

GREAT WORKS OF MUSIC

[SYMPHONIES AND THEIR MEANING]

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Three Volumes in One



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CHAPTER XIV

THE EARLIER BRUCKNER *

WHATEVER be the final answer of the mooted question of the greatness of Bruckner's symphonies, there is no doubt that he had his full share of technical profundity, and a striking mastery of the melodious weaving of a maze of concordant strains. The question inevitably arises with Bruckner as to the value of the world's judgments on its contemporary poets. There can be no doubt that the *furor* of the musical public tends to settle on one or two favorites with a concentration of praise that ignores the work of others, though it be of a finer grain. Thus Schubert's greatest—his one completed—symphony was never acclaimed until ten years after his death. Even his songs somehow brought more glory to the singer than to the composer. Bach's oratorios lay buried for a full century. On the other hand, names great in their day are utterly lost from the horizon. It is hard to conceive the *éclat* of a Buononcini or a Monteverde,—whose works were once preëminent. There are elements in art, of special, sensational effect, that make a peculiar appeal in their time, and are incompatible with true and permanent great-

* Anton Bruckner, born at Annsfelden, Austria, 1824, died in Vienna in 1896.

ness. One is tempted to say, the more sudden and vehement the success, the less it will endure. But it would not be true. Such an axiom would condemn an opera like "Don Giovanni," an oratorio like the "Creation," a symphony like Beethoven's Seventh. There is a wonderful difference, an immeasurable gulf between the good and the bad in art; yet the apparent line is of the subtlest. Most street songs may be poor; but some are undoubtedly beautiful in a very high sense. It is a problem of mystic fascination, this question of the value of contemporary art. It makes its appeal to the subjective view of each listener. No rule applies. Every one will perceive in proportion to his capacity, no one beyond it. So, a profound work may easily fail of response, as many works in the various arts have done in the past, because the average calibre of the audience is too shallow, while it may deeply stir an intelligent few. Not the least strange part of it all is the fact that there can, of necessity, be no decision in the lifetime of the poet. Whether it is possible for obscure Miltons never to find their meed of acclaim, is a question that we should all prefer to answer in the negative. There is a certain shudder in thinking of such a chance; it seems a little akin to the danger of being buried alive.

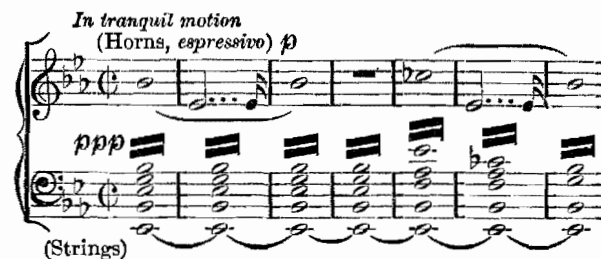
The question of Bruckner's place can hardly be said to be settled, although he has left nine symphonies. He certainly shows a freedom, ease and mastery in the symphonic manner, a limpid flow of melody

and a sure control in the interweaving of his themes, so that, in the final verdict, the stress may come mainly on the value of the subjects, in themselves. He is fond of dual themes, where the point lies in neither of two motives, but in the interplay of both; we see it somewhat extended in Richard Strauss, who uses it, however, in a very different spirit. The one evident and perhaps fatal lack is of intrinsic beauty of the melodic ideas, and further, an absence of the strain of pathos that sings from the heart of a true symphony. While we are mainly impressed by the workmanship, there is no denying a special charm of constant tuneful flow. At times this complexity is almost marvellous in the clear simplicity of the concerted whole,—in one view, the main trait or trick of symphonic writing. It is easy to pick out the leading themes as they appear in official order. But it is not so clear which of them constitute the true text. The multiplicity of tunes and motives is amazing.

