

ANTON BRUCKNER

B. Ausfelden, Austria, Sept. 4, 1824; d. Vienna, Oct. 11, 1896.

Here is a symphonist of unquestioned genius, bitterly attacked and strangely misunderstood during his lifetime, and only now beginning to arrive at the appreciation that is his due. Unfortunately much of Bruckner's music sounds dull to modern ears, yet there are pages of such inspiration that his significance cannot be ignored.

He was largely self-taught, but became one of the outstanding organists of his time, concertizing, teaching and composing throughout his long life, with little encouragement from the critics or the public. Hanslick was consistently and venomously hostile, partly because the Wagnerites, whom he hated, chose to pick Bruckner as their symphonic representative, in opposition to Brahms, whom Hanslick adored.

Outside of an early Overture in G minor (1863), Bruckner's orchestral writing is summed up in his nine symphonies, several of which have established their permanent place in the repertoire. This does not include a symphony in F minor, published posthumously, and also dating back to the year 1863. The Andante is often played alone.

The first Bruckner symphony in the recognized list is in C minor, written at Linz in 1865 and revised in 1891. It was first performed at Linz May 9, 1868, and proved too difficult for the players. Hans Richter introduced the revised version in Vienna at a Philharmonic concert, December 13, 1891. This symphony was dedicated to the University of Vienna, in appreciation of a doctor's degree. It is seldom heard today.

There are four movements, of the conventional type, the first in Sonata form. The Adagio has two themes and is followed by a Scherzo. The Finale shows a fiery opening by the full orchestra, followed by a tranquil second theme.

Bruckner's Second Symphony is also in C minor, written in 1871-2, and first performed in Vienna, Oct. 26, 1873, with the composer conducting. The dedication is to Franz Liszt. There are three themes in the first movement. The second is a Rondo, with one outstanding theme to which the others are subordinate. The Scherzo has a peasant humor, and the Finale, with three themes, achieves considerable complexity, ending in a C major climax.

The Third Symphony was dedicated to Bruckner's idol, Richard Wagner, whose orchestral technique he attempted to

adapt to symphonic writing, not without success. The key is D minor. It was composed in 1873 and first performed in Vienna, December 16, 1877.

The opening movement is in Sonata form. The Adagio has three themes, freely developed. The Scherzo shows a whirling violin figure, with a Trio on a waltz theme. The Finale is free in form, suggesting a Rondo, although there are only two themes.

The Fourth Symphony of Bruckner is in E-flat, with the title "Romantic." (It is also known as the "Wald" or "Forest" Symphony.) It was first played in Vienna in 1881.

This symphony is full of the love of Nature. It begins contemplatively, and the slow movement (Andante) is full of melancholy. The Scherzo seems to represent a hunting scene. The Finale starts impressively with a long and gradual crescendo, going into a musical description of a folk festival and closing in a triumphant mood. This work has by this time attained considerable popularity. Here is the final theme:



Number Five is not so well known. It is in B-flat, with a first performance at Graz, April 8, 1894, conducted by Franz Schalk. Although Bruckner composed this symphony in Vienna between 1875 and '77, and revised it in 1878, he never heard it performed. It has been given the title "Tragic," and is contrapuntally brilliant, with a cyclic use of thematic material.

The first movement contains a so-called "Hymn to Holy Love," written when the composer was in a desperately unhappy state of mind. The second movement starts with a pizzicato which becomes the foundation of the Scherzo. The Finale is fugal and makes use of earlier themes.

The Sixth Symphony of Bruckner is seldom heard. The key is A major, and it was written between 1879 and 1881. Two movements were performed in Vienna in 1883, with Jahn conducting, and the first complete performance was given by Gustav Mahler with the Vienna Philharmonic in 1899.

The Seventh is unquestionably the most popular of the Bruckner symphonies today. Its key is E major, and it was completed September 5, 1883, with a dedication to the mad King Ludwig II of Bavaria, who had been Wagner's generous patron. The Adagio of this symphony was called by its composer a "Dirge to Wagner's memory," although it must have been written before his idol's death, February 13, 1883. The first performance was under the baton of Arthur Nikisch in Leipzig, December 30, 1884, and the symphony was published the following year.

The Dirge has been called Bruckner's "most celebrated page." It is the second movement, and its principal theme is played by five tubas, doubled by the low strings:



This slow movement is followed by a Scherzo, and the Finale ends with a triple fortissimo on the chief theme of the first movement.

Bruckner's Eighth Symphony is again in his favorite key of C minor, with the title "Apocalyptic." The composer worked at it from 1884 to 1890 and it was first played in Vienna by Hans Richter, December 18, 1892. Even Hanslick admitted its triumphant success. There are four movements, with the Scherzo preceding the Adagio.

This symphony is generally considered programmatic. Commentators have found Prometheus in the first movement, the German Michel in the Scherzo, the All-loving Father of Mankind in the Adagio and a Finale devoted to "heroism in

the service of the Divine." The ending recalls themes from the earlier movements, again suggesting the cyclic form of which Bruckner was so fond.

Bruckner's Ninth Symphony remained unfinished. It is in D minor, and was begun in 1887 and continued in 1891. The Adagio was completed in 1894, and Bruckner sketched a Finale, but imperfectly, working on it to the very day of his death. He knew of his approaching end, and suggested that if the symphony were not completed, his own *Te Deum* be used for a Finale.

It is customary, however, to play only the three complete movements, ending with the Adagio, containing an "elegiacal chant of tubas," decorated by the violins. Löwe conducted this final Bruckner symphony in Vienna in 1903 and published it the same year in his own garbled version. Like most of the others, it reveals its composer as a strange combination of naïveté, mysticism and the grand style.