

Bruckner's special harmonic language, his orchestral polyphony – both seeming to unite the 19th with the 16th century – his personal and supremely satisfying orchestration and the spiritual background to his music are generally agreed upon, but too little has been said of his melodic inspiration. His melodies, whether complex or sublimely simple, go straight to the heart. The wonder of them is that they also satisfy the intellect, being capable of the most profound transformation in the mighty developments they undergo.

The Sixth Symphony's melodic inspiration is such that an immediate response to its beauty is possible long before the immensity of the conception and its musical and spiritual implications are grasped. Perhaps modern audiences are startled by its incredible modernity – which certainly prevented a complete performance in Bruckner's lifetime – for it is the least played of his mature symphonies. It was eventually played in 1901 in a spurious edition and finally published and performed as the composer intended in 1935.

The Symphony's rhythmic basis is immediately set in motion by the violins, *pianissimo*, while the 1st subject is intoned by cellos and basses, its 2nd phrase a dotted-note rhythm – a dominating feature of the whole Symphony. After the full orchestra has given out the theme, the 2nd subject ensues (this movement is unique in Bruckner in having no pauses between sections), hauntingly lyrical, built on cross rhythms and wavering uneasily between major and minor tonality. The 3rd subject is a brutal, trombone-dominated unison theme. A quiet codetta follows, whose arpeggio figures lead into the development which opens with a noble inversion of the original subject. A great crescendo based on the dotted-note figure leads to a restatement of the 1st subject in a distant key. A superb modulation presages the simultaneous climax of the development and beginning of the recapitulation, with the 1st subject hammered out in the home key and now with a splendid extension. The 2nd and 3rd subjects follow, both a tone higher, then an awe-inspiring coda. Trumpet and horn debate the opening theme against a continuous arpeggio accompaniment, while blithely passing through a plethora of keys, until the Symphony's initial rhythm reasserts itself and in a triumphant peroration hurls the movement forward to its inevitable *A major* close.

The sonata-form *adagio* has the character of a deeply-felt threnody. The 1st subject, a sombre theme in the strings, is pitted against a plaintively insistent oboe lament in the all-pervading dotted-note rhythm. The 2nd subject, richly scored for strings, provides a note of consolation. The 3rd subject is like a ghostly funeral march with a suggestion of muffled drums. The development dwells mainly on the 1st subject, which is heard more fully scored in the recapitulation, though still harnessed to its lamenting countersubject. A climax hinting at splendour is suggested but quickly extinguished and the consoling strains of the 2nd subject reappear, to be followed by a startlingly contracted 3rd subject. The coda finally establishes an air of calm, the violas casting the final benediction of peace.

The *scherzo*, vacillating between major and minor, is in ternary form and based on the mosaic of ideas presented almost immediately, dotted rhythms again prominent. Brass fanfares cap the 1st statement which is then brilliantly developed. The recapitulation draws all the threads together with the brass fanfares resounding. An amazing *trio* follows: a striking phrase in dotted rhythm, *pizzicato*, is echoed by horns and answered by the woodwind with a quotation from the Fifth Symphony. Only at the close is the prevalent dotted rhythm temporarily halted. The *scherzo* is repeated.

No key-signature is indicated for the wildly modulating *finale*. Several elements make up the march-like 1st subject, notably the rather sinister opening theme and an oscillating string figuration. A single horn note forms the transition to the lyrical 2nd subject. A lovely dialogue between strings and horns, the Symphony's only suggestion of the typical Bruckner chorale, leads to the 3rd subject, a massive unison variant of a phrase from the march. This continues with a dotted-note figure reminiscent of the *adagio*'s lament. The brilliantly concise development manages to include a new lyrical idea before the recapitulation is launched with the 1st subject, magnificently extended and enriched. The 2nd subject is heard again; then the dotted section of the 3rd subject in which the Symphony's opening rhythm is subtly reintroduced and absorbed into a massive climax which breaks off abruptly. The coda begins quietly in the minor but soon blazes into *A major* with the march subject. The trombones superimpose the Symphony's opening melodic idea and the work closes in a paean of splendour in which all the rhythmic elements are combined.