Of the Wagner influence with which Bruckner is said to be charged, little is perceptible in his second symphony. On the contrary, a strong academic tradition pervades. The themes are peculiarly symphonic. Moreover they show so strikingly the dual quality that one might say, as a man may see double, Bruckner sang double. Processes of augmenting and inverting abound, together with the themal song in the bass. Yet there is not the sense of overloaded learning. There is everywhere a clear and melodious polyphony.

But with all masterly architecture, even enchanting changes of harmony and a prodigal play of melody, the vacuity of poetic ideas must preclude a permanent appeal. Bruckner is here the schoolmaster: his symphony is a splendid skeleton, an object lesson for the future poet.

In the FOURTH (ROMANTIC) SYMPHONY the main light plays throughout on the wind. The text is a call of horns, that begins the work. It is a symphony



of wood-notes, where the forest-horn is sovereign,—awakening a widening world of echoes, with a murmuring maze of lesser notes. One has again the feeling that in the quiet interweaving of a tapestry of strains lies the individual quality of the composer,—that the *forte* blasts, the stride of big unison figures are but the interlude.

In the Andante the charm is less of tune than of the delicate changing shades of the harmony and of the colors of tone. We are ever surprised in the gentlest way by a turn of chord or by the mere entrance of a horn among the whispering strings. The

shock of a soft modulation may be as sudden as of the loud, *sußen blare*. But we cannot somehow be consoled for the want of a heart-felt melody.

The Scherzo is a kind of hunting-piece, full of the sparkle, the color and romance of bugles and horns, — a spirited fanfare broken by hushed phrases of strings or wood, or an elf-like mystic dance on the softened call of trumpets. The Trio sings apart, between the gay revels, in soft voices and slower pace, like a simple ballad.

The Finale is conceived in mystical retrospect, beginning in vein of prologue: over mysterious murmuring strings, long sustained notes of the reed and horn in octave descent are mingled with a soft carillon of horns and trumpets in the call of the Scherzo. In broad swing a free fantasy rises to a loud refrain (in the brass) of the first motive of the symphony.

In slower pace and hush of sound sings a madrigal of tender phrases. A pair of melodies recall like figures of the first Allegro. Indeed, a chain of dulcet strains seems to rise from the past.

The fine themal relevance may be pursued in infinite degree, to no end but sheer bewilderment. The truth is that a modern vanity for subtle connection, a purest pedantry, is here evident, and has become a baneful tradition in the modern symphony. It is an utter confusion of the letter with the spirit. Once for all, a themal coherence of symphony must lie in the main lines, not in a maze of insignificant figures.

Marked is a sharp alternation of mood, tempestuous and tender, of Florestan and Eusebius. The lyric phase yields to the former heroic fantasy and then returns in soothing solace into a prevailing motive that harks back to the second of the beginning movement. The fantasy, vague of melody, comes



(in more than one sense) as relief from the small tracery. It is just to remember a like oscillation in the first Allegro.

When the prologue recurs, the phrases are in ascent, instead of descent of octaves. A climactic verse of the main dulcet melody breaks out in resonant choir of brass and is followed by a soft rhapsody on the several strains that hark back to the beginning. From the halting pace the lyric episode rises in flight of continuous song to enchanting lilt. Now in the big heroic fantasy sing the first slow phrases as to the manner born and as naturally break into a paean of the full motive, mingled with strains of the

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original legend of the symphony, that flows on to broad hymnal cadence.

In mystic musing we reach a solemn stillness where the prologue phrase is slowly drawn out into a profoundly moving hymn. Here we must feel is Meister Bruckner's true poetic abode rather than in the passion and ecstasy of romance into which he was vainly lured.*

* Bruckner's Fifth Symphony (in B flat) is a typical example of closest correlation of themes that are devoid of intrinsic melody.

An introduction supplies in the bass of a hymnal line the main theme of the Allegro by inversion as well as the germ of the first subject of the Adagio. Throughout, as in the Romantic Symphony, the relation between the first and the last movement is subtle. A closing, jagged phrase reappears as the first theme of the Finale.

