

Joseph Goebbels' Address at Regensburg, Germany - June 6, 1937

My Fuhrer,

Today we have gathered together with you, my Fuhrer, on a consecrated site to honor one of the greatest masters of the German music. With us, the German people feels itself called upon in this hour to contemplate with gratitude this genius, who, like Beethoven before him, left us and the world an artistic legacy of nine mighty symphonies, and who belongs to the proudest treasures of our national musical culture. But it is not only in his musical works that this master of the symphonic art speaks to us; along with them appears strong and unmistakably in Anton Bruckner the lineage of our best musical tradition, which experienced its most visible manifestation in his personality in the last century.

Here before us stands the German church musician who, as a teacher and performer, faithfully prepared and nourishes the sacred-music tradition without drawing undue attention to his own work, with which he contributed to that tradition in his during this time of humble employment; but he also carefully paid attention to the indigenous music of his people, which is played such an important part of daily life outside of the church. It is very fortunate for the history of our music that in his time which in art as in all other areas of intellectual activity was characterized by an increasing use of specialization that certain aspects of German musical creativity could be combined by Bruckner in such decisive way. A symphonic composer and a church music composer were combined in the genius of Anton Bruckner.

It was not easy for Bruckner's contemporaries to understand the complexities of this man and his personality. His physical appearance, and his music seemed peculiar and almost hard to comprehend. It would take time for Bruckner's musical language, with its originality and inner logic, to be generally understood in broader circles. It is completely misguided to hope to discover in Bruckner's music nothing more than a symphonic distortion of Wagner's music, as is still often done in certain circles. Like any genius, Bruckner is unique and peculiar unto himself. In order to understand him one must look to the roots of his existence, the elemental forces of blood and race that propelled his humanity.

Bruckner comes from a long line of peasants which we can trace back as far as the year 1400. Throughout his life, even after his professional advancement and his move to higher social circles, he never disavowed his peasant roots. His almost mystical connection with nature; his long standing and genuine love for his native soil and for the great German fatherland; his uncomplex and straightforward character, which was matched with true humility and bore a proud self-understanding of his own accomplishments; his childlike purity of his love of life, which was anchored upon his faith in God uncomplicated by any intellectual uncertainty – demonstrates how strong and secure his peasant roots remained in him.

One must know of the hardships of his early life in order to understand that there could be no choice of profession for him to choose. He was the eldest of eleven children. He grew up with the understanding that he was to become a schoolmaster. None of our other great masters has so willingly and unhesitatingly placed himself in the service of the schools as he did; and even after there was little more for him to study in his art, he continually enrolled in exams to demonstrate in writing to the masters of his day his extraordinary technical ability. One of these examiners was honest enough to admit that, "he should be testing us!"

Perhaps this is now the time and the place to object to a misguided statement often directed against the life and works of Anton Bruckner. Saccharine catchwords such as "God's street-musician" or "Our Dear Lady's singer" must be evoked even today as excuses for promoting a religious martyrdom of Bruckner's difficult artistic struggle. The people who promote such clichés are particularly fond of pointing out that his Franciscan humility was his most pronounced characteristic. All such suggestions do not do justice to the image of this great musical genius. As with his personality, there have been and still are numerous misinterpretations of his life's work. A hostile, journalistic branch of criticism, with its incessant torments, embittered him to his rich life of work. During a conversation with Bruckner, Eduard Hanslick once even let slip these words which unmask this guild of "critical mosquitoes": "I destroy whoever I wish to destroy!"

It is with reluctance and disdain that we turn our attention today to these intellectual carpet-baggers, who in Bruckner's day misused their high position as judges in order to set down sentences such as this about his music, whose creativity they simply could not understand: "We truly shudder before the scent of mold that assaults our noses from the discords of this putrefactive counterpoint." Or, "In the event a page here and there from one of his scores accords with our understanding of musical logic, then we can hardly hold him responsible for it; Bruckner composes like a drunkard." Or: "It is not impossible that the future belongs to this dream-distorted, hung-over style -a future which, for that reason, we do not envy."

