

THE MUSIC

Common musical motivation and related content make the succession of Bruckner's symphonies 4-7 a virtual entity. Perhaps the composer intended no such integration, but creative genius often "builds better than it knows." It may be sheer coincidence that just these four, but no other symphonies by Bruckner (there are seven more, including two "trial" symphonies) were conceived in the major mode. Yet it is surely more than coincidence that all four sing the mystic union of Man and Nature beneath the guiding hand of God. Hence the nick-name "Romantic", sanctioned by Bruckner for the Fourth alone, might well be applied to all four, for they constitute, unmistakably, a "Romantic Tetralogy."

The Sixth remained unperformed during Bruckner's lifetime because of its comparatively small measure of the theatrical heroics dear to the hearts of the Wagnerian-minded conductors of his day. Though still the most neglected of his greater works, it is now (thanks to the present recording in its original, ungarbled form) on its way towards wide-spread recognition as one of the most individual and characteristic of the Austrian master's symphonies.

Playfully, Bruckner liked to speak of the Sixth (Sechste) as the "Keckste" (most daring), referring, of course, only to certain formal and harmonic features of the work. However, a brief summary of the circumstances attending its composition suggests a more apt, if less witty nick-name: The Philosophic.

In 1879, when Bruckner entered upon the composition of the Sixth, the Fourth and Fifth were still unperformed. The Third, conducted by Bruckner himself, had proved a pitiful fiasco. Loneliness, sickness, and financial worry drove him to seek in renewed creative effort the consolation and courage to carry on. The contemplative optimism swaying the first movement of the Sixth, largely written during a long painful illness is eloquent of the philosophic resignation his great soul was able to achieve.

The opening movement takes up again the "Romantic" burden of the Fourth. It too is steeped in the glory of the cosmos, but to his reformulation of the message of the union of Man and Nature Bruckner has brought a more human quality. The mighty spiritual flowering of the Fifth has borne fruit in a calmer, more disciplined expression. If the sunrise in the Fourth is more radiant with its youthful ecstasy, the sunset in the Sixth has a deeper, more individual magic. It is shot through with delicately varied instrumental and dynamic shades and subtle melodic, harmonic, and rhythmic nuances. Chief of these is the curious, irregular five-note element known as

"Bruckner Rhythm." The very opening tones, struck off by the violins in sharp staccato, present this rhythm in lovely

form as a pulsating background for the main theme. The latter, its rhythmic contour derived from an Austrian military signal (significantly, the "Retreat"), is drawn softly from the deep strings. It begins like a sighing question concerning the ultimate mysteries of existence. The second theme (in reality a theme-group) is introduced by a doleful strain in square rhythm over a plucked accompaniment in triple-rhythm cited from the *Adagio* of the Fifth. The air of gloom surrounding the opening bars of this song-section is but the shadow of a momentary painful reminiscence, swiftly dispelled by the cheery sway of the gracious melody which emerges from it.

The third theme-group, a pounding unison passage in "Bruckner Rhythm," bristling with warlike inclination, vainly searches every plan of tonality for a scene of conflict, but succumbs to the lure of the calm, richly harmonized episode terminating the exposition. This air of philosophic restraint, maintained throughout the statement of the themes, continues to dominate the development section, devoted to an eulogy of the wonders of Nature. Familiar song-themes rise on ever-broadening wings, the tide of melody surging irresistibly upward toward a climax. And now a formal surprise! The listener, alert for the traditional "bridge" leading to the recapitulation, is suddenly aware that he is in the midst of the restatement. Yet nothing abrupt seems to have occurred. In the opening movement of this work, (we believe, for the first time in symphonic literature) the climax of the development and the beginning of the recapitulation coincide. That this important innovation in sonata-form was no mere flying chip in Bruckner's workshop is convincingly proven by its increasingly effective reappearance in his subsequent symphonies.

The slow movement begins with a yearning love-song, the bright counterpart of the melancholy *Standchen* presented in the corresponding section of the Fourth and intensified to utter gloom in the Fifth. A brief shadow crosses the sunny path of this three-voiced melody when the oboe intrudes its counterpoint of plaintive sighs. A mournful phrase in the horns threatens to revive some painful memory of unrequited love. (Bruckner's life abounded with instances); but the new-found spiritual power, philosophic resignation, easily turns aside all imminent bitterness. The second theme is a soaring, untroubled love-song. The central portion of the movement is occupied with a resourceful contrapuntal exploitation of the opening theme, its varied restatements resulting in a subtle mingling of rondo and sonata form.

The magic chatter of elfin spirits characterizes the highly impressionistic *Scherzo*, the first of a series of Bruckner scherzi to portray the witchery of Pan, playing his pranks amid the very roots of Nature. The *Trio* unfolds a fresh aspect of this extraordinary gayety. The woodwind advances fragments of melody based on the opening theme of the *Allegro*, while ca-

pricious harmonic interruptions issue from plucked strings or horn groups in sharply punctuated rhythm.

To the comparatively calm atmosphere prevailing over the Finale is mainly due the extreme rarity of performances hitherto granted this work. Yet its sustained philosophic air is consistent with artistic integrity. The opening movement advanced no conflict; the Finale has none to resolve. Lacking the turbulent character of other Bruckner closing sections it remains nevertheless a Finale conforming in essential respects to the accepted meaning of the term. All its thematic factors (and there is an unusually rich store of these—fanfare, chorale, march, and song) move swiftly and smoothly along, as though controlled by some mysterious inductive power. Drawn together at the end in a masterly summing-up, they become merged in the jubilant final reentry of the work's opening theme.

Shortly before his death the ailing Bruckner gave weary consent to numerous "improvements" in the score of the Sixth by two well-meaning, but misled disciples (the conductors Schalk and Loewe) to whom had been entrusted the preparation of the work for publication. The purpose of these alterations was to refine Bruckner's abrupt dynamic contrasts and to blend (in the then approved Wagnerian manner) his unmixt, sharply defined orchestral colors. Nothing could have robbed the symphony more thoroughly of its individual, truly Brucknerian character.

As for actual "cuts" in the score, the conductors of the few early performances doubtless played havoc with the already pitifully garbled available version. However, Schalk's own piano condensation indicates but two flagrant excisions: in the *Adagio* (a dozen bars before K) and in the *Finale* (14 bars before M). The original version, rectifying all these wrongs, was not published until 1935. The present is the first recording of the original version.

GABRIEL ENGEL.

TECHNICAL DATA

Play this recording only with an unworn, microgroove stylus, preferably with a diamond tip. This recording is processed according to the R.I.A.A. characteristic. Stereophonic equipment enhances the sound of this monophonic recording, making it richer and more brilliant. The original recording was made on a one-track tape which was transferred without further changes directly to a master disc. In this manner the exact, original sound and the dynamic range were preserved as they were heard and intended by the performing artist in the recording hall. These pressings from the master disc were compared with the original tape by the Westminster music and engineering staff and only those pressings which proved to be a comparable match were accepted for commercial distribution.