The Adagio and Scherzo are built upon the same figure of bass. The theme of the Trio is acclaimed by a German annotator as the reverse of the first motive of the symphony.

In the prelude of the Finale, much as in the Ninth of Beethoven, are passed in review the main themes of the earlier movements. Each one is answered by an eccentric phrase that had its origin in the first movement and is now extended to a fugal theme.

The climactic figure is a new hymnal line that moves as central theme of an imposing double fugue.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LATER BRUCKNER

IN Bruckner's later works appears the unique instance of a discipline grounded in the best traditions, united to a deft use of ephemeral devices. The basic cause of modern mannerism, mainly in harmonic effects, lies in a want of formal mastery; an impatience of thorough technic; a craving for quick sensation. With Bruckner it was the opposite weakness of original ideas, an organic lack of poetic individuality. It is this the one charge that cannot be brought home to the earlier German group of reaction against the classic idea.

There is melody, almost abundant, in Wagner and Liszt and their German contemporaries. Indeed it was an age of lyricists. The fault was that they failed to recognize their lyric limitation, lengthening and padding their motives abnormally to fit a form that was too large. Hence the symphony of Liszt, with barren stretches, and the impossible plan of the later music-drama. The truest form of such a period was the song, as it blossomed in the works of a Franz.

Nor has this grandiose tendency even yet spent its course. A saving element was the fashioning of a new form, by Liszt himself,—the Symphonic Poem,

—far inferior to the symphony, but more adequate to the special poetic intent.

Whatever be the truth of personal gossip, there is no doubt that Bruckner lent himself and his art to a championing of the reactionary cause in the form that was intrinsically at odds with its spirit. Hence in later works of Bruckner these strange episodes of borrowed romance, abruptly stopped by a firm counterpoint of excellent quality,—indeed far the best of his writing. For, if a man have little ideas, at least his good workmanship will count for something.

In truth, one of the strangest types is presented in Bruckner,—a pedant who by persistent ingenuity simulates a master-work almost to perfection. By so much as genius is not an infinite capacity for pains, by so much is Bruckner's Ninth not a true symphony. Sometimes, under the glamor of his art, we are half persuaded that mere persistence may transmute pedantry into poetry.

It seems almost as if the Wagnerians chose their champion in the symphony with a kind of suppressed contempt for learning, associating mere intellectuality with true mastery, pointing to an example of greatest skill and least inspiration as if to say: "Here is your symphonist if you must have one." And it is difficult to avoid a suspicion that his very partisans were laughing up their sleeve at their adopted champion.

We might say all these things, and perhaps we have gone too far in suggesting them. After all we have

no business with aught but the music of Bruckner, whatever may have been his musical politics, his vanity, his ill judgment, or even his deliberate partisanship against his betters. But the ideas themselves are unsubstantial; on shadowy foundation they give an illusion by modern touches of harmony and rhythm that are not novel in themselves. The melodic idea is usually divided in two, as by a clever juggler. There is really no one thought, but a plenty of small ones to hide the greater absence.

We have merely to compare this artificial manner with the poetic reaches of Brahms to understand the insolence of extreme Wagnerians and the indignation of a Hanslick. As against the pedantry of Bruckner the style of Strauss is almost welcome in its frank pursuit of effects which are at least grateful in themselves. Strauss makes hardly a pretence at having melodic ideas. They serve but as pawns or puppets for his harmonic and orchestral *mise-en-scène*. He is like a play-wright constructing his plot around a scenic design.

Just a little common sense is needed,—an unpremeditated attitude. Thus the familiar grouping, "*Bach, Beethoven and Brahms*," is at least not unnatural. Think of the absurdity of "*Bach, Beethoven and Bruckner*"!*

The truth is, the Bruckner cult is a striking symptom of a certain decadence in German music; an

* A festival was held in Munich in the summer of 1911, in celebration of "*Bach, Beethoven and Bruckner*."

