



*Anton Bruckner*

Bruckner worked on his Seventh symphony for almost two years. He began work on the first movement on September 23rd, 1881, but did not complete it until December 29th, 1882. During this interval, to be sure, he composed also the Scherzo movement (between July 14th and October 16th, 1882). The famous Adagio was begun on January 22nd, 1883, and completed on April 21st, while the Finale was finished on August 10th of the same year, at St. Florian.

The Symphony No. 7 with its rich invention and marvellous architecture, marks a supreme achievement. The first and last movement are by far the most vivid and "optimistic" among the corresponding movements from any of Bruckner's symphonies. They fairly sing with passionate enthusiasm, and the entire work is imbued with an atmosphere of knightly splendour and romance.

The principal theme of the first movement is an ecstatic outburst of song; it ranks among the broadest and most sweeping of Bruckner's melodies. Bruckner related that one night one of his friends from Linz appeared to dictate it to him, remarking that "this theme would bring him luck". And indeed it was his Seventh symphony which brought Bruckner general recognition. Its first performance, at Leipsic and under Arthur Nikisch's baton, brought Bruckner the first great and undisputed success of his career and that general appreciation which Bruckner had struggled for in more than ten years of disappointment. The reception accorded to the second performance — at Munich, under Hermann Levi — was almost more brilliant still and more than indorsed the Leipsic success. The Adagio movement, the finest portion of this symphony, has its place among the most beautiful things which this master has ever written. Concerning the tuba theme of this movement which seems to be imbued with a presentiment of death, Bruckner (who, as is generally known, was an enthusiastic admirer of Richard Wagner) related that one day he indulged

in melancholy reflections upon the fact that the days of the great master were probably counted; and that, while pondering on this presentiment, this theme suddenly occurred to him. When the report of Wagner's sudden death arrived, the composition of this movement had already proceeded beyond the last, towering climax (C major, letter W); and under the impression of the sad news Bruckner composed the last section of this movement, so touching in its pathetic grandeur, which the composer himself inscribed as "Funeral Music". — It seemed a most poetical idea on the part of Ferdinand Löwe, the conductor and Bruckner apostle, to perform this short last section of the Adagio on the occasion of Anton Bruckner's burial. No more adequate obituary could have been found, and well do I remember the overwhelming impression, when members of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra played this piece, arranged from the thematic material of the Adagio and set for brass instruments, at the funeral of the great master, Anton Bruckner.

The Symphony No. 7 is one of the most frequently performed symphonies of this composer. Its popularity is rivalled only by the Fourth symphony, and by Bruckner's Te Deum.

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