

If the question "How many symphonies did Bruckner write?" were put before the general concert-goer, he undoubtedly would answer, "Nine, of course," which, curiously enough, is not correct. For Bruckner actually penned eleven symphonies. At forty, in 1863, he composed a symphony in F Minor which is generally referred to as the "Study Symphony". This "Study Symphony" is not a work of small proportion, as one would perhaps assume. The measure total of the 'exercise' amounts to 1,219. Between October 1863 and May 1864 he wrote a symphony in D Minor. Only a manuscript copy, dated 1869, is extant, which, however, represents a revision of the work. Between 1864 and 1869 Bruckner created the Mass in D Minor No. 1 (1864), the Symphony in C Minor (1865/66) which we know as No. 1, the Mass in E Minor No. 2 (1866) and the Mass in F Minor No. 3 (1867/68).

The fact that Bruckner concerned himself with the D Minor Symphony of 1863/64 after the successful presentation of the C Minor Symphony in 1868 testifies to his interest in the older work. Yet, the revision completed, he was confronted with a numerical problem. The existence of the Symphony in F Minor was not known to the public, and Bruckner had definitely set this symphonic essay aside. He must have had confidence in the D Minor Symphony because he played it for Otto Dessoff (1835-1892), conductor at the Vienna Court Opera and of the Philharmonic Concerts, for consideration of acceptance for the Philharmonic Concerts. Some critical remarks on the part of Dessoff had a discouraging effect, and Bruckner there-upon decided to withdraw the symphony which is now referred to as No. O.

The withdrawal of this work, which received its first public hearing as late as 1924, might be regarded a very wise step, for although the symphony discloses some typical Brucknerian features and the anticipation of later characteristics, it shows, if placed in juxtaposition to the Symphony in C Minor No. 1, no remarkable development of Bruckner's personal style and technique, no refinement in the manipulation and coherence of the musical ideas. Viewed within the context of Bruckner's entire symphonic work the Symphony No. O appears as a transitional and preparatory essay and a step in the direction to a style which within the framework of the classical symphony, tended to veer toward a symphonic type of work, of large architectural proportions, in a powerful and at the same time original musical language.

This tendency became more intense in the Mass in D Minor and also in the C Minor Symphony (No. 1). Bruckner's predilection for the minor key is remarkable. All his major works created in the decade 1863 to 1873 are in a minor key and the spell was broken only in 1874 with the Romantic Symphony, in E-flat major. It is also interesting that the chosen tonalities are centered on the tetrachord C - D - E - F. Bruckner's close occupational affiliation with the church as an organist at the cathedral in Linz affected the symphonic thoughts of this deeply religious man. He visualized his symphonies as towering cathedrals, the exuberant *scherzi* notwithstanding. There are also important links between the masses and the symphonies composed in the 1860s and early 1870s.

In 1867 Bruckner suffered a serious nervous breakdown and underwent a cure for the next three months. The performance of the Symphony in C Minor on May 9, 1868, in Linz under the direction of the composer was heartily acclaimed. Some experts criticized the "violence" of the instrumentation, censured it and even pronounced the symphony "unplayable." Bruckner jokingly christened the symphony the "saucy little bosom". In fact it contains some turbulent passages. Friendly voices counselled

“moderation”. Criticism and advice had an adverse effect, and Bruckner declared, “They frightened me so that I feared to be myself.” Appointed professor of counterpoint and organ at the Vienna Conservatory, Bruckner installed himself in the Austrian capital in 1868. Having found recognition as an organist *extra-ordinaire* in Nancy and Paris (1869) and in London (1871), he conducted his Mass in F Minor (No. 3) in the St. Augustine church in Vienna on June 16, 1872, with Brahms, Dessoff, and Eduard Hanslick, the most influential Viennese music critic, in attendance. On September 11 of that year Bruckner completed the second symphony which he had commenced on October 11, 1871.