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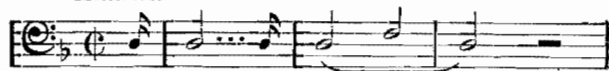
incapacity to tell the sincere quality of feeling in the dense, brilliant growth of technical virtuosity. In the worship at the Bayreuth shrine, somehow reinforced by a modern national self-importance, has been lost a heed for all but a certain vein of exotic romanticism, long ago run to riotous seed, a blending of hedonism and fatalism. No other poetic message gets a hearing and the former may be rung in endless repetition and reminiscence, provided, to be sure, it be framed with brilliant cunning of workmanship.

Here we feel driven defiantly to enounce the truth: that the highest art, even in a narrow sense, comes only with a true poetic message. Of this Bruckner is a proof; for, if any man by pure knowledge could make a symphony, it was he. But, with almost superhuman skill, there is something wanting in the inner connection, where the main ideas are weak, forced or borrowed. It is only the true poetic rapture that ensures the continuous absorption that drives in perfect sequence to irresistible conclusion.

SYMPHONY NO. 9

I.—*Solenne*. Solemn mystery is the mood, amid trembling strings on hollow unison, before the eight

Misterioso



p
(Eight horns with tremolo strings on D in three octaves)

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horns strike a phrase in the minor chord that in higher echoes breaks into a strange harmony and descends into a turn of melodic cadence. In answer is another chain of brief phrases, each beginning

(1st violins)

p

pp
con Sva.
(Lower reeds with strings tremolo in all but basses)

with a note above the chord (the common mark and manner of the later school of harmonists*) and a new ascent on a literal ladder of subtlest progress, while hollow intervals are intermingled in the pinch of close harmonies. The bewildering maze here begins of multitudinous design, enriched with modern devices.

A clash of all the instruments acclaims the climax before the unison stroke of fullest chorus on the solemn note of the beginning. A favorite device of Bruckner, a measured tread of *pizzicato* strings with interspersed themal motives, precedes the romantic episode. Throughout the movement is this alternation of liturgic chorale with tender melody.

* See Vol. II, note, page 104.

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Molto tranquillo
(Strings) *espressivo*

Con Sva.

(Oboes and horns)

Bruckner's pristine polyphonic manner ever appears in the double strain of melodies, where each complements, though not completes the other. However multiple the plan, we cannot feel more than the quality of *unusual* in the motives themselves, of some interval of ascent or descent. Yet as the melody grows to larger utterance, the fulness of polyphonic art brings a beauty of tender sentiment, rising to a moving climax, where the horns lead the song in the heart of the madrigal chorus, and the strings alone sing the expressive answer.

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(Violins doubled in Sva.)

(Strings, wood and horns)

A third phrase now appears, where lies the main poetry of the movement. Gentle swaying calls of

Tranquillo (Wood and violins)

(4 horns in Sva.)

(Horns)

(Strings with bassoons)

dim.

mf *Con Sva.*

soft horns and wood, echoed and answered in close pursuit, lead to a mood of placid, elemental rhythm, with something of "Rheingold," of "Ossian" ballad, of the lapping waves of Cherubini's "Anacreon." In the midst the horns blow a line of sonorous melody, where the cadence has a breath of primal legend. On the song runs, ever mid the elemental motion, to a resonant height and dies away as before. The intimate, romantic melody now returns, but it is rocked on the continuing pelagic pulse; indeed, we hear anon a faint phrase of the legend, in distant trumpet, till we reach a joint rhapsody of both moods; and in the never resting motion, mid vanishing echoes, we dream of some romance of the sea.

Against descending harmonies return the hollow, sombre phrases of the beginning, with the full cadence of chorale in the brass; and beyond, the whole prelude has a full, extended verse. In the alternation of solemn and sweet episode returns the tender melody, with pretty inversions, rising again to an ardent height. The renewed clash of acclaiming chorus ushers again the awful phrase of unison (now in octave descent), in towering majesty. But now it rises in the ever increasing vehemence where the final blast is lit up with a flash of serene sonority.

