escaped the loving care of Columbia's stereo engineers.

For a decade or so prior to the time when Bruno Walter and George Szell took up permanent residence here, very little Bruckner was played in this country. Meanwhile, in Soviet Russia the more progressive musicians of Leningrad, prodded by the noted critic Sollertinsky, delved into the music of the entire modern Viennese school with singular zeal and determination. Though Moscow's musical bureaucrats tried hard to suppress it, the northern "Mahleria" epidemic made a lasting impression, at least on Eugene Mravinsky and his matchless Leningrad Philharmonic. Their recently released Artia recording of the Bruckner Eighth (MK 210B, \$11.98) eschews the Wagnerian conception no less than Walter's Fourth. In order to give the far-flung melodic lines of this monumental work purpose and direction, Mravinsky presses forward in constant animated motion. Indeed, the beautifully played Adagio takes some eight minutes less than in Eugen Jochum's static rendition, for, like the late van Beinum, the Russian conductor understands the term *adagio* generically rather than as a more or less precise tempo indication. The incredible Leningraders use four sides (to van Beinum's three and Jochum's five) for a veritable feast of shining sonorities, only slightly impeded by the somewhat artificial liveness of the monaural recording.

ALWAYS self-effacing, Bruckner used to credit his first hearing of "Tannhäuser" with the awakening of what he considered to be his own modest talent as a composer. The "Tannhäuser" Overture and Bacchanale, stunningly performed and recorded, occupies the fourth side of the Walter set. In juxtaposition with Bruckner's universal message, Wagner's brazen glitter and unabashed sensuality is beginning to sound curiously dated. Yet, it was Bruckner whom Brahms called "a fraud who will be dead and forgotten in one or two years." Clearly today, several wars and revolutions later, both East and West, however divided they may find themselves otherwise, seem agreed that he is very much alive. But such are the vicissitudes of history.

—ALEXANDER RINGER.