Bruckner and the symphony

by ROBERT SIMPSON

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This booklet deals with Bruckner's music and not with his life; I welcome this fact. Far from wishing to dispute the obvious importance of biographical exploration, I nevertheless feel sure that in some exceptional cases such as of Shakespeare, Rembrandt, Beethoven, and also Anton Bruckner, it contributes comparatively little to their artistic appraisal to sift external information about historical and psychological facts, about genealogy, or about their day-to-day lives. What really matters is the inner life of a great artist—and that is shown in what he creates. Biographical treatment, however skilful, can often hinder the direct approach to the quintessence, the living force of his work. In the case of Bruckner, conjecture about his personality and his life has certainly led to much misunderstanding, and stories about his naivety have sometimes brought about an underestimation of his genius. The textual difficulty (the various conflicting editions of the symphonies) has also made for confusion and lack of understanding. This essay concentrates upon the nature of Bruckner's music, and the author's chief stimulus has clearly been his appreciation of its grandeur.

JASCHA HORENSTEIN

August 1963

Bruckner and the symphony

THE facts of Anton Bruckner's life and career may be got from various books of reference; this essay is concerned with the nature of his music, the best way to listen to it, and its unique treatment of the symphonic problem. Although Bruckner was born in 1824, he did not emerge as a composer until the eighteen-sixties. This does not mean that any sudden self-discovery took place; the creative urge was there from the start, and developed its character very slowly, for the man was as cautious as (in some ways) he was naive. His rustic simplicity and his profound conscientiousness caused him to prolong his apprenticeship to an almost unheard-of length; he was well into his thirties before he felt able to allow his imagination any degree of freedom. Until then he pored doggedly over harmony and counterpoint, in the meantime building a considerable reputation as an organist with a genius for improvisation. In this early period he produced a number of small liturgical works, some of them faintly prophetic (there is a foreshadowing of the Ninth Symphony in the little *Missa solemnis* of 1854), but he never let fly—free flight seemed possible to his fantasy only in the organ loft. On paper, it was grinding work, tough theoretical study, enough to crack the skull, with but an occasional timid venture into the fringes of a world he knew was there, and vast if only he could summon the courage to penetrate its interior.

At the organ his timidity fell away from him, and it is highly significant that Bruckner left no written organ music of any importance. The instrument became a function of himself, and he rarely wanted to play composed music on it, whether his own or others'; in his Upper Austrian dialect he is said to have remarked 'Let them as has no imagination play Bach and Mendelssohn—I'd rather let go on my own' (or so one might attempt to translate). There is a deep psychological reason for this, and it is naturally connected with his timorous attitude to composing itself, which in turn arose from his fear of the smart intellectuals whom at first he dimly perceived at a distance and who later were to make his life a misery in Vienna. So he often retreated into the seclusion of the organ-loft where, unseen, he could improvise with such power as astonished all his hearers. By contrast, composition was a nightmarish problem, for orchestras and choirs *had* to be written for; they consisted, moreover, of other people and knowing he would have to commit his thoughts to them in some

permanent form he became, in a deep sense, shy—of them and of himself. It took him many years to overcome this special personal difficulty, and the noble patience with which he learned to understand it is definitively expressed in nearly all his mature music.

The slowness of Bruckner's artistic development has been paralleled by the tardiness with which appreciation has come to him, especially outside Austria and Germany; it is also connected with the slow processes of his music itself, which arose from his own patience and, to a slight extent, from his admiration for Wagner. Tovey said 'If you want Wagnerian concert music, why not try Bruckner?'—but this is a dangerous thought, and one which bedevilled Bruckner himself, through those friends who, thinking they knew better than he did, tried to help him become more like Wagner. In reality his work is deeply un-Wagnerian, and touching evidences of Wagner's influence serve only to illuminate the alien world in which they are discovered. Bruckner's vast time-scale is often said to be Wagnerian; but it is more like an extension of Schubert's, with Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in the background. Wagner's time-scale is that of drama, and his special achievement is in creating a music large enough to accommodate complete stage action (indeed it is sometimes too big for the drama itself, a fact which underlines a remarkable aspect of Wagner's musical genius). Bruckner listened to Wagner without much idea of the drama or even the story; Wagner's harmony fascinated him, and the sheer breadth of the musical forms aroused in him admiration to the point of idolatry.

Yet he is remarkably independent of the German master; if his friends had realized the full extent of his independence, they might not have dragged him into the often vitriolic controversy that swirled about the rival figures of Wagner and Brahms. It was Bruckner's ill-luck that the Wagnerians needed a symphonist to pit against Brahms; intending to raise him on a hero's pedestal, they sacrificed him instead. More—they took advantage of his simplicity and mutilated some of his works, creating in his mind greater uncertainty than could any frankly hostile criticism. His only defence was to hoard the original manuscripts 'for fifty years' time'. To compare Bruckner's own score of the Fifth Symphony with the version that was first published is to feel with bitter intensity the agonies the composer must have endured at the hands of these clever, well-meaning, dismally misguided partisans. Even now, there are many difficult textual problems, some insoluble, for there is no way of discerning with exactness (in some cases) Bruckner's own final intentions. Some passages in the *Adagio* and *Finale* of the Eighth may or may not have been intended by him to remain; but their excision could have been the result of pressures that prevailed over his better judgment. My view is that this must have been so, for these passages show themselves vital to deep-laid musical processes of which only he could have been (perhaps even dimly) aware at the time.* The

