To enjoy fully the most popular of Anton Bruckner's symphonies, his monumental Fourth, the listener should be completely at ease, for its musical process is deliberate. This unhurried pace allows easy access to the rewards the symphony offers. Its sonorities are magnificent (and impressive material for high-fidelity display), its melodies strike us directly at first hearing, and the very amplitude of its time scale affords a welcome relief from the nervous rush of our times.

Bruckner's pace in his work habits was also unhurried. His output of nine symphonies, quintet, Masses, and miscellaneous choral music proves that he worked tirelessly, but the motion of the music is always deliberate, and it is a commonplace to say that despite the tempo markings he never wrote a real *allegro*. He was a man of exceeding humility, a devout Roman Catholic church organist, brought up in the influence of St. Florian, where he was a chorister, and of Linz Cathedral, where he was organist and conductor of the town's *Männerchor*. He was born in 1824, and, like Brahms, did not write his First Symphony until he was in his forties, in 1868. In that year, however, he became professor at the Vienna Conservatory, and thereafter he worked steadily at his symphonies until his death interrupted the composition of the Ninth in 1896.

Wagner's *Tannhäuser* made a great impression on Bruckner as a young man, and the Wagnerian style became the chief influence on his music. He cultivated an acquaintance with Wagner. The Third Symphony was dedicated to him; the beautiful *adagio* of the Seventh Symphony was inspired by his death. Bruckner adopted Wagnerian instrumentation, to the point of including tenor tubas in the last three symphonies. And the Wagnerites, happy to have a symphonist in their camp, drew Bruckner into the fray as they opposed the Brahmsians, led by Hanslick, in the stormiest battle of the Romantic era, involving episodes and invective that must frequently have alarmed so retiring a man.

But the expressive content of Bruckner's music sets it apart from both Wagner's and Brahms', as well as from Mahler's, who in other respects was his stylistic successor in the following generation. Wagner is primarily dramatic; Brahms is essentially lyrical and humanistic; Mahler was wrestling with existentialist doubts. But Bruckner's music is always a paean to God, always the outpouring of a simple and supremely confident Christian faith. The dedication of his Ninth Symphony, *An meinen lieben Gott* (to my beloved God), might be inscribed on any of his scores.

The Fourth Symphony, subtitled "Romantic" by the composer, was written between 1874 and 1880, and was first performed in 1881 in Vienna, under Richter. It is thus contemporary with Brahms' Second Symphony (1877) and Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* (1876). It is in four movements, like the Beethoven and Brahms symphonies. The structure preserves the outlines of sonata form, but instead of the classical thematic process we have a succession of separate theme blocks, which has given rise to the terms "pyramidal" and "lapidary" to describe Bruckner's forms.

The first movement (*Ruhig bewegt:* with quiet motion) begins with a motto theme, sounded by the solo horn over a string tremolo, then repeated in dialogue between woodwinds and horn. The characteristic interval of the fifth in this motto recurs in the main themes of slow movement and scherzo. A bridge section built on typical Brucknerian triplets leads to a dramatic pause with only the horns sustaining, after which the contrasting material is introduced, first in the strings, then throughout the orchestra. The triplets return as the exposition closes. The middle section of the movement is a pseudo-development, employing much of the preceding material, modulating constantly until the home key is reached for the recapitulation. This final section opens with the motto theme beautifully counterpointed by flute and muted violins. After the rest of the material has been restated, the coda climbs magnificently upon variants of the motto theme from *ppp* to a resounding *fff*.

The second movement *(Andante)* consists of three presentations of a long, expressive melody (first heard in the cellos), separated by nearly identical episodes made up of short phrases in which the violas have the leading role.

The scherzo (*Bewegt:* with movement) is based upon characteristic hunting horn figures. Bruckner once suggested jocularly that it depicted "mealtime on the hunt." The trio (contrasting key, triple meter) brings a quiet rural tune, after which the scherzo is repeated in shortened form, with a loud fanfare for coda.

The finale (*Mässig bewegt:* moderate speed) possesses its own themes, though reminiscences of material from all the preceding movements are introduced – notably the motto theme of the opening, which is sounded *fortissimo* just after the symphony's one loud cymbal crash. Again the coda is one tremendous dynamic climb, this time over a background of constant triplets in the strings, from a mirror statement of the head of the movement's opening theme (woodwinds) to a sonorous fanfare on the rhythm of the original motto as the home key is finally attained.

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