

The visitor to Austria who proceeds eastward from Salzburg to Vienna passes through the hilly districts and fertile plains of Upper Austria. It is a corn-growing region with little villages and small towns, many of which still retain their medieval buildings and fortifications. The churches of the rural communities are a characteristic feature of the landscape, their spires standing out against the silhouettes of the Alpine mountain ranges in the background. There, too, are found Baroque monasteries with magnificently decorated churches and libraries where preservation of precious manuscripts and incunabula is an element of the way of life. Here, learning and art have flourished since the Middle Ages. It is in this country, inhabited by a strong, humble, and very devout peasantry, that Anton Bruckner and his art have their roots.

Although his immediate forebears did not till the soil, his ancestors were peasants, and Bruckner himself was a robust man of remarkable physical strength. Amusing episodes testify eloquently to this trait of his personality. In his attachment to nature he resembled Joseph Haydn — also a country boy. The dances and *Ländler* of the peasant folk were an inexhaustible source of ideas for his rustic and exuberant scherzos; and from the organ of the Augustine monastery of St. Florian, which boasted four manuals, a pedal with 30 keys, 94 stops, and about 5,000 pipes, Bruckner received lasting inspiration for his creations.

Deep religious feeling and unswerving trust in God not only carried this simple and good-natured musical giant through a life filled with artistic defeats, disappointments, and humiliation, but also nourished and generated his creative powers. Leaving aside the great masters of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, Bruckner was the most devout Catholic among the musical giants. Although Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, and Schubert started their musical career in the church as choristers or organists, they nevertheless, while still very youthful, channeled their creative activities predominantly into secular music, whereas Bruckner in his early stages produced liturgical works, in the main. In doing so, he revealed a certain medieval aspect of his character — he created music *ad majorem Dei gloriam* (to the greater glory of God): Masses, a Requiem, graduals, offertories, and so forth. Bruckner was a believer of unique fervor and as Franz Schalk, one of his apostles, once said, out of his orchestra there resounds an immense Credo that even the world of today must accept. It is known that Bruckner spoke of God always in a soft and whispering tone; he was a mystic. We encounter the designation "*misterioso*" several times in Bruckner's scores, entered to define precisely the spiritual attitude out of which the composition arose and to serve as a guide post for the performer. The romanticists generally delved from brightness into the sphere of mystic darkness. Bruckner moved in the opposite direction, from mystic depths and the romantic twilight up to luminous lofty heights. His music reflects his spiritual life, which is anchored in the church.

Bruckner suffered in his long and bitter struggle for recognition and had to bear the fateful consequences of his artistic creed of devotion to Richard Wagner. He lived and created in a period of political liberalism, and the journalistic spokesmen who dealt with musical affairs in the Viennese liberal press were bitter enemies of Wagner, and antagonistic to his adherents as well. The vicissitudes of Bruckner's Seventh Symphony in E major are a case in point.

The compositional history of the work is documented by several entries in Bruckner's autograph score, which reposes in the Austrian National Library in Vienna. The Symphony was begun on September 21, 1881. It is indicative of the tragic

situation in which Bruckner found himself then that he started a new symphony before the Fifth and Sixth had received hearings that might have led to their publication. But Bruckner refused to be daunted by continuous disappointing experiences. The Seventh was completed on September 5, 1883, one day after his 59th birthday. The prospects of having the symphony performed were very dim indeed.

In the first place, Bruckner lacked an influential promoter. The most powerful musician in the Austrian capital was Hans Richter, who was Vienna's musical czar for longer than a decade. He conducted in the court opera, led the Philharmonic concerts and those of the Society of Friends of Music, and wielded the baton in the Court Chapel. As the musician chosen by Wagner to conduct the *Nibelungen* tetralogy at the first Bayreuth Festival, Richter was a man of enormous prestige. He had the asset of an impressive appearance, and was at the same time a very clever musical diplomat. One of the foremost paladins of the master of Bayreuth, he was fully aware of the strength of the anti-Wagner party in Vienna which saw its idol in Brahms and submissively accepted the critical pronouncements of Brahms's friends Eduard Hanslick and Max Kalbeck. Thus Richter practiced a successful bi-partisan policy: he conducted in Bayreuth and fought for Wagner in the court opera and promoted Brahms in the Philharmonic concerts. Poor Bruckner was the victim of this diplomacy, for the Philharmonic Orchestra refused to include his symphonies in the programs of its concerts nor did Richter exert his authority for the cause of Bruckner.

