



*Anton Bruckner*

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Anton Bruckner's first attempt at symphonic composition dates back to the first half of the year 1863, while Bruckner was still pursuing his musical studies under Otto Kitzler, at Linz. It was a symphony in four movements but Bruckner who did not regard it as more than merely a school practice properly solved, not included it in the number of his recognized symphonies. The same fate befell Bruckner's posthumous symphony in D minor, written in 1869. However, while Bruckner's procedure towards this latter work was surely too severe an act of self-criticism — it contains many and great beauties — it was fully justified in the case of his maiden work: this symphony in F minor contains, apart from certain passages such as the Scherzo, little or nothing that was worthy of Bruckner: it lacked in inspiration and therefore possessed in fact no "raison d'être".

Bruckner did not find himself and his own greatness until in his next work, the Symphony No. 1. He began work upon it early in 1865 and when he travelled to Munich to attend the first performance of "Tristan", he took the MS of the then completed movement with him. While at Munich, Bruckner completed the Scherzo, on May 25th, and began work on the Finale after the performance of "Tristan", which occurred on June 10th. The Adagio, and therewith the entire symphony, was completed at Linz, on April 14th, 1866.

If the Mass in D, written in 1864, had marked a decided departure in the realm of sacred music, the Symphony No. 1 was an equally important innovation in the instrumental field. Here Bruckner undertook the task of enlarging the traditional symphonic form of Beethoven, at the same time filling it with new contents. Heedless of his epoch and public, freely indulging in his unbridled creative inspiration, attentive only to "the voice from within" Bruckner wrote this new work. The entire symphony — excepting the Ada-

gio — reflects a spirit of youthful energy and vitality such as we do not find in any of Bruckner's later works. It is surely the "storm and strife" spirit of this symphony, its virile spontaneity and bold abandon, which prompted Bruckner himself to dub this symphony "das kecke Beserl", when, in 1890/91, he undertook a revision of the piece. This jargon expression, taken from the idiom of the Viennese students, was a nickname often given to young and merry, even fresh and snappy young girls. — The Adagio alone differs widely from the balance of this symphony: Max Auer, Bruckner's excellent biographer, rightly alludes to it as "one of the most unique slow movements, even among those of Bruckner." Auer is quite justified in saying: "The principal subject conveys the impression of desperate brooding, of a struggle with Fate. . . The Secondary subject is like a consolation from above. . . But presently the merciless fist of Fate interferes again . . . in the closing passages, tenderly dying away, it is as though the Hero, reconciled with the Piety, had regained his inner peace. . ."

Bruckner himself conducted the first performance of the symphony, on May 9th, 1868, at the Redouten Saal, of Linz. The orchestra was that of the local theatre, augmented by members of a military band. The piece met with ample applause which was, however, no doubt intended principally for the personality of the popularly beloved conductor and organist. The musical critics of Linz, however, were at a loss to understand the meaning of Bruckner's new and unusual musical idiom, and found many faults. Bruckner, somewhat timid and distrustful by nature, derived the impression of having been misunderstood both by public and press, notwithstanding the enthusiastic applause. The composer,

all too susceptible to self-tormenting, now harboured doubts as to his work, its worth, even of his own talent. He was seized by a deep depression which compelled him to interrupt his customary activity and to undergo a treatment of his nerves. Only when he began work upon his new great Mass in F minor, Bruckner gradually regained his peace and health.

The first important performance of the symphony, on larger scale, was given by the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, under Hans Richter's baton, on December 13th, 1891. — When Bruckner was awarded the honorary degree of doctor, he dedicated the symphony to the University of Vienna, where he had been functioning as lecturer on Musical theory since 1876.

Josef V. Wöss.

The photograph of Bruckner reproduced in our score was kindly placed at our disposal by Professor Dr. Victor Junk, Vienna.