*These passages are present in Robert Haas's edition, but not in Leopold Nowak's.

final form of the Second Symphony must stay in doubt; many aspects of No. 3 will always be problematical. The case of No. 1 must inevitably create argument, but for a different reason; it exists in two forms, both authentic, the earlier dating from 1866 and the later revision from 1891, interrupting work on the Ninth Symphony. All these difficulties have been further exacerbated by unedifying disputes between some of the scholars involved in restoring the true Bruckner. Yet when all is said and done the character of Bruckner's genius and the majesty of his greatest music remain inviolable. It has often been averred that Bruckner's uncertainties and his hapless acquiescence make him less than a great composer. Are we to say the same of Beethoven in respect of *Leonore* and *Fidelio*, of the C minor symphony and its *scherzo* and *trio* (to repeat or not to repeat?), of the *Hammerklavier* sonata (the composer's suggested cuts, which make the hair stand on end), of the B flat quartet, Op.130, with its substitute ending?

Finding an approach to Bruckner means getting rid of preconceptions. It is perilous to pay too much attention to the idea that his naivety prevented him from mastering architecture coherently, that his work reveals a want of intellectual concentration. Where Bruckner failed, it was for reasons different from those usually offered by critics who view him through the wrong end of a telescope. Part of the trouble is concerned with Wagner, and with the assumption that Bruckner is a Wagnerian composer. From Bayreuth came the dictum that 'the art of composition is the art of transition'—admirable when applied to Wagner's problem of how to reflect in almost unbroken music the discourse and shift of human situations, how gradually to evolve transformations of themes along with the growth of a drama on the stage, how to make tonalities flow one into the other as part of a continuum. No one, however, is likely to attack the greatest masterpieces of Giovanni Gabrieli or Monteverdi because they do not fulfil Wagner's requirement; in many ways Bruckner's positive assets are closer to those of Gabrieli than to Wagner's. His peculiar kind of grandeur depends upon the apt placing of mass and void; when Bruckner's early admirers used the term 'lapidary' they meant his characteristic piling of phrase on phrase, cumulatively scored, to build a climax, but even they did not see that the very forms of his music are coherently placed aggregations of such blocks rather than failures to achieve a smooth flow like Wagner's. In trying to bend Bruckner's music into a more Wagnerian shape, they did not give credit where it was due—for Bruckner himself never had any difficulty with smooth Wagnerian transitions when he felt the need for them. As I have said elsewhere, any block-headed Bachelor of Music could fill the 'gaps' in Bruckner with such transitions. He did not choose to do so.

That particular misconception has beset the favourably disposed. Another, equally serious, comes from those with fixed notions about the nature of symphonic music. The Wagnerians cannot be accused of pedantic classicism; they were fully prepared to allow Bruckner a new type of symphony (indeed, their

opposition to Brahms dictated such an attitude) so long as it chimed with Wagner's discoveries. But in fact they understood Wagner no better than Bruckner, for they saw nothing wrong with 'bleeding chunks' from Wagner's music dramas, so long as their raw edges were decently trimmed. From the opposition, devoted especially to Brahms, came the objection that Bruckner was clumsy and naive in his attempts to handle sonata form, that his symphonies were unholy monsters, cross-bred between incompatibles and deformed by inexpert midwifery. Neither good 'classical' symphonies, nor good Wagner! Is it not surprising that hardly anyone at the time seemed able to draw the simple inference that such impressive music as this (and only the extremest antagonists failed to find it impressive) might possibly be good Bruckner?

It is now plain enough that Bruckner's symphonies and masses will survive all these vicissitudes; yet it is important to discuss them, for by sweeping away the negative falsities we see the more clearly what is left, the stuff of the music, and its real nature. Before treating Bruckner only as an elaborate demonstration of what a good composer Brahms was (as H. C. Colles did) we must first understand the forms in which Brahms was masterly. We must discover then that the superficial semblances of sonata shapes to be found in Bruckner make him peculiarly vulnerable to superficial criticism. The Brahmsian conception of sonata and symphony stems directly from Haydn, Mozart, middle-period Beethoven, and some Schubert. It depends upon the dramatic and athletic treatment of harmony and tonality. A true sonata movement creates certain symmetries, but it is a grave mistake to suppose that the presence of roughly similar symmetries indicates an attempt at a sonata structure. In a genuine sonata movement of even the quietest kind the moment of *reprise,* for instance, is a dramatic incident depending on a special kind of tension, expressed through a fundamentally dynamic sense of key. It is this kind of tonal tension that defines what a sonata is—not the mere presence of a recapitulation. There are plenty of sonata movements without regular or even obvious recapitulations, and plenty of other kinds of organisms that recapitulate.