The history of this symphony marks the beginning of the long *via dolorosa* which Bruckner had to tread in Vienna for about the next fifteen years, in his bitter struggle for recognition as a creator. In order to understand his difficulties one must understand the local conditions in Vienna’s musical life of the period. There was only one professional orchestra: the Philharmonic Orchestra, formed by the members of the Imperial Opera Orchestra. It gave eight concerts during the winter season. The acceptance of new works was voted upon after a rehearsal try-out. Otto Dessoff (1835-1892) was at the helm when Bruckner settled in Vienna, and he showed little sympathy for this curious composer of peasant stock who was also his colleague at the conservatory. Bruckner, however, had found a champion in Johann Herbeck (1831-1877), the dynamic conductor at the court Chapel and of the concerts of the *Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde* (Society of Friends of Music) who had rescued Schubert’s B Minor Symphony from oblivion.

Bruckner submitted the second symphony to the Philharmonic Orchestra. A tryout was arranged and the symphony rejected as “unplayable” primarily because of its length. Bruckner refused to be daunted and hired the orchestra. On October 26, 1873, he appeared before the Viennese public in a four-fold capacity — as the conductor of his symphony, as an organist and improviser at the organ. He found an enthusiastic reception, and even the orchestra, which had turned him down, applauded him. The grateful composer wanted to express his feelings and offered to dedicate the symphony to the orchestra. It seems that the musicians were afraid of antagonizing Dessoff through their acceptance, for Bruckner received no reply. About ten years later, taking advantage of Liszt’s presence in Vienna, Bruckner approached Liszt with the request of dedicating the symphony to him. Liszt accepted, but leaving Vienna in a hurry, he left the score behind. Bruckner accidentally found out this deplorable act of negligence, and the dedication was withdrawn.

Herbeck programmed the symphony for the “Gesellschaftskonzert” on February 26, 1876 and invited the composer to direct the performance. It earned Bruckner much applause. Herbeck, who realized Bruckner’s greatness, knew the mentality of the Viennese public of the 1870’s very well. He had little confidence in the aptitude of the general concert-goer to absorb Bruckner’s musical language and to cope with the enormous architectural proportions. He suggested substantial cuts and put forward his proposals with insistence. Bruckner excised no less than 139 measures from the first, second and fourth movements and most of these cuts went into the first published version of the symphony in 1892. Herbeck’s cutting practice was unavoidable in the 1870’s but those circumstances are a matter of the past and the symphony is nowadays performed in its original version, which became available in 1938 in the *Complete Edition of the Works of Anton Bruckner* issued by the Austrian National Library (formerly Court Library) to which Bruckner had willed his autographs.

The second symphony (with a measure total of 1753),

which is longer than the fourth, sixth, and seventh, not only anticipates the massiveness of the later symphonies, but also their important structural and technical characteristics. See for example the announcement of the main theme of the first movement in the lower voice (cello) which is also the case in the fifth, sixth, seventh, and eighth symphonies. Note the retardation of the tempo in the third theme group prior to the development section, a feature which returns in the later symphonies. The derivation of the oboe melody in the first movement from Wagner's *Rienzi* is obvious.

Ex. 1



The *Adagio* is cast in the sonata design plus an extended coda which shows a gentle ending after a powerful climax, a procedure which Bruckner had already established in the study symphony. The movement is spiritually and musically related to the *Benedictus* of the F Minor Mass which he had written after his recovery from his grave illness. The following passage (measure 180) is taken from the Mass.

Ex. 2



The scalewise-developed melody in the cello and viola parts is derived from the following passage of the mass.

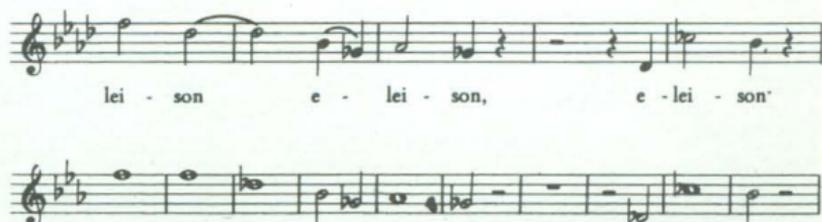
Ex. 3



The *scherzo* established the pattern of the later specimens, particularly the trio (121 measures), whose prolonged working-out anticipates the extended trios of the third, fifth, seventh, and ninth symphonies.

The beginning of the *finale* alludes to the opening of the first movement, whose main idea is quoted in the development section and in the coda. One more reference to the Mass in F Minor must be pointed out — the quotation of a phrase from the *Kyrie* before the development section and prior to the coda.

Ex. 4



This insertion assumes a particular significance. It expresses the determination of the composer to stress his creed also in his creative work.