Given samples of such utterly deplorable public criticism, one can understand the shocking document written by Bruckner's that is held today in the archives of the Vienna Philharmonic. In 1884, the Philharmonic was considering the premiere of his Seventh Symphony. Bruckner wrote to them, "If my request be approved, the most honored committee will wish to find a way around the undertaking that gives me so much honor and happiness, for reasons that have to do only with the sad situation arising from the prevailing criticisms."

How much bitterness, how much emotional anguish must have consumed this genius to drive him to such a decision! If the public practice of music criticism has been restricted by law to official channels in the new Germany, then we believe we have also resolved a debt of gratitude to the master who struggled in solitude, and was tortured up to his moment of death by his tormenters.

With regard to this hostile resistance, however, we also cannot fail to mention those misinterpretations of Bruckner's music, those of his true followers and disciples. Here, too, lurks the catchword of succession, a successor to Wagner. And this is by no means always meant disparagingly, but rather, often enough, positively. To the extent that this is meant to say that Bruckner's artistic development would be unthinkable without Wagner, no one can object. For Bruckner's mastery first developed fully and as a person he was first able truly to break free from external barriers, only when he was approached the age of forty. This was when he got his first direct impression of the art of the great music-dramatist Richard Wagner. This experience had an almost revolutionary effect on the sonority of his musical language which only then assumed the character that we recognize today as the true Brucknerian style. From that moment onwards the church musician quickly retreats almost entirely, and then emerges the distinctive symphonist.

This transformation, incomprehensible as it is for such a faithful servant of the church, to an absolute symphonic art, which by nature knows no liturgical obligations, was the fateful point in Bruckner's subsequent artistic development. Here his creative genius frees itself of all ties to the church, and now awakens in him the spring-like force of the great creative act. He is filled with the victorious intoxication of form-giving, and a boundless feeling of freedom roars through his soul. In the works of this mature period the warrior-like will to act, without which we can imagine absolutely no true symphony, sweeps us along with it.

A complete misunderstanding of Bruckner's style is revealed when attempts are made to lump his symphonies together under the rubric of religious art, to characterize them as a kind of church music, to dub them simply "Masses without texts." It is time to take a stand against these misguided attempts at interpretation. For Anton Bruckner, like every great genius, cannot be forced into the constraints of an artistic stencil. And those of us who, although not making a scholarly examination of his music, let his works affect us so simply and immediately as artistic revelations; we all sense and know that his deep religious faith has long since been freed of all confessional confines, and that it has its roots in the same heroic feeling for the world from which all truly great and eternal creations of German art blossom. In this sense, Anton Bruckner's works represent a national legacy.

The Fuhrer and his government regard it as a cultural debt of honor to do everything in their power to enable the entire German people to share in this sacred heritage, and, with a significant encouragement of interest in Bruckner, to see to it that this interest and its effects penetrate not only deeply but also widely. For these reasons they have decided to make a considerable annual contribution to the International Bruckner Society for editions of the original versions of his symphonies, until the master's complete works are available in the form he envisioned.

Permit me, my Fuhrer, also to state in this solemn hour that Anton Bruckner, as a son of Austrian soil, is especially called upon to make sense of the unrelenting intellectual and spiritual common fate that envelopes the German people even today. It is, therefore, a symbolic event of more than just artistic significance for us that you, my Fuhrer, have decided to have a bust of Anton Bruckner included in this sacred national place, once erected by a great Bavarian king, as the first monument of our empire. As admirers of the art of this great master, we all have been deeply moved by his overpowering genius, wish to offer you, my Fuhrer, our deepest gratitude.

With veneration we consider the immortality of Bruckner's music and recognize one fact with that acknowledgment submitted by a great learned Austrian as he presented at the awarding of an honorary doctorate to the great master, declared to him, "Where science must stop, where its insurmountable barriers are set, only there does the realm of art begin. But you have been able to express that which has remained closed to all knowledge. So it is that I, the rector of the University of Vienna, bow before the schoolmaster from Windhaag." And thus does a thankful nation bow, in this solemn hour, in the meaning and spirit of this speech before the immortal genius of one of its greatest sons.