Consider the fact that all large-scale musical designs need to create some sense of symmetry, or balance, if they are to satisfy a normal listener's instinct for unity. This is true even of so free a form as fugue, whose *dénouement* is nearly always produced at a strategic moment when the listener's desire for a sense of symmetry has been stretched to breaking point. In the great harmonic forms, of which 'sonata' is the most influential, symmetry tends to reveal itself in ways that are more broadly recognizable than in contrapuntal music. But it has been assumed that, because sonata forms are so common, the presence of such symmetries indicates sonata structure. Birds and bats, however, are unrelated, whatever the cursory glance may suggest. Any extended structure that is harmonically based will tend to recapitulate at some time or other; there will also be moments of 'transition' and a moment when one feels the end to be in sight—a 'coda'. There will also be an initial period in the music when one

feels that matter for consideration is being put forward—an 'exposition'. But the terms 'exposition', 'development', 'recapitulation', and 'coda' are apt to be rigidly attached to sonata form by the *routiniers* who, seeing something of the sort in Bruckner, are content only with seeing, and do not listen to what actually happens. Some musicians hear visually, so to speak.

One of the things we must understand from the start is the fact that Bruckner's structures, whatever characteristics they may have in common, are all individual structures. A frequent way of describing his symphonic method is to take the various types of movement in turn, first movement, *Adagio*, *Scherzo*, and *Finale*, generalizing vaguely over certain seemingly typical features and preparing a sort of blueprint of 'the' Bruckner symphony. This is all very well; there is certainly no doubt that a composer's habits reveal important aspects of his personality, the age he lived in, and his influence upon his successors. But such particularizing over generalities leads only to confusion if it is not first clearly grasped that the works themselves are very different from each other in character and structure. The more deeply Bruckner's music is pondered, the stronger becomes the realization that he invariably bends structure to expressive needs, that he never adopts the same procedure twice, that his large designs make totally diverse uses of their apparently similar features. Tovey's description of the 'typical' Bruckner slow movement is as follows: 'The plan of his adagios consists of a broad main theme, and an episode that occurs twice, each return of the main theme displaying more movement in the accompaniment and rising at the last return to a grand climax followed by a solemn and pathetic die-away coda.' On the face of it this is plausible but Tovey, as so often in his comments on this composer, takes too much for granted.*

Since Tovey's description occurs in his essay on Bruckner's Fourth Symphony, we may as well examine the slow movement of that work, and see how it compares with another famous *Adagio*, that in the Seventh Symphony. The first point to note about the *Andante* of No. 4 is that the whole of its first section—immense in size—revolves round the tonic key, C minor, turning to the major at the end through the subdominant (F minor), so that its last cadence is not exactly final. In this section there are three main ideas, and the character of the piece as a whole is that of a veiled funeral march. The quotations show no harmony, and are purely for identification:

Ex. 1 (bar 3)

Cellos

mf

etc.

*This said, it perhaps becomes necessary to dissociate myself from the present-day tendency to debunk this greatest of all writers on music.

Ex. 2 (bar 25) 1st Violins *p cresc.* *etc.*

Ex. 3 (bar 51) Violas *mf* *cresc.* *tr* *dim.* *etc.*

Ex. 1 begins a plain marching tune with a subdued accompaniment of muted strings and Ex. 2 is the start of a solemn chorale, passing through many apparent modulations that effectively prevent any new key from asserting itself. It falls away into Ex. 3, which continues the apparent modulations, but eventually settles on a C major that leans toward the subdominant (as if Bruckner is going to end the whole section with the same kind of inflexions that colour the coda of the *Eroica* Funeral March). Now Ex. 3 is usually regarded as an 'episode' (see Tovey), but it cannot be too strongly emphasized that it is tonality which governs these matters; Bruckner is careful never to allow any key but C (minor or major) to gain a foothold during this long passage from the opening, and the change that follows shows at once how different is the effect of a clean move from one tonality to another. The sound of A flat major at bar 92 is strikingly firm; here we really begin to move away. From this point, fragments of Ex. 1 are developed with new figures, building a big climax that subsides on the home dominant, awaiting the restoration of C minor (see bar 129). What next—a symmetrical restatement? Obviously this would be clumsy. But the 'exposition' was dominated by one key; if it had been a sonata exposition, it would have moved decisively away from its tonic, so that the development could have made the return journey to a restatement that stayed at home. Here we have a strange reversal of the procedure. An exposition fixed about one tonality does not necessarily preclude further development, for no sense of form is yet achieved; the music must expand further. So it does, as already described. But what kind of recapitulation shall there be? Bruckner's solution is to write a recapitulation that behaves like a normal sonata exposition—he restates Ex. 1 with a new transition leading directly to Ex. 3, which emerges around D minor-major, a key which is now very expressive because it has hitherto been allowed no independence. Ex. 2 is omitted, not simply to avoid *longueurs*, but to prevent the impression of slavish symmetry. Ending this recapitulatory section in a D major that leans towards G minor (just as the original C major hinted at the F minor subdominant), Bruckner now needs and composes a magnificent coda that rebuilds the home key in a grand climax. The mysterious end alludes to both Exx. 2 and 3.

The opening of the *Adagio* of the Ninth Symphony.

