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Anton Bruckner

Mit Genehmigung des Verlages F. Bruckmann A.-G. München.

None of Anton Bruckner's symphonies is probably more frequently played than his Fourth. Even during the composer's lifetime this work achieved a certain measure of popularity, due no doubt to the freshness of its musical substance, the wealth of inspiration and to its artistic maturity in conception and structure.

Bruckner drafted the first movement of this symphony while still occupied with work on his Third, and completed this movement on January 2nd, 1874. The second movement was written between April 10th and July 7th of that year, and the (first) Scherzo between June 13th and July 25th. The Finale was begun on July 30th and finished, at St. Florian, on August 31st. The orchestration of the symphony (in its first version) was completed "on the evening of November 22nd, 8³⁰ o'clock, at Vienna." In 1878 and 1880 the composer undertook a complete revision in the course of which the original Scherzo was eliminated and replaced by a new, definite one (November, 1878). The score of this new version was finished on June 5th, 1880. The first three movements were played, at a private audition under Bruckner's baton, by an orchestra formed of pupils of the Vienna Conservatoire, on two occasions. Again Bruckner undertook a revision of the orchestration which resulted in the ultimate reading now known and in print.

The school of music known as "programme music" which deeply moved the musical world during the latter portion of the 19th century, could not fail to impress even the reticent and self-secluded Bruckner. The sub-title of

this symphony which Bruckner himself, on the first manuscript, termed the "Romantic", bears testimony to this effect. Dr. Theodor Helm gives us the "programme" of the first movement, as Bruckner himself revealed it to him in conversation: "A medieval town — dawn of morning — the morning calls are sounded from the towers of the city — the gates of the town are opened — on fine horses the brilliant knights ride out into the open — the forest with its beauties receives them — forest murmurs — singing birds — a fine romantic picture." From the "forest" to the "hunt" there seems but a step. The new Scherzo palpably conveys this picture and may thus be termed genuine programme music. The original score, furthermore, bears this inscription at the beginning of the Trio (G flat major, $\frac{3}{4}$): "Dance strain during a repast at hunting." — To Bruckner, the simple, naive artist free from all speculative tendencies, the above indications seemed apparently sufficient. However, it is evident that the subject grew under his hands into the well-nigh gigantic. Max Auer, the excellent Bruckner biographer, seems therefore justified in saying: "It is a different sort of romanticism which this symphony palpably reflects: romanticism of nature. We may as well omit the terms 'knights' and 'middle ages' without in the least weakening the romantic conception. Here we have a Nature Symphony in the sense of Beethoven's Pastoral Symphony: a programme symphony whose appeal will be none the smaller if the programme be omitted." — This manner of contemplation will give us the key (if such a key be necessary) for the understanding of the moods expressed in the second and fourth movements. Second movement: human sorrow which seeks consolation and recreation in Nature. Fourth movement: Nature itself,

with all its splendour and grandeur — and with its uproar and ultimate calming — and above all “the spirit of the Lord that hovers on the waves.” This movement — one of the boldest manifestations of human genius — was too large a conception for the naive explanatory powers of its author.

The first public performance of the symphony was given on February 20th, 1881, at the Grosser Musikvereins-Saal, Vienna, on the occasion of a charity concert for the Deutscher Schulverein. Hans Richter conducted, and the performance was a great personal success for the composer who attended it — a success which even the always hostile Viennese press could not suppress.

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