



*Ferry Beraton pinx.*

*Anton Bruckner*

1889

*Original: Städtische Sammlungen, Wien.*

The great recognition which Bruckner's playing of the organ had met with in London, in August, 1871 (both in Albert Hall and in the Crystal Palace) was doubly welcome to him in his then rather timid and pessimistic frame of mind. It so quickened his creative inspiration that Bruckner, while still at London, drafted the Finale of a new symphonic work, the Second Symphony, in C minor. Soon after his return to Vienna (on October 11th), Bruckner began work upon the first movement, at the same time continuing the Finale, and completing the former on July 8th, 1872. In quick succession Bruckner now finished the Scherzo (July 16th—18th) and the Adagio (July 18th—25th). One day after the completion of the Adagio Bruckner finished the Finale and therewith the entire symphony. During the years of 1877/78 Bruckner subjected the work to a thorough revision; it was shortened and the orchestration altered; in the eighties, however, Bruckner — ever bent upon absolute perfection and never willing to abide by his achievements — again revised the entire piece.

Many consider the Second symphony inferior to Bruckner's other symphonies: quite unjustly so. Profiting by the experiences of the premiere (at Linz) of his First symphony, Bruckner had sought to express himself more clearly, more lucidly and simpler in his Second. Indeed this work shows no longer traces of the "storm and strife period". It lacks, however, the tragic, grievous elements which so fre-

quently impress the hearer in Bruckner's later symphonies. The adverse, hostile influences which embittered Bruckner's future life, were then still unknown to the master. The symphony no doubt reflects the pleasant, invigorating experiences of Bruckner's London visit, in its noble calm and clarity, in the loveliness of its melodic inspiration and in the lucidity of its formal structure. It is by virtue of such qualities that the Second symphony holds its own, indeed a position all by itself, among its greater, more brilliant and, of course, more mature sisters.

In his Second symphony Bruckner reveals for the first time a peculiarity most characteristic for him: a predilection for interspersing his music with quotations from his own older compositions. The present symphony contains two reminiscences from the F minor Mass. The first, taken from the Benedictus, occurs at letter *O* of the Adagio; the second one four bars after letter *F* of the Finale ("Eleison" from the Kyrie). This quotation expresses a recollection of the severe crisis which visited the master towards the end of his Linz period; but no doubt also the pious gratitude for his restoration from the severe illness which had then visited him. Indeed it was this sentiment of gratitude which had inspired the Mass itself.

The Finale of the Second symphony suggests a possible curtailment, from letter *O* to the 21st bar after letter *R*; this passage is marked „*Vi-, -de*” in the score. This cut is of a later date and is the result of adverse critical comment, particularly against the long duration of Bruckner's symphonic movements. Those conductors who are possessed of thorough and loving understanding for Bruckner's music, will probably ignore this cut, although

it was the composer himself who suggested it. Such a curtailment perceptible disturbs the formal balance of the movement, since it eliminates not only the re-entrance of the Principal theme but the entire Secondary subject and the entrance of the Closing subject as well.

Shortly upon its completion, Bruckner submitted the symphony to the Philharmonic Orchestra of Vienna, then conducted by Otto Dessoff, with a view to a performance. It was, however, rejected as "unplayable". Bruckner himself then produced the symphony, for the first time, at the close of the Vienna Exposition (on October 26th, 1873), at the Grosser Musikverein and with the Philharmonic Orchestra, in a concert in which he appeared as organist as well. The orchestra played the "unplayable" symphony beautifully and the evening, according to the verdict of the Vienna press, became a great success for Bruckner, both as an organist and composer.

Vienna, 1928.

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