The *Adagio* of No. 7, perhaps Bruckner's most celebrated piece of music, is in C sharp minor, and begins with a vast and sombre train of themes culminating in a climax on the edge of F sharp minor (at bar 26). The climax fades into dark hesitancy, and the tonal trend is confirmed and explained by the second main idea, the wonderful *Moderato* in F sharp major:

Ex. 4 (bar 37) 1st Violins *p* *cresc.* *dim.* *etc.*

This returns in due course to C sharp minor and to the opening; the first theme is then developed, tension increasing until there is a powerful apex in G major, one of the remotest possible keys in this context (see bar 126½ *et seq.*). This G major behaves as if it intends to be the dominant of C, but the tone subsides and the music moves instead into A flat major. The *Moderato* (Ex. 4) returns in this key with fresh orchestration. Here lies a stroke of genius, perhaps the most original among many in this movement. A flat is simply G sharp, the home dominant; consequently the recapitulation of the *Moderato* acts as an immense dominant preparation for the restoration of the tonic C sharp minor and the first theme. This is a new application of the cardinal principle of restatement, and because Bruckner sees the true nature of his material, he is able to use familiar devices to mould it into unfamiliar, living forms.

The main theme now becomes the backbone of an enormous passage, crowned by a towering climax in C major (see bar 177) (cymbal or no cymbal?—the issue is in doubt, but the cymbal crash is so thrilling that few would gladly do without it here*). C major is directly related to the G major of the previous peak, and the whole mighty plan is integrated at a stroke. All that remains to be composed is the coda; it was at this point that Bruckner heard of Wagner's death, and the sublime elegy that follows was directly inspired by that event. As the G major of the first climax led to A flat, so this C major, as the sound fades, moves in music of extraordinary depth into D flat, or C sharp, the tonic major, where the *Adagio* finally settles with a profound calm of which Bruckner was one of the few masters.

All these points are but signposts; both these movements are full of subtleties, traceable only in a lengthy discussion. But what should emerge from these brief descriptions is the over-riding fact that while Tovey's account of the typical Bruckner *adagio* may cover one or two salient features, it fails to indicate the great differences in structure that exist. And no two slow movements in

*It must have been this moment that inspired Hugo Wolf to one of the most gorgeous pieces of hyperbole ever perpetrated by a partisan musician: 'A single cymbal crash by Bruckner is worth all the four symphonies of Brahms with the serenades thrown in.'

Bruckner's symphonies are much more closely related than the two just described. One cannot even except those in the Second and Fifth symphonies, which perhaps fit Tovey's words more nearly than any others; the *Adagio* of No. 6 is a marvellous and nearly regular sonata plan, while the Eighth and Ninth have slow movements which actually attack the tonal question from diametrically opposite points of view. The one in the First Symphony has a design of astounding originality, to which Bruckner never returned, and that in No. 3, despite some great music, aims rather uncertainly at what might have been a new discovery, a type of ternary form within ternary form, the whole in one vast breath.

Turning from slow movements, we can find the same individual variety elsewhere. In the first movement of No. 7, Bruckner found a completely new concept of tonal development. Glancing through the score, one finds the themes and sections occurring in an order suggesting sonata form; yet the peculiar tensions of sonata are missing. This led H. C. Colles and others to assume that something was wrong somewhere. As always with Bruckner, it is essential to cast out preconceived notions and assume that what we are examining has no precedent.* First of all, notice that the long main theme modulates from tonic to dominant before it slips back to the tonic for a counterstatement. This is a clue to the larger scheme. As the music goes on, the key of B (the dominant) gradually takes possession, until it is fully established. Anyone with a score may care to look at (no—*listen* to!) bars 51, 69, 89 and 123 with particular attention. At bar 123 the key of B (now minor) is for the first time solidly entrenched, and the point is made by a change of character and rhythm (this is *not* a 'second subject'):

Ex. 5 (bar 123)

After a climax, the music settles quietly in B major. The rest of the movement reverses the process, E (minor or major) gradually supplanting B; the earlier stages of this devolution are at bars 189, 210, and 219. Then comes a massive outburst in C minor (233). Here is a crucial moment. This C minor is disruptive, and if Bruckner were writing a normal sonata movement, he would now need a long and thorough preparation for the recapitulation in the tonic, E major, which would eventually come, however quietly, with an underlying sense of drama. When the storm calms, however, there is no immediate change of key; soon follows a quiet drift through D minor, and towards its opposite pole A flat. Instead of A flat, however, there is a magical change to E major (281),

*This is, in fact, the only sure way of perceiving the vitality of any individual work of art. Then, and only then, should we be interested to see what features it may share with other works.

where the glorious main theme is suddenly given in full. But because of the previous tonal fluctuations E major is not established here with the solidity of a sonata restatement. The big outbreak of C minor has simply interrupted a process that has already been going on, given Bruckner the reason for a startlingly beautiful change of key, and greatly increased the prospects of the design as a whole.

Now comes another subtlety; remember that the complete main theme modulates from tonic to dominant—at this stage a dangerous tendency, for E must now gradually take over from B. So this time the end of the theme drifts into mysterious dark harmony that tilts the balance the opposite way, and when E (minor) does appear (319) it feels like the dominant minor of A minor. Again there is a subversive tendency towards the usurper, B, this time with a sense of crisis, and a great *crescendo* brings the music to the very threshold of B major (362). There is but one possible solution, and a drastic one. Bruckner abruptly cuts in with Ex. 5 in the foreign key of G major. So the theme which originally clinched the usurping key (B major—at bar 123) now decisively contradicts it! The coda at last establishes the tonic with massive dignity, and a degree of subtlety that cannot be treated here.

