

This is actually the seventh of Bruckner's symphonies, his total symphonic output being eleven, not nine. The two which are not numbered are the F minor *Studiensinfonie* and the C minor known as *Die Nullte* (No. 0), the first and third respectively in order of composition. In my opinion they should be renumbered to include the two early works. Quite apart from the merits of those works they were authentic essays in symphonic form which, to say the least, prepared the ground for his later works, works which are indeed later by two symphonies, thus increasing the perspective in which they are placed.

Possibly of greater significance, however, is the spirit of optimism prevailing throughout the 'first' and 'third' symphonies which adds considerably to this side of Bruckner's nature and places in even greater isolation the tragic, personal documents of his last two symphonies. Throughout the first six symphonies, up to and including the Fourth ('Romantic'), there is a sustained aura of well-being. The region is philosophical; and abstract are its motivations. Except for occasional evocations in the Scherzos of our earthly countryside, mankind never enters the scene, notwithstanding Bruckner's 'programme' for the Fourth. The fact emerges that Bruckner's most notable artistic and personal characteristic was one of staunch optimism, not to say faith, which was not undermined until eventual disillusionment brought to his late works a strong psychological bias.

In the trilogy of late symphonies one should not underestimate the powerful influence of his venturing into new technical fields in bringing about this apparent shift from a philosophical point of view. Technique and content are indivisible in fully realised works, yet in the melting-pot of creative imagination primary motivation can come from either direction.

Undoubtedly the inclusion of Wagner tubas in the elegy on Wagner's death which became the slow movement of Bruckner's Seventh symphony was a decisive step for him to take. Eight horns were retained from there on with an increase from double to triple woodwind for the two symphonies to come and an implied corresponding increase throughout the strings. With such forces at his disposal — and Bruckner's remarkably telling use of the orchestra rendered this increase potent indeed — the basic character of his orchestra had changed as much as its physical range had expanded. He became immersed in this vast sphere of instrumental sonority in which the almost overwhelming struggle to comprehend its limitless potential could have become a projection of his personal struggle within a limitless world.

The tragic saga of the Eighth and Ninth symphonies reached a level of psychological penetration unsurpassed to this day. In a fundamental sense they are the first modern orchestral works, nowhere more so than at their very closes—the conclusive *ritenuto* at the end of the Eighth, a despairing rejection of the whole affair; and the ultimate acceptance, nostalgic and capitulatory, of the Ninth—where nothing is concluded; the question remains unanswered.

The Fifth and Sixth symphonies are central to the two main groups which have just been outlined, though tending to bridge the gap. The Sixth is an intimate meditation of a very personal nature and while it indicates a change of direction which is later confirmed the composer considers his environment with his former optimism. This leaves us now to concentrate on the Fifth symphony which has thus been isolated. Though a culmination of the style and spirit of his previous symphonic development it stands above and apart by virtue of the extraordinary completeness of its conception and execution.

The Fifth is Bruckner's most pronounced philosophical and intellectual achievement. It is what he is; his lefthand as a composer, so to speak. There is an overall detachment, an austere level of statement which informs it throughout. The thematic link between the outer movements, with a corresponding though subordinate link between the Adagio and the Scherzo, bring an appropriate formal cohesion. Perhaps the secret of its inner genius lies in the opening fourteen bars. The quiet simplicity of counterpoint might conceivably have been written in homage to Simon Sechter, distinguished contrapuntalist himself and Bruckner's principal teacher. The setting was familiar. Not only with the shade of the master at his elbow to guide him but, with the environment of his earliest musical recollections having been the little church near his home (at which his father was organist), Bruckner, though struggling in the contentious

atmosphere of Viennese musical life, was spiritually back in the sure world of his formative years.

Throughout there is an untroubled assurance. The closing pages are more truly a consummation than a climax. The emotional level is invigorating and rational, always affirmative and reflective only in a formal sense (the quotations in the Finale set the scene and are not inward-looking or poignant). The Fifth might be described as Bruckner's 'Classical' symphony were it not for its musical influences having been notably pre-classical in origin.

Of all his symphonies the Fifth reveals its outer movements in greatest prominence. The compelling reiterations of the first movement's Chorale, heightened by its fugal treatment in the Finale, leaves one in no doubt that the Fifth drives through to and stops at its very apex. Bruckner had never achieved such a synthesis; never again was he compelled to reach his goal with the same undeviating confidence. And the setting of the Chorale established this confidence right at the very beginning.

After the quiet introductory fourteen bars already referred to, a sudden flourish by the full orchestra leaves the brass in sole command to state the four-bar phrase which is to become the motive of the work. The first subject of the Allegro is elusive in character. Its expressive line rises and falls, strongly rhythmic, only to be unexpectedly terminated by a whip-like embellishment. Even without giving much away Bruckner extends the initial statement to an imposing fifty bars, leading direct into the second subject, or *Gesangsperiode* (Lyrical section) as Bruckner would term it. In this peaceful melodic episode—and similar episodes occur in others of his symphonies—Bruckner carries the principle of the second subject (i.e. contrasting with the first subject) to its limits. The considerable time-span which it occupies contains in itself an important element of repose. Thematically there is a benign warmth which is reassuring rather than emotional or profound. Indeed there is something of a conversational air about these passages, relaxing, reasonable, which seems to draw the listener deep into the musical discussion. The episode ends with one of Bruckner's characteristic cross-rhythm devices, one which occurs even in his earliest works. The closing section which completes the exposition is robust and eventful and introduces an ebullient, leaping, staccato quaver figure before the transition's magical calls from horn to flute lead into the development.