This motive, of simple octave call, indeed pervades the earlier symphony in big and little. And now, above a steady, sombre melodic tread of strings it rises in a fray of eager retorts, transfigured in wonderful harmony again and again to a brilliant height,

pausing on a ringing refrain, in sombre hue of overpowering blast.

A soft interlude of halting and diminishing strings leads to the romantic melody as it first appeared, where the multiple song again deepens and ennobles the theme. It passes straight into the waving, elemental motion, where again the hallowed horn utters its sibyl phrase, again rising to resonant height. And again merges the intimate song with the continuing pulse of the sea, while the trumpet softly sounds the legend and a still greater height of rhapsody.

Dull brooding chords bring a sombre play of the xwing phrase, over a faint rocking motion, clashing in bold harmony, while the horns surge in broader melody. The climactic clash ends in a last verse of the opening phrase, as of primal, religious chant.

II.—*Scherzo*. In the dazzling pace of bright clashing harmonies, the perfect answers of falling and rising phrases, we are again before the semblance, at

(Flute with *pizz.* violins) (Flute)

(*Pizz.* strings)

least, of a great poetic idea. To be sure there is a touch of stereotype in the chords and even in the pinch and clash of hostile motives. And there is not the distinctive melody,—final stamp and test of the

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shaft of inspiration. Yet in the enchantment of motion, sound and form, it seems mean-spirited to cavil at a want of something greater. One stands bewildered before such art and stunned of all judgment.

A delight of delicate gambols follows the first brilliant dance of main motive. Amid a rougher trip of unison sounds the sonorous brass, and to softest jarring murmur of strings a pretty jingle of reed,

p grazioso (Oboe)
p (Pizz. strings with soft chord of wind and rhythmic bassoon)

The score shows a single staff for the Oboe with a melodic line and a piano accompaniment of strings. The key signature has two sharps (F# and C#) and the time signature is 3/8. The music is marked *p grazioso* and *p*.

with later a slower counter-song, almost a madrigal of pastoral answers, till we are back in the ruder original dance. The gay cycle leads to a height of rough volume (where the mystic brass sound in the midst) and a revel of echoing chase.

In sudden hush of changed tone on fastest fairy trip, strings and wood play to magic harmonies. In calming motion the violins sing a quieter song, ever

Dolce (Violins)
Piu tranquillo
pp (Oboes with sustained strings)

The score features two staves: the upper staff for Violins and the lower staff for Oboes. The key signature has two sharps and the time signature is 3/8. The music is marked *Dolce*, *Piu tranquillo*, and *pp*.

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echoed by the reed. Though there is no gripping force of themal idea, the melodies are all of grateful charm, and in the perfect round of rhythmic design we may well be content. The original dance recurs with a full fine orgy of hostile euphony.

III.—*Adagio. Feierlich*,—awesome indeed are these first sounds, and we are struck by the original-

Molto lento (Solenne)
 (Violins, G string) *mf* broadly *cresc.*
 (Strings with choir of tubas, later of trombones and contrabass-tuba) *mf con Sve.*

The score consists of two staves. The upper staff is for Violins (G string) and the lower staff is for strings with a choir of tubas, later of trombones and contrabass-tuba. The key signature has two sharps and the time signature is 3/4. The music is marked *Molto lento (Solenne)*, *mf* broadly, *cresc.*, and *mf con Sve.*

ity of Bruckner's technic. After all we must give the benefit at least of the doubt. And there is after this deeply impressive *introit* a gorgeous Promethean

(Woodwind and low brass with tremolo strings)
 (3 trumpets)
 (4 horns) *f*
mf *Con Sve.*