I hope to be forgiven for indulging in this kind of analysis, for it is the only way to show the real nature of Bruckner's originality and the danger of misinterpreting it by preconception. The form of this movement, and the kind of 'progressive tonality' it reveals, is something new in the symphony; if the symmetries it creates suggest sonata shapes, one should not be misled. Bruckner could and did create normal sonata movements on a great scale whenever he felt it apt. The first movement of the Eighth Symphony is a case in point, its dramatic character demanding clear sonata behaviour. Bruckner carries it out in masterly fashion, again with an original feeling for tonality, but with all the typical sonata tensions arising naturally and unequivocally. The same is true of the first movement of No. 6, and that of No. 4, as well as other cases, all different in character, but having in common a kind of tonal movement that can easily be related to Beethoven and Schubert, magnified, rhythmically simplified, and slowed down. But when Bruckner is looking in another direction, we must learn to recognize the fact, and not try to find a nose on the back of his head. Much confusion has arisen as a result of attempts to analyse the first movement of the unfinished Ninth Symphony as if it were a sonata structure that has been cruelly stretched upon some grotesque rack. Yet its details become immediately meaningful when we realize that the whole piece consists of a grand and simple scheme of Statement, Expanded Counter-statement, and Coda.

This last instance is worth going into; to show how some of Bruckner's gigantic and unorthodox forms grow from his material and from his peculiarly deliberate sense of movement, we can consider two of the largest examples—the first movement of No. 9, and the *Finale* of No. 5. It is quite possible that if

Bruckner had finished the Ninth Symphony he was working at until the day of his death in 1896, revision would have followed; there are passages in the first movement and in the *Adagio* that he might have wished to examine again. Yet both these movements, despite passing uncertainties, achieve new and vast designs, neither concerned with traditional sonata methods, though the first movement can be uncomfortably crammed into such a scheme if one uses the eye rather than the ear.

This movement, one of Bruckner's hugest conceptions, has an immense but simple outline that is easily described, once it has been noticed. The three main components already remarked are so large as not to be obvious to the new listener; but awareness of them makes the whole great *fresco* easy to apprehend. Moreover, it makes sympathetic criticism at once possible. The Statement gives out three elements, or paragraphs, each containing a number of thematic ideas, and each with its own climax. First comes what is essentially a long slow *crescendo*, containing several melodic ideas, beginning with the solemn chant-like horn theme that Bruckner had anticipated some forty years earlier in the *Missa solemnis* in B flat minor. Here the key is D minor. The culmination of the *crescendo* is a tremendous unison theme in the tonic. Such a description must bring Beethoven's Ninth to mind, the key reinforcing the impression; but Bruckner's opening is very different. Its procession of themes and slow 'lapidary' accumulation create a kind of momentum that is remotely alien from Beethoven's. Where Beethoven increases the tension by progressively tightening the rhythm so that the main theme possesses greater impetus than its preparation (a characteristic of sonata organization, for the rest of the movement is thereby compelled forward), Bruckner's 'main' theme is the end of a procession, which it brings to a halt. We have time to pause and look back. So a link brings us to a necessary contrast, the second part of the Statement, a flowing section beginning in A major (bar 97), more expansive, reaching its own lesser climax, and falling away into another mysterious link that anticipates the third element. This begins at bar 167, back in D minor, in severe mood; it comes to a heavy earthbound climax that clears into F major at the last moment. So the Statement ends. To call it an exposition would be literally correct, since it exposes all the main matter, but it is better in this case to avoid terminology with confusing associations.

Commentators have usually attempted to describe what follows as a sort of combination of development and recapitulation. It is cleaner and simpler to notice that what Bruckner is really aiming at is a colossal expansion of the opening *crescendo*, followed by the telescoping of the two sections that originally succeeded it, the whole to be an Expanded Counterstatement. Beginning at bar 229 over a pedal F, the music grows in four huge waves to the unison theme (bar 333), itself magnified into two even larger sweeps, the first enveloped in furious titanic string passages and the second tramping and heaving towards a truly seismic irruption in F minor—a Miltonic power is in this music:

Silhouettes by Otto Böhler

Wagner greets Bruckner
in Bayreuth.

Portrait by Ferry Beraton, 1889.

Forthwith upright he* rears from off the pool
His mighty stature; on each hand the flames
Driven backward slope their pointing spires, and, rolled
In billows, leave i' the midst a horrid vale.
Then with expanded wings he steers his flight
Aloft, incumbent on the dusky air,
That felt unusual weight; till on dry land
He lights--if it were land that ever burned
With solid, as the lake with liquid fire,
And such appeared in here as when the force
Of subterranean wind transports a hill
Torn from Pelorus, or the shattered side
Of thundering Ætna, whose combustible
And fuelled entrails, thence conceiving fire,
Sublimed with mineral fury, aid the winds,
And leave a singèd bottom all involved
With stench and smoke. Such resting found the sole
Of unblest feet.

