

Bruckner and the National Socialists in Germany

Ephemera from a Dark Time

By John F. Berky



Bruckner & the National Socialists in Germany – Ephemera from a Dark Time

The life and music of composer Anton Bruckner would be interesting if it simply encompassed the years of his life, but unlike most composers, Bruckner's music and even his life took on an added dimension of interpretation during the reign of the National Socialist Party in Germany from 1933 to 1945. The appropriation of Bruckner's music by the Nazi Party is a fascinating study and one that has been well covered in several scholarly essays. The purpose of this essay is not so much to discuss that complex time, but to look at that era through the examination of several artifacts from that time. In most cases, the objects are small and ephemeral in nature but it is often these overlooked and easily discarded objects that can tell an interesting sidelight and lead us to a better realization of the tenor of the times.

Program Booklets: One of the most ephemeral, but often most informative musical objects of this time are concert program booklets. Often simply discarded after the concert, an occasional notice or program book can give a glimpse into the musical activity of the time. My interest has always centered around the year 1937, because in that year, the appropriation of Bruckner's music became official with the establishment of the "Day of German Art" celebrations and the placing of Bruckner's bust in the Temple of Walhalla, the shrine overlooking the Danube in Regensburg, Germany. It was at this ceremony, on June 6, 1937, that Hermann Goebbels, the Propaganda Minister of the National Socialist Party, in the presence of Adolf Hitler, presented his skillfully crafted speech which linked Bruckner to the German people and to the mission of the National Socialists. Below is a program announcement for the Donau Week which took place in St Florian, Linz and Steyr in July of 1937.

„KUNST UND KULTUR IM BRUCKNERLAND“

DONAU FESTWOCHE 1937

16. BIS 21. JULI

FESTKONZERTE AN DEN GEDENKSTÄTTEN DER GRÖSSTEN
ÖSTERREICHISCHEN MUSIKER IN

LINZ, ST. FLORIAN UND STEYR

WIENER PHILHARMONIKER UND WIENER SYMPHONIKER
UNTER KABASTA, ORMANDY U. WEISSBACH INTERPRETIEREN:

**BRUCKNER
BEETHOVEN
SCHUBERT**

Franz **SCHMIDT**



IM FESTPROGRAMM:
Überraschungsfahrt auf der Donau u. Gelegenheit zu Ausflügen ins
Salzkammergut. Billige Pauschalarrangements inkl. Aufenthaltskosten.

DAS PROGRAMM:

IN LINZ:

16. Juli, 21.00 Uhr: Serenade im Landhaushof.
Leitung: Musikdirektor Keldorfer.
Ausführende: Wiener Philharmoniker.

17. Juli, 20.00 Uhr: in der Festhalle:
FRANZ SCHMIDT: II. Sinfonie in Es-Dur.
ANTON BRUCKNER: III. Sinfonie in D-Moll.
Leitung: Prof. Oswald Kabasta.
Ausführende: Wiener Philharmoniker.

IM BAROCKSTIFT ST. FLORIAN:

18. Juli, 10 Uhr: in der Stiftskirche:
ANTON BRUCKNER: Missa solemnis in B-Moll.
Leitung: Musikdirektor Trittinger.
Ausführende: Wiener Symphoniker und
Floriner Stiftschor.

Anschließend Orgelkonzert. (Prof. Franz Schütz)

15.00 Uhr: im Marmorsaal des Stiftes:
Musikalischer Festakt.
Leitung: G. M. Dir. Hans Weissbach und
Musikdirektor Adolph Trittinger.
Ausführende: Wiener Symphoniker und
Floriner Stiftschor.

LINZ – DONAU + STEYR:

19. Juli: Überraschungsfahrt auf der
Donau mit eigenem Programm.

20. Juli, 19.30 Uhr: in der Festhalle in Steyr:
FRANZ SCHUBERT: I. Sinfonie in C-Dur.
ANTON BRUCKNER: VI. Sinfonie in A-Dur.
Leitung: G. M. Dir. Hans Weissbach.
Ausführende: Wiener Symphoniker.