This is one of the most powerful in the entire symphonic repertoire; analytical, turbulent and aggressive. The patriarchal reappearance of the Chorale abruptly ends the turmoil. The recapitulation does not overshadow the earlier part of the work and the closing diatonic fanfares are affirmative of the stage reached so far rather than conclusive and point onward to succeeding movements.

An extraordinary juxtaposition of rhythms seems, at first, to make the Adagio appear contrived. That the orchestral accompaniment should be *pizzicato* in compound triple time (6/4) while the theme is in duple time (4/4) would not be remarkable were it not for the slow tempo and sparse orchestration. There seems to be a vast and uneasy discrepancy at this tempo between the conflicting rhythmic pulses which become even more involved when the strings take up their bows and weave *legato* quaver passages. It is like an *étude* in orchestral playing and conducting. However, that is not at all its purpose, as will be realised when the Coda is reached. (It was also something of an *étude* in composing. Bruckner's original manuscript shows that he constantly changed the time signatures from 6/4 to 4/4—and even back again—finally, settling for a noncommittal *alla breve*.)

The second subject comes as a wonderful moment after the uneasy opening. It is sonorously scored for strings (quite remarkable is the sonority which comes from dividing the cellos), a noble song of hymn-like phrasing, which is built up to a broadly spaced *tutti*, horns following closely upon trumpets. The next statement of the first subject attains more security than before because of its full orchestration, whereas the dynamic level of the second subject at its repetition drops right away, stately and subdued, and imperceptibly merges into the stillness of the transition to the Coda.

Now it becomes clear what was the purpose of the curious first statement of the main theme: it was to delay its emergence as a fully integrated theme until this moment. Although triplets are retained in a semiquaver violin figure, the whole rhythm, melody and accompaniment is at last synchronised in common time; and in

forty monumental bars this rather mediaeval, sad melody achieves its consummation. Nine closing bars with fragments of melody in a bleak setting once again delay anything conclusive and lead on.

The Scherzo has running through it a *staccato* figure which is a speeded-up version of the Adagio's triplet accompaniment. Its course is briefly diverted by two *Ländler* tunes but each time it returns it does so in all manner of fantastical guises, bits of tune flung almost disrespectfully around the orchestra, until a final twelve bars of rapping away on the chord of D brings everything to attention and halts the nonsense.

The Trio makes me wonder what sort of ballet music Bruckner would have written! He was perfectly capable of writing splendidly pulsating music and evocative melodies as, for example, the Fourth's hunting Scherzo and the waltz in the Trio of the Second, one of the most persuasive waltzes I've heard. And the present Trio also has a balletic cast in its faintly satirical imputation of old-fashioned elegance. Bruckner had a ready and dry wit; we must not overlook an occasional touch of pastiche.

The Scherzo had just the right disarming element to redress the note of despondency left by the Adagio. Now all is set for the unquestioning assurance of the Finale. References to the first two movements are punctuated, at first tentatively, by wisps of an angular theme which manages a little courage on its third attempt, only to be blasted to insignificance by a gruff announcement from the full cellos and basses of the first theme of the mighty double fugue on which the movement is based. This theme has five distinctive features which can be closely followed throughout the movement: (a) downward octave leap; (b) dotted-quaver figure which turns around to (c) upward octave leap; (d) dotted-quavers ascending stepwise; (e) three heavily accented crotchets.

The second subject, unpredictable, sinuous, is in severe contrast. A vigorous development/transition arrives at the Chorale (slightly transformed by this time) which closes this episode and supplies the subject for the next. After this has completed its fugal entries it is joined by the first fugal theme in a complex web of counterpoint which is on a level with Beethoven's *Grosse Fuge*. The orchestration too is remarkable for its clarity and a stringent texture which has a point in common—only fundamentally, of course—with Stravinsky's particular mastery. The culmination is a titanic, eruptive unison in which Bruckner wrote 295 hammering down-bows, one for every note, throughout the strings. The reappearance of the second subject at this point is surely Bruckner's most prodigious anti-climax. Several apparent climaxes then attempt to usurp the place of honour and latterly the *Allegro* theme from the first movement makes a brave attempt, harried unmercifully by the first fugue theme which grows and grows into a plethora of scudding dotted-quavers. The long-delayed true climax is clearly imminent. A great whirling round of sound seems to prepare the moment but fragmentation of the Chorale again creates delay. Short phrases start congealing into a sequential passage which rises inexorably step by semitone step against protestations by the third trumpet and second trombone who are right outside the main rhythm, until an augmented version of the Chorale rises above the festive clamour of the whole orchestra and the work is brought to a triumphant and logical conclusion.

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