After this, slow gently circling figures disperse the terror and drift into the consolatory second part of the Counterstatement, which comes as a great relief, in D major. It is fused with the third section, whose end is now intensified, creating the need for a great Coda. For this Bruckner has reserved a chorale-like figure he originally used as a grand cadence to the unison theme. Here is the melodic outline of its first form, and it has not been heard at all between bars 71 and 531, when it eventually becomes the spine of the mighty Coda:

Enormous as this design is, it would be extremely terse were it not for the passage between bars 277 and 301, where Bruckner briefly interrupts his vast expansion of the original opening *crescendo* with a somewhat abortive reference to later material; this he might well have reconsidered at the stage of revision. A cut would certainly not do, for Bruckner's instinct for proportion is nearly always right, and although a cut from L to M would restore the natural sequence of ideas, the whole passage would then be too short. Only the composer could have solved this difficulty. Nevertheless, the conciseness of the movement as a whole should not be overlooked, for it is an error to assume that conciseness and brevity are the same thing. Is an elephant less concise than a flea? It is all

*Satan (*Paradise Lost*, Book 1).

a question of proportion, and mastery of design. In art, as in biology, adequacy is all that matters; there must be no understatement or overstatement—only exactitude, whether the proportions be large or small.

The remarkable nature, the size, and the rightness of Bruckner's sense of proportion may be found in the extraordinary *Finale* to the Fifth Symphony. Here again, the listener who is not properly prepared will find it hard to grasp the plan at first hearing, for the dimensions are greater than one would expect after the preceding three movements, large though they are. Bruckner's habits in his last movements are, moreover, apt to be disconcerting to those who assume, on classical precedent, that a *finale* must 'go'. As will be seen the *Finale* of No. 5 eventually does 'go' in no uncertain manner, but (in Tovey's phrase) 'the enemy blasphemes' long before it does. We must understand that were it not for the protracted preliminaries, this movement would not be able to 'go' in precisely the way it does; grasping this, we become able to enjoy these overtures in the way that the composer himself must have felt them. And this must surely be our aim in listening to anything whatever. Sometimes in a *finale* Bruckner is hesitant, not successful in tackling new problems such as no composer had ever before set himself—the last movement of No. 4 aims at but misses the target, despite a superb coda that leaves the listener overawed. In the Fifth, the difficulties are triumphantly conquered, and the first of Bruckner's really great culminative movements springs into existence. In the greatest of his symphonic endings, those of the Fifth and Eighth symphonies, he is in the frame of mind of a great architect moving in and around his newly finished cathedral; sometimes he will experience a masterful and always dignified exhilaration, and his actions will reflect his mind; sometimes he will stand stock still, overwhelmed by his surroundings. The first three movements of the symphony provide the background for a wide range of reflections; they have created a world in which a new, freer kind of activity is possible. Bruckner can be active and static by turns, in a movement that is neither quick nor slow yet receives both kinds of motion, action and rest being set in contrast to each other according to a plastic sense analogous to that of architect or sculptor. This kind of music is almost peculiar to Bruckner, and does not exist elsewhere in the nineteenth century; in his last four completed symphonies, there are two fully achieved examples (in the Fifth and Eighth) and one that does not quite succeed, though it contains magnificent music (in the Sixth), while the other, the *Finale* of No. 7, is of a different species altogether, balancing and contrasting the contemplative nature of the first two movements by forming with the *Scherzo* a power-house of activity. The sketches for the *Finale* of No. 9 show that it might have blended the contrapuntal mastery of No. 5 with the rocky solidity of No. 8, much of it cast over with a peculiarly menacing tone.

The *Finale* of the Fifth opens with a brief review of previous movements (omitting the *Scherzo*, which starts with the same material, in the same key, as the *Adagio*). After each quotation is inserted a short phrase, apparently

comic, as the figure of poor Bruckner must have seemed to smart-alicks who had no idea of what he could do:

At first it appears at various pitches, though the quotation shows it in the tonic. Suddenly the cellos and basses seize it roughly and turn it into a fugue subject. The *fugato*, however, soon becomes swallowed in a march-like symphonic *tutti* that hardly gets going before it subsides, marking time on the home dominant. A break, then a new section begins in D flat, full of amiability:

It wanders cheerfully and inventively round and about, the figure marked (x) turning into a scale-figure in combination with new thoughts, until eventually this section, too, comes to a full stop, this time definitely in F major (bar 136). Another break, then a big *tutti*, combining a derivative of Ex. 7 with the inverted scale-figure arising from Ex. 8 (x). The *tutti*, which appears to be clinching the key of F, then abruptly subsides into mystery, out of which a mighty blaze of light, in the shape of a chorale, suddenly stuns the senses from the direction of a strange key:

As the majesty of the chorale reveals itself, the strange tonality proves to be only part of a wonderful and gigantic cadence into F, and the music falls into serene quiet. Horn and woodwind instruments muse over the first phrase of the chorale—and then? 'Now' says the composer, after a mere 222 bars, 'we can begin!' By this time, Bruckner cannot even hear the blasphemy of the enemy, let alone be disturbed by it, and if we wish to enter his world and taste its rewards, we must also leave the enemy to grind his teeth in solitude. He, poor wretch, has no patience and so cannot grasp the very quality that Bruckner's music expresses. Patience is one of the greatest and most difficult of virtues;

when constancy of practice has made it an achieved natural function of mind and heart, it can become a sublime emotion. As Haydn can inspire us with joy, Beethoven with heroic passion, Chopin with poetic melancholy, so Bruckner can inspire us with patience. The risk he takes is greater than most, for if he fails, or if we fail (more likely), he becomes victim to our impatience and we the losers. The patience of the listener is not only something he demands; given generously by an experienced hearer, it is something that comes back from the music, enriched.