Under these circumstances, the fate of his Seventh Symphony seemed to be sealed, and all the composer could hope for in the immediate future was a presentation to his devoted following of the Symphony in an arrangement for two pianos; the words of St. Luke, "No prophet is accepted in his own country," once more were drastically proven in Bruckner's case. It happened at the end of 1883 that Joseph Schalk, one of Bruckner's most active apostles, had occasion to travel to Leipzig. He decided that while there he would attempt to find a conductor who might become interested in Bruckner's latest symphony. Schalk was fully aware that it was hopeless to approach Carl Reinecke, Leipzig's leading musician, in this matter, for Reinecke, the conductor of the famous Gewandhaus Concerts (once led by Mendelssohn), was very much the conservative. However, the chief conductor at the municipal theater, Arthur Nikisch, a graduate of the Vienna Conservatory and a theory student of Bruckner, seemed to offer a hopeful possibility. Schalk put his brand-new arrangement of the Seventh Symphony for piano duet in his bag and visited Nikisch, then a young man of 29. They played the symphony; Nikisch waxed enthusiastic and decided to perform it in a concert to be given in the theater for the benefit of a monument to Richard Wagner, who had recently died. Yet it was a very long way from the making of this decision to the realization of the noble project, and Nikisch foresaw serious difficulties ahead.

His first task was to win over the director, who demanded that the planned concert should not interfere with the set schedule. Nikisch was hard pressed, as he had to prepare the production of *Tristan und Isolde*, and this, in 1884, was no routine task but an extremely difficult undertaking. Thus the concert and the presentation of Bruckner's symphony had to be postponed over and over again. Finally, though, the great day did arrive. On December 30, 1884, Bruckner's Seventh Symphony was played in public for the first time and brought him the success for which he had so long striven. He was after all not compelled to leave Leipzig, the birthplace of Wagner, under cover of darkness, as he had feared, but returned to Vienna as a victor—much to

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the chagrin of his enemies. What his own country persistently had denied him, he had achieved beyond the Austrian borders.

Still another victory was at hand. Bruckner had sent a copy of the symphony to Hermann Levy, chief conductor at the Royal Opera in Munich. Levy's prestige was then high; Wagner had entrusted him with the musical direction of the first performances of *Parsifal* in 1882. Although he entertained friendly relations with Brahms, he nonetheless had upon studying Bruckner's E-major Symphony been profoundly impressed by the work—to the extent that he felt called upon to use his prestige and powerful position in the cause of the misunderstood and neglected Austrian symphonist. He programmed the symphony on March 10, 1885, and it was a day of triumph for Bruckner that changed his standing in Vienna completely. The Leipzig success was brought about by a municipal theater orchestra, while the Munich victory was achieved by a court orchestra under the command of a court conductor. To fill Bruckner's cup to the brim, King Ludwig II of Bavaria accepted the dedication of the Seventh Symphony. Now Richter, whom Bruckner once called "the generalissimus of deceit," jumped on the bandwagon and presented the Symphony in the Philharmonic concerts in 1886. Emperor Franz Josef bestowed an Order on the composer and received him in audience. Bruckner had finally arrived.

Since limitations of space preclude detailed analytical consideration of the symphony, the writer, who played Bruckner's symphonic and choral works under the direction of the great Bruckner champions Ferdinand Löwe and Franz Schalk, proposes to direct the attention of the listener to a few salient details.

The Seventh Symphony shares with the preceding and following sister works the monumentality, the loftiness and nobility of musical ideas, the powerful expression and awesome build-up of overwhelming climaxes, and the mastery in forming polyphonic developments that distinguish Bruckner's greatest works. In the first movement, witness the widely spanned melodic arch of the main theme, unique in the symphonic literature. Note the songful and expressive episode that precedes the majestic coda which evolves from the most tender *pianissimo* to the triumphant restatement of the first measures of the main theme.

In the *Adagio*, Bruckner employs a quartet of the so-called *Nibelungen* tubas that Wagner invented for adequate orchestral characterization of certain dramatic situations and emotions—as for example the majesty of Valhalla, the hatred of Alberich, or the ire of Wotan. Fascinated by the color of the tubas, Bruckner assigned to them the main idea of the G-sharp-minor *Adagio*. When he began the movement around the turn of 1882, he was overcome by a feeling of premonition of Wagner's death, and the sad news arrived before the movement was finished. Deeply moved, Bruckner created in the thirty-five concluding measures a dirge "in remembrance of his unattainable ideal, of the dearly beloved, immortal master of all masters."

The peaceful conclusion of the *Adagio* is markedly contrasted with the powerful accents of the exuberant Scherzo, whose rhythmic revelry is interrupted by the tender lyricism of its Trio. But strong rhythmic forces are also at work in the Finale, whose incisive main theme is melodically related to the chief idea of the first movement. The conception of the Brucknerian finale differs fundamentally from that of his precursors. It is the crowning fulfillment of the entire symphony, musically and spiritually. In the Finale of the Seventh Symphony, there occurs a violent but determined struggle, reflected in musical developments of cyclopean dimensions. The victory is expressed in the apotheosis of the conclusion wherein the main theme of the first movement reappears in majestic orchestral glory.

JOSEPH BRAUNSTEIN