

Bruckner Literature in English

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Obviously most writing on Bruckner will be in German. It may well be that most intelligent writing about Bruckner will be in German, but there is some stuff in English that is worth a look. Here's a list that has no pretensions to completeness.

Two sources would seem to be reliable if you want facts unsullied by romantic conjecture. In most cases, unless you're very well off, they entail a visit to the library.

New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians, entry on Bruckner, 30 double-column pages by Paul Hawkshaw and Timothy L Jackson. This is good basic biography, chapters on his 'personality', publication and reception history, (all by Paul Hawkshaw), and thereafter chapters on the versions, metrical and part-writing theories, composition and revision process, vocal music, 'narrative and intertextuality', research issues (these by Timothy L Jackson). At the end is what looks to be a complete list of works and an extensive bibliography. I think this is as good as it gets for a brief summary of things one needs to know about Bruckner - and it's free to consult if you go to the library (in the UK) and I was able to photocopy the pages I needed.

Anton Bruckner - A documentary biography - two volumes, Edwin Mellen Press. Very, very expensive and hard to come by even when it first appeared in 2002. This is what it says it is: a documentary biography. What's in there is facts and reports, it's all reliable information with documentary sources given. So if you want to know when and where Bruckner did this or that, what the critical reaction was, the answer if it exists is likely to be in this book. But don't expect poetic evocations of Bruckner's character or music - that's left for you to do. If there are questions about facts about Bruckner that you can't find in this book, then feel free to contact Crawford Howie himself via The Bruckner Journal email address.

And concentrating on just one work is the following:

Bruckner - Symphony No. 8 by Benjamin M. Korstvedt, in the Cambridge Music Handbooks series, Cambridge University Press, 2000 - which for me comes as near as anything to being essential reading. A very fine book.

Then there are a clutch of books made up of essays on a variety of Bruckner topics. There are good things in all of them, much of it very illuminating, but there are also things that verge on the incomprehensible (to me) in their level of academic analysis - these wretched Schenkerite diagrams and all that sort of caper. There may be insights to be gained from grappling with these, but sometimes I feel life is too short.

Bruckner Studies - ed Timothy L Jackson and Paul Hawkshaw, Cambridge University Press, 1997, in two parts: Historical Studies (7 of them); Analytical Studies (4 of them)

Perspectives on Anton Bruckner - ed. Crawford Howie, Timothy L Jackson, Paul Hawkshaw, Ashgate, 2001, in three parts: Theoretical Perspective and Compositional Practice (2 of those); Symphonist: Analytical Considerations (9 of those); Man, Music and Reception (7 of those). Authors include, besides the editors, William Carragan, John Phillips, Andrea Harrandt, Constantin Floros, Benjamin Korstvedt.

The Cambridge Companion to Bruckner - ed. John Williamson, Cambridge University Press, 2004 - 4 parts, Background, Choral Music, The Symphonist, Reception. Articles by many of the usual suspects listed above, and Julian Horton, Christa Brüstle, Margaret Notley.

Bruckner's Symphonies - Analysis, Reception and Cultural Politics by Julian Horton, Cambridge University Press, 2004. Horton employs a methodology of 'critical pluralism', that is to say using different critical approaches to examine different issues. The result is that readers are likely to find some of the essays easier to cope with and more illuminating than others.

Then there are a couple of volumes that are 'essential' to the extent that they are always being quoted. The most recent is -

Bruckner Remembered - by Stephen Johnson, Faber & Faber 1998, a very entertaining and occasionally illuminating collection of contemporaneous (or at least remembered not too long after the event) reminiscences of Bruckner. Invaluable in giving a picture of Bruckner's music and personality - as others saw it.

The Essence of Bruckner by Robert Simpson - Victor Gollanz, London, 1992. You need to be sure that if you get it, you get this later revision (not 1967) where he is more up-to-date on the Third, and the Ninth finale, and adds a chapter on the String Quintet. I have a love/hate relationship with this book. I notice that there are at least four references to it in the latest issue of *The Bruckner Journal* - and this is not uncommon. It seems to be standard English-language text, quoted as though what it says is gospel. Yet his view of Bruckner is idiosyncratic, and his fascination with and insistence that key relationships and tonality are the single most important mechanism in analyzing the symphonies leads him to write much that seems not far from gibberish to many a lay reader. But his book is full of insight and a composer's understanding of a fellow practitioner, and when puzzling over some aspect of Bruckner's music I have often found clues in what he says - and sometimes in disagreeing with what he says.

There are quite a few outdated biographies and discussions of the symphonies of varying quality and reliability. They all have something to offer, but need to be treated circumspectly. Double-check the facts, and have confidence in your own appreciation of the music should what they write seem inappropriate.

The Life and Symphonies of Anton Bruckner - by Erwin Doernberg, Barrie and Rockcliff, 1960 - I loved this book when I was much younger.

Bruckner - Derek Watson, in The Master Musicians Series, Shirmer Books, 1997. I find this a sympathetic and thoroughly adequate one volume biography within the limitations of the genre.

Bruckner - Hans Hubert Schönzeler, Calder and Boyars 1970 -heaps of illustrations in this fine short biography.

Bruckner and Mahler - H. F. Redlich, in The Master Musicians Series, Dent, 1955. Those were the days when there was one composer called Bruckner and Mahler - but it's a good book with considerable insight.

Anton Bruckner - Rustic Genius by Werner Wolff, Dutton 1942 - in which the writer is able to write as his first words: 'I saw him -face to face'. Well, of course this is outdated and prone to conjecture, but nevertheless not without some inspiring thought and analysis.

Bruckner Symphonies by Philip Barford, BBC Publications 1978- a 68 page booklet in the BBC Music Guides series.

Quite a range of articles can be downloaded from various sources. Margaret Notley's article, *Bruckner Problems, in Perpetuity* - a summary of on-going responses to Bruckner 'problems', with subheadings, "Bruckner as Church Musician and Symphonist and Problems of Semantic Interpretation" and "Larger Cultural Questions and Problems of Reception and Intent" and "The Eighth Symphony: Analytical and Philological Problems", I managed to download from University of California Press - for a fee.

Prefaces to MWV scores, though often of disappointing brevity, often contain useful information, and Ben Cohrs' introductory commentary on the Ninth finale, completed performing version, in the published score from Musikproduktion Höflich is full of thought-provoking information.

And of course, there's the continuing resource of *The Bruckner Journal!*

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