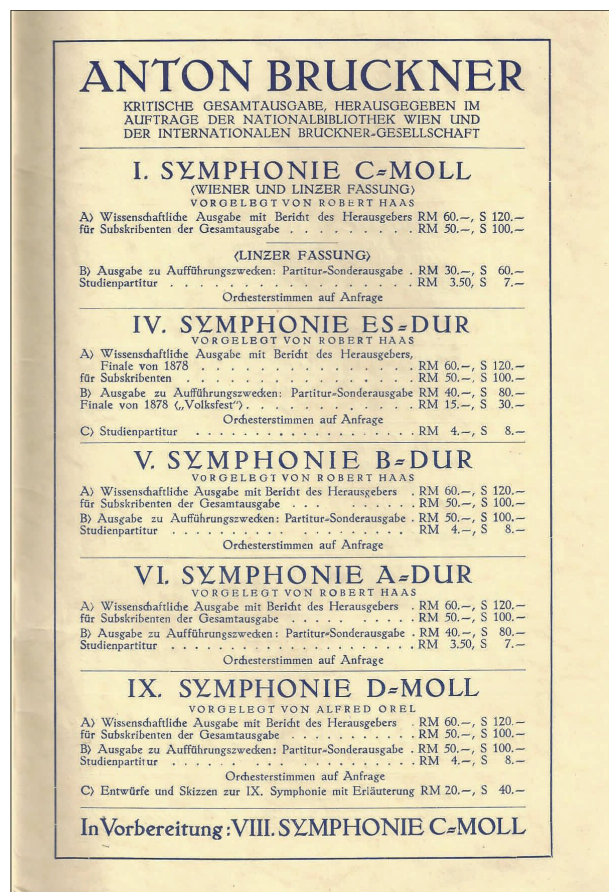
21. Juli, 20.00 Uhr: in der Festhalle in Linz:
BEETHOVEN: VIII. Sinfonie in F-Dur.
ANTON BRUCKNER: V. Sinfonie in B-Dur.
Leitung: G. M. Dir. Eugene Ormandy.
Ausführende: Wiener Symphoniker.



Druck von J. Wimmer, Linz a. d. Donau

A Bruckner Sixth by Hans Weissbach and a Symphony No. 3 conducted by Oswald Kabasta would certainly be interesting to hear but, unfortunately, no recordings survive. It is also interesting to see that Eugene Ormandy, who recorded the Bruckner 7th in 1936 and received a Bruckner Society of America medal of honor, is in Austria several months prior to the Anschluss conducting the Symphony No. 5.

Program notes more closely associated with the ceremony at Walhalla in Regensburg exist as shown in the example below:



There are also pictures associated with the installation of Bruckner's bust at Walhalla:



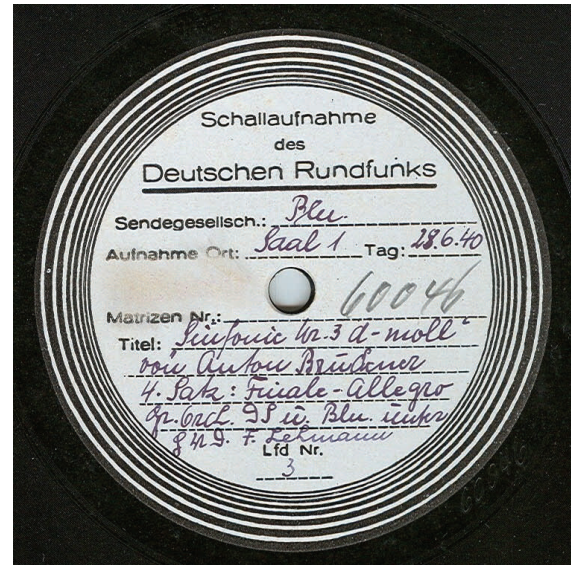
There is a more tangible souvenir associated with the Regensburg event. For the occasion, sculptor Karl Goetz (1875—1950) was commissioned to strike the following commemorative coin:



A few weeks after the Regensburg event, the Nazis celebrated the opening of a museum in Munich devoted to the glorification of “German Art.” At the same time, an exhibit was opened to show what the National Socialists’ arbiters of taste considered to be “degenerate art.” The opening event was a national celebration entitled, Der Tag der Deutsche Kunst (The Day of German Art). Programs books and posters were produced as well as postcards of the logos for the 1937 and 1938 events. In 1938, a postage stamp was issued.



For this special day, there was also a radio component with approved German music being presented over the stations of the Reichs Radio Gesellschaft (RRG). In between the radio reports, a special music “stinger” was commissioned which incorporated the opening theme motto of Bruckner’s Symphony No. 3. The recording, pressed by Polydor still survives. The National Socialists were actively recording Bruckner’s music for broadcast. Transcription discs, like the one shown below featuring Fritz Lehmann were distributed via transcription discs to the regional radio stations.



With commercial releases, the National Socialists made it a point to promote acceptable artists while removing recordings by “unacceptable” performers. The most notable example was the deletion of the Jascha Horenstein / Berlin Philharmonic recording of the Bruckner Symphony No. 7 with the same symphony and orchestra conducted by Carl Schuricht.



Perhaps the most unusual bit of ephemera that has come our way is the set of two 78 rpm discs of a partial performance of the Bruckner Symphony No.7 with the Berlin Philharmonic conducted by Wilhelm Furtwängler.. The recording was made on April 1 of 1942 and only the Adagio exists. What makes this particular set of records so special is that they come from one of the Führer bunkers occupied by Adolf Hitler. Based on information gleaned from German periodicals (most notably "Der Spiegel") the discs probably come from the bunker under the Reichs Chancellery in Berlin. The discs can be identified by the inventory labels attached to them.