So now the *Finale* can 'go'. Bruckner begins a beautiful fugue on Ex.9 and soon shows that it combines with the subject formed from Ex.7, which has now entirely lost its comic aspect (bar 270). Passing through many strange and fantastic developments in which free inversions of Ex.7 and 9 are combined with themselves and each other, the fugue shows astonishing resource in harmony, naive counterpoint, instrumentation, and phrase-rhythms for 126 bars. Then it hesitates momentarily. There is a crash (bar 350) and we discover that the music is no longer fugal but that we are in the middle of a vigorous symphonic *tutti*, including a grand-slam combination of Exx.7 and 9 (bar 374) and reaching a climax soon afterwards. This solves the problem of how to bring the fugue to a *dénouement* within the scope of a larger symphonic whole. The *tutti* dies away and a simple but mysterious transition leads to—what? To the whole complex that grew from Ex.8, this time beginning in F major; its internal modulations are subtly changed, and some passages are freshly composed, so that it eventually arrives at an F major which is only the dominant of B flat—it travels, in fact, by a devious route from F major to the dominant of B flat!

The reader who finds such jargon incomprehensible need not worry. The effect of this recapitulation is what matters—it is infinitely refreshing after the previous contrapuntal fireworks and has, moreover, behind it a momentum which it was originally without, a sense of movement now irrevocably created by the fugue. On this great tide it swims where previously it paddled in the shallows. Only a Bruckner could have restated the whole of an amiably static paragraph such as this, giving it a new bouyancy and movement with but slight alteration; it is a matter of timing. And the effect at this point would not be half so telling without the experience of the first statement, which seemed like (and was) one of a series of static *tableaux*. This time it cannot possibly come to a full stop, and at length a *crescendo* leads to the *tutti* that originally followed after a break; but now the key is the tonic, B flat.

At this stage Bruckner throws in the theme of the first movement

Ex.10 (bar 464) Trumpets *ff*

and everything grows into a vast coda, now contrapuntal, now massively harmonic, with myriad combinations and transformations of the themes, never losing itself in detail but always driving inevitably towards one of the greatest climaxes in any symphony. The harmonic tension increases until it reaches a blazing chord of G flat; this proves to be the first chord of the chorale, which now strides across the whole world. The symphony ends with a precision and punctuality that mark only great composers. A further evidence of Bruckner's mastery is the fact that the chorale, when it finally arrives, does not slow down the music in the slightest degree; so irresistible is the momentum that it maintains its grip to the last. At least one conductor has, in my memory, wrecked this passage by pompously halving the tempo at the entry of the chorale, thus stultifying Bruckner into the sort of composer for whom the enemy's blasphemies should be reserved.

So far we have examined two first movements, two slow movements, and a *finale*, in order to show the variety of structure and character of which Bruckner is capable. The *scherzi*, too, show comparable diversity, and they are certainly at least as strong as any since Beethoven. Most of them show to perfection that Bruckner could and did master the tersest kind of sonata form when he wished. His characteristic *scherzo* is a simplified relative of that in Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, a fully developed sonata movement with a *trio* more violently contrasted than Beethoven might have liked; Bruckner's idea of a *trio* is akin to that of Schubert in his C major string quintet—except in the Ninth Symphony, where there is a departure, a *trio* much faster than the grim stamping *scherzo*, and icy in feeling. Here the *trio* of Beethoven's E flat quartet, Op. 127, comes to mind. In character Bruckner's *scherzi* show great variety; no two are remotely alike after the first three symphonies (or first four, if the posthumous D minor is included, as it should be). Most have in common a *penchant* for pounding repetitive rhythms, an essentially Beethovenian characteristic, and in itself a not unusual feature of *scherzi* of this period. What is unusual is Bruckner's blunt insistence upon regular phrase-rhythms that create the momentum of Thor's swinging hammer, or (in the stupendous *Scherzo* of the Eighth) the cumulative power of some colossal celestial reciprocating engine. His use of regular four-bar rhythms is never stiff or hapless in the *scherzi*, as it occasionally can be in a movement like the *Finale* of No. 4; nor is Bruckner so bound by these rhythms as some critics aver (these gentlemen would be well advised to study this aspect of the *Finale* of No. 5, where they will encounter a bewildering concatenation of threes, fives, sixes, sevens, and nines, for hundreds of bars at a time, with fours cannily and strategically reserved). Two of Bruckner's *scherzi* stand somewhat apart from the rest; the remarkably expansive one in No. 5, with its strange and abrupt dichotomy of subject-matter, mysterious energy opposed by a heavy *Ländler*, as if one's gaze were constantly turning from the mountains to the peasants in the valley, and back again; and the shadowy and deeply original *Scherzo* of the Sixth, which strongly anticipates Mahler.

What of Bruckner's symphonies as wholes? It has sometimes been asserted that he traversed the same ground in each, but we have seen from the discussion of individual movements that 'the' Bruckner symphony exists no more objectively than 'the' Dvořák or 'the' Brahms symphony. Every one of Bruckner's symphonies, with the obvious exception of the very early student work in F minor, has striking characteristics that it shares with the others, that mark its composer; this is true of any series by one master. Bruckner's means of integrating a symphony as a whole are too subtle to be dealt with here. They vary, as do the structures themselves, from work to work. Take, for example, the keys of the movements of the Seventh Symphony; the E major first movement might be expected to touch C sharp minor (the so-called relative minor) somewhere or other, but it does not. This is because the second movement is to be rooted in that key. Further, the A minor of the *Scherzo* owes its striking effect to the fact that it was touched but once in the first movement and studiously avoided in the second, and the *Scherzo* itself strictly excludes F major so that the trio shall emerge freshly in that key, the more freshly because neither of the first two movements has established F at all. And the return of E major in the *Finale* is the stronger and brighter for all this.

