

BRUCKNER, ANTON (1824-1896), Austrian composer, was born on Sept. 4, 1824, at Ansfelden in Upper Austria. He successfully competed for the organist's post at Linz cathedral in 1856. In 1868 he succeeded his former master of counterpoint, Simon Sechter, as organist of the court chapel in Vienna, and also became professor in the conservatorium. In 1875 he was appointed to a lectureship in the university. He made a great impression by his extemporizations on the organ, and his success in an organ competition at Nancy in 1869 led to his playing in Paris and London (six recitals at the Albert hall, 1871). He died in Vienna on Oct. 11, 1896.

While Bruckner is regarded as one of the great masters in Austria and, rather less generally, in Germany, elsewhere he never gained the reputation as a composer which he had achieved temporarily as an organist. At first church music was the medium in which he best expressed himself. Always humbly obedient to his priest, and never at ease among intellectuals and men of the world, he developed his talent in the composition of masses and other choral works that mark the not unworthy close of a classical (though provincially classical) epoch in Austrian church music—the church music that could not digest Beethoven, though it was not uncongenial to Schubert. The instrumental music of Bruckner's first period is so uncouth that its disinterment is an extraordinary tribute to the triumph of his later symphonies. His Mass in F minor, finished in 1868, seems in comparison with his first symphony (produced in that year) like a metropolitan bishop compared with Dominie Sampson. But by 1884 the position was reversed. The grand *Te Deum* (1881-84) has one or two lapses into a style fairly describable as parochial, and seems to belong to a much more primitive art than the sixth symphony, which was finished in 1881. The seventh symphony, finished while the *Te Deum* was in hand, quotes the *non confundar in aeternum* in its slow movement, an elegy on the death of Wagner. The effect is almost as if the Wagner of *Parsifal* were to quote not *Lohengrin* (as he does) but *Rienzi*.

Bruckner, in the last months of his life, feeling unable to write a finale to his ninth symphony, expressed the wish that this *Te Deum* should be performed in that position. Apart from the fact that Bruckner's ninth symphony has naively provocative external resemblances to Beethoven's, conductors who seriously appreciate Bruckner's art find abundant reason for not carrying out this wish; the discrepancy of styles is grotesque. Yet the *Te Deum* is a fine work with a sledge hammer Handelian power, alternating with pious meditative passages which have nothing in common with its few lapses into provinciality.

The musical sources of Bruckner's symphonic inspiration are two, or rather twin: the opening of Beethoven's ninth symphony and the openings and crescendos of Wagner's *Ring*. These lapidary materials (as Bruckner's partisans aptly called them) he builds into forms quite uncritically taken over from classical tradition, but lacking the essential symphonic element of transition, with results that blind many critics to the grandeur of his style. But the reputation of Bruckner's symphonies has survived the hostilities provoked by his position as symphonic stalking-horse for the Wagnerians.

(D. F. T.; X.)

