

Bruckner

(1824-1896)

Symphony No. 6 in A Major

(Robert Haas edition)

Composed 1879-81. First performance (incomplete) Vienna, 11 Feb. 1883; first complete performance 13 Dec. 1901
Instrumentation: 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, strings

Anton Bruckner was born in 1824 in the village of Ansfelden some sixty miles north east of Salzburg. For a period of over forty years he lived permanently within a few miles of his birthplace. Except for occasional brief journeys mostly to Vienna for composition lessons he appears to have lived contentedly within the limits of Linz—St. Florian—Steyr, an area less than Greater London.

That severe environmental restriction was an essential formative influence in the shaping of Bruckner's character and musical development. To many empowered with the creative temperament it would have frustrated their spirit and imagination. But the particular inner sufficiency of Bruckner responded in such a way as to develop a marvellous concentration of purpose which was never to leave him even at the moments of extreme and humiliating failure which were to come.

The formative years were spent among real people; the farmers, the craftsmen, the solid working man of Upper Austria and, above all, the wonderful monks of the monastery of St. Florian with whom he maintained close contact throughout his life. People who had an inherited respect for the traditions of their land. With them Bruckner sought merely to fulfil his place in the community, that of school-master and church organist, to the best of his ability. No extraordinary conviction of his destiny; no rejection of life; music as he found it: no new paths to be conquered even though, quite unwittingly, he was to be responsible for many remarkable new developments. Acceptance and perseverance were equally the man and the artist in Bruckner. Another important influence was his close association, as an organist, with the music of the church. Composers of the 16th and 17th centuries played an important part in his repertoire and Baroque music was an entirely

Otto Klemperer

Conducting The New Philharmonia Orchestra

SIDE ONE

Band 1—1st movement: (*Maestoso*)

Band 2—2nd movement: Adagio
(*Sehr feierlich*) (part 1)

SIDE TWO

Band 1—2nd movement (conclusion)

Band 2—3rd movement: Scherzo
(*Con moto—Moderato*) and Trio

Band 3—4th movement: Finale
(*Allegro ma non troppo*)

appropriate musical counterpart in its vigour and direct statement to the personality of the man.

The Sixth Symphony is a strong evocation of the dominating features of his formative years. It is in certain ways his most personal and representative work and might be regarded as his 'Pastoral' symphony expressing the composer's responses to nature as Beethoven had done before him. The topography, however, is vastly different; the spacious, rolling hills and jagged peaks of the Salzburg range contrasting with the Wiener Wald; the trekking over hills and mountains as opposed to the country walk.

The coincidence that each symphony was the composer's sixth cannot in fact be claimed. Bruckner's Sixth was actually his eighth symphonic work. Before moving to Vienna he composed a delightful symphony in F minor known as, but certainly not described as, the 'Studiensinfonie' (Student Symphony). This was followed by the official No. 1 in C minor, but yet another work, in D minor, was completed before No. 2. The two unnumbered symphonies were works which were criticised, though not harshly, and Bruckner as yet unseasoned by the chill blasts which were to come in later years set them aside unnumbered as if to disown them. He composed therefore eleven symphonies in all.

The single predominating feature of the present work is its rhythmic pattern. Which is not to say other works of his are deficient in rhythmic vitality, but in none of his other symphonies is the rhythmic pattern overlaid to such an

extent as to produce an almost textural effect. The opening statement, a sharp dotted figure followed by a triplet, is to recur throughout the work; the slow movement and the Finale feature the dotted figure and the Scherzo exploits the triplet, with the dotted figure here and there slashing through. The Trio is built almost entirely upon the dotted figure. Needless to say, each movement translates the rhythms into a quite different musical significance.

The first movement announces the rhythm which is maintained throughout a wide dynamic range for forty-six bars. Cellos and basses enter after two bars with the main theme, in which the short semiquaver and the triplet (expansively rendered in crotchets as against quavers) are also combined. A sudden fortissimo (bare fifths) restates the principal theme in a tutti which is strangely ambivalent in the barbaric rhythm, now reinforced by the timpani, and the vibrant warmth of melody. Triplet crotchets against triplet quavers, a crossing three-against-four pulse and the tension between opposing forces produces one of the most urgent statements in the entire symphonic repertoire.