Subtle devices of this kind may be found in all Bruckner's mature symphonies. The D minor of the two middle movements of No. 5 arises from a tug-of-war between B flat and D minor in the first movement. Indeed his large-scale handling of tonality is full of miracles, analysable by any musician with a fine ear, and effective whether the listener is aware of them or not. It cannot be too strongly urged that such subtleties are there for the effect they make on the unbiased ear, which is not expected to analyse them or identify tonalities as such. We do not need to break down into its chemical constituents the air we breathe in order to discover whether it is fresh or not. Besides tonality there are thematic developments in Bruckner's symphonies that show, in their far-reaching effects, an outstanding degree of spontaneous cunning. One theme will gradually transform itself into another, so that the connection between the first idea and the end-product is fully traceable only in the musical process that evolved it. Anyone interested in detective-work of this kind should look at the bass at bar 161 of the first movement of the Fifth Symphony and discover the fascinating and spontaneous process by which it becomes changed into something very different at bar 199 and thereafter (the details are quoted in Erwin Doernberg's book on Bruckner). This is a method characteristic of No. 5, helping to knit the work into a unity. No. 8 shows another thematic device, the avoidance of the obvious tonal position of the main theme at the recapitulation of the first movement (a) so that the passage itself may be powerfully expanded and (b) so that this position, the one in which it lies most firmly in the tonic key, may be reserved for a shattering statement near the end of the *Finale*. This I have already described in a complete analysis of the work in *Chord and Discord* (1950), the journal of the Bruckner Society of America.

It would be possible to enumerate many such examples, especially in the later symphonies.

In the series as a whole there is a notable development of scope, character, and degree of organization. This is not the place to give all the involved details of Bruckner's numerous revisions, which sometimes overlapped the actual composition of much later works. But this (and here I refer to Bruckner's *own* revising) never altered the essential nature of the work being recast, except in some aspects of the First and Third symphonies. The bold rugged force of the First Symphony shocked its first hearers, so much so that Bruckner wished for a time to 'play safe'; but in doing so he discovered a new path, first in the D minor symphony he rejected (I agree with Hans F. Redlich that this work dates from 1869, between Nos. 1 and 2) and then more firmly in the Second Symphony, in C minor. Both these works aim at a calm objectivity that No. 1, for all its high quality, barely hints at (except in its wonderful *Adagio*, superior to anything of its kind he achieved before No. 5). In No. 3 we find him reaching outwards into these new fields, not altogether successfully or freely, but often with powerful imagination. The first three movements of the Fourth (the only one to which he gave a name—*Romantic*) are at last Brucknerian masterpieces, and only in the *Finale* does he falter seriously. The opening of No. 4 at once creates an air in which Bruckner is free, with limitless space before him, and the remaining symphonies show the diverse worlds of expression he was able to explore, gaining the while an ever mounting sense of personal identity. The more one knows these works the more individually do they reveal themselves, at the same time radiating an artistic composure that places Bruckner outside his own age. They are all different, the austere grandeur of the Fifth, the indescribable iridescence of the Sixth, the firm euphony and glowing calm of the Seventh, the heroic drama of the Eighth, the dark and often weary quests and penetrations, profoundly disturbing, of the Ninth.

Bruckner belonged to the romantic era only insofar as he was influenced by the harmonies and forms of his contemporaries. He is really a non-romantic composer (despite his childlike attempts to interest his up-to-date colleagues in naive 'programmes' to some of the symphonies); he strove to reach an expression that should be timeless. When weariness overtook him, or he was confused by the inimical intellectual climate that surrounded him, his music betrayed romantic human weaknesses, such as were always magnified by those who altered his work to fit their conception of 'contemporary' music. In his original scores far fewer such weaknesses exist, and many are illusory, often strokes of genius when positively interpreted. The key to their understanding lies in quiet concentration and generous patience. The religious elements and the characteristically Austrian tone in much of Bruckner's music have sometimes been quoted as barriers to his acceptance by non-Catholics or by foreigners. This is false counsel; it is not necessary to be an Austrian or a Catholic (or even a religious man) to find one's imagination stirred and gripped by the vast

power and sweep of Bruckner's greatest music. Majesty is a quality in itself eminently recognizable, patience another. The beauty and strength of his grandest conceptions amount to majesty, and are achieved by patience. Music is one way of making significant our experience of time, the mature exercise of patience another. Bruckner joins these two arts as best he can; a correct response brings a profound and unique sense of having been personally and literally composed by him. The deep composure Bruckner is able to achieve, express, and ultimately transfer to the receptive listener is not only something that sets him apart from the artistic turbulence of an age in which he suffered much distraction; it is a state rare in any time or place. The supreme masters, Bach and Beethoven, would have recognized it instantly, greeting with an accolade this outwardly simple and sometimes, by their very highest standards, falteringly humble peasant.

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