Nor is the tension reduced in the second subject (one really should refer to 'periods' with Bruckner, it being often impossible to define within the usual limits where exactly a theme begins and ends). Triplet crotchets flow ceaselessly through fifty-two bars yet the melodic line is mainly in quadruple time. Later an heroic though brief tutti of golden splendour offers a glimpse through parted clouds before an enormous unison recalls the grimmer aspect of the first period. Triplet quavers in an arpeggiandi motion broaden out the underlying mood in a Codetta of serene beauty.

Bruckner's modified sonata form is easily discernible in this work. Instead of the usual exposition-development-recapitulation he follows the exposition with a modified and expanded treatment of it. In this case it commences with an inversion of the principal theme, then goes directly into the second period, thus restating the form of the exposition. The unison passage follows as before. A flowing quaver accompaniment radiates a Coda of such splendour as to stand in almost equal prominence to the exposition and recapitulation.

The Adagio, as with all his slow-movements, is profoundly moving. After the dramatic insistence of the first movement there is now an indescribable loneliness; a sense of loss. The form, again binary, is clearly defined. A sombre hymn-like tune against which the oboe utters its plaintive theme (dotted rhythm) is followed by a lyrical period which, in spite of its richness of sound, has the sad smile of great longing. The third period, a funeral march (again the dotted rhythm) has the mood of bereavement as at a time of national mourning.

An episode in which the horn states the opening bars with an orchestration mainly of wind instruments, and an answering phrase of lofty scoring, leads into the second half of the movement.

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The material of the exposition is restated in its original order but greatly modified in orchestration and treatment. The climax of the movement is developed out of the restatement of the first period while the funeral march is reduced to a mere half-dozen bars. The movement dies away on a tonic pedal of twenty-one bars with the haunting voice of the violas at the close laying out the tonic chord as if to rest.

The Scherzo gives the impression of being much faster than his usual tempo for this movement. Although it is marked 3/4 the predominating triplet quaver rhythm (as in the first movement) appears to render each crotchet beat as one bar of 3/8. This lively movement has a bird-like fleetness which is in considerable contrast to the immovable force of some of his other scherzi.

Finally, to the Bruckner interpreter, comes one of the great problem movements. Bruckner's Finales are always the most difficult to bring off, but whatever weaknesses may be pointed out the fact is that performances can and do succeed.

The central argument of this movement rests upon maintaining a cohesive tempo throughout. The exceptional plasticity of the subject matter does make it possible to devise individually expressive approaches to each section; Bruckner affords unlimited opportunities for imaginative treatment to detail. However, this could be greatly to the detriment of a large-scale conception. Rather must the plasticity be seized upon to draw the movement together. The relationships of one section to another and then to the whole admittedly are elusive.

Two bars of viola tremolo precede the principal statement of sixty bars which rises from a subdued treading motion to a gigantic march, fanfares (dotted rhythm) blazing out from the brass section. Herein lies the pulse of the whole movement. This impetus is maintained in the succeeding 'Gesangsperiod' (lyric period), as Bruckner would call it, although the change from quaver to crotchet movement suggests an exactly half tempo. A slowly germinating crescendo returns to the march motive and a sudden break in dynamic introduces an episode in which the dotted rhythm is complexly cross-hatched into various instrumental textures.

A fantasy based on the opening motive and the dotted rhythm spans the two halves of the binary form. After several isolated announcements of the fanfare there is no difficulty in detecting the return of the march, which is now greatly extended. The *Gesangsperiod*, cadenced by a beautiful phrase for brass and first violins, brings a moment of respite before the final march, joined at the conclusion by a triple-fortissimo statement of the symphony's opening motive, rounds off this breathtaking essay largely based upon the fertile properties of two minute rhythmic cells.