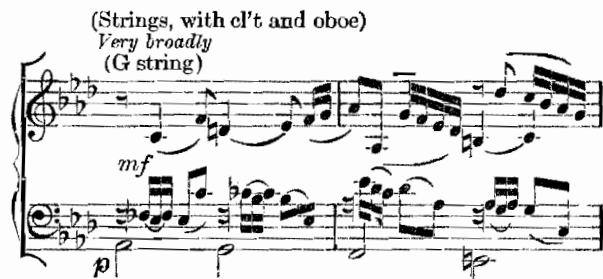
The score features two staves. The upper staff is for woodwind and low brass (3 trumpets and 4 horns) and the lower staff is for strings with tremolo. The key signature has two sharps and the time signature is 3/4. The music is marked *mf* and *Con Sve.*

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spring of up-leaping harmonies. The whole has certainly more of concrete beauty than many of the labored attempts of the present day.

The prelude dies down with an exquisite touch of precious dissonance,—whether it came from the heart or from the workshop. The strange and tragic part is that with so much art and talent there should not be the strong individual idea,—the flash of new tonal figure that stands fearless upon its own feet. All this pretty machinery seems wasted upon the framing and presenting, at the moment of expectation, of the shadows of another poet's ideas or of mere platitudes.

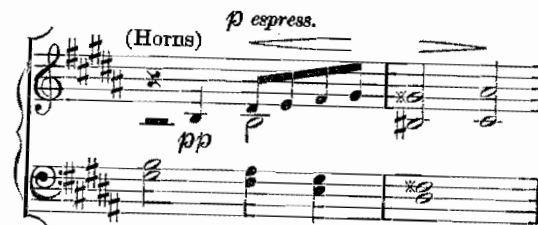
In the midst of the broad sweeping theme with a



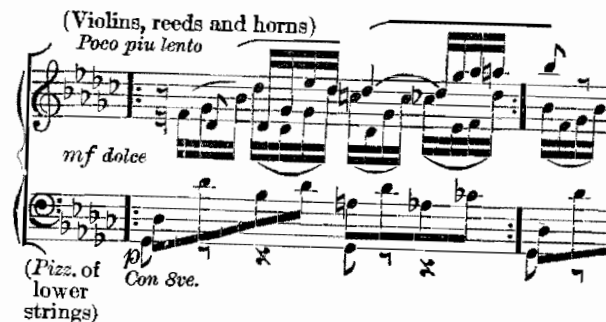
promise of deep utterance is a phrase of horns with the precise accent and agony of a *Tristan*. The very semblance of whole motives seems to be taken from the warp and woof of Wagnerian drama. And thus the whole symphony is degraded, in its gorgeous capacity, to the reëchoed rhapsody of exotic roman-

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ticism. It is all little touches, no big thoughts,—a mosaic of a symphony.



And so the second theme * is almost too heavily laden with fine detail for its own strength, though



it ends with a gracefully delicate answer. The main melody soon recurs and sings with a stress of warm feeling in the cellos, echoed by glowing strains of

* We have spoken of a prelude, first and second theme; they might have been more strictly numbered first, second and third theme

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the horns. Romantic harmonies bring back the solemn air of the prelude with a new counter melody, in precise opposite figure, as though inverted in a mirror, and again the dim moving chords that seem less of Bruckner than of legendary drama. In big accoutrement the double theme moves with double answers, ever with the sharp pinch of harmonies and heroic mien. Gentlest retorts of the motives sing with fairy clearness (in horns and reeds), rising to tender, expressive dialogue. With growing spirit they ascend once more to the triumphant clash of empyraean chords, that may suffice for justifying beauty.

Instead of the first, the second melody follows with its delicate grace. After a pause recurs the phrase that harks from mediæval romance, now in a stirring ascent of close chasing voices. The answer, perfect in its timid halting descent, exquisite in accent and in the changing hues of its periods, is robbed of true effect by its direct reflection of Wagnerian ecstasies.

As if in recoil, a firm hymnal phrase sounds in the strings, ending in a more intimate cadence. Another chain of rarest fairy clashes, on the motive of the prelude, leads to the central verse, the song of the first main melody in the midst of soft treading strings, and again descends the fitting answer of poignant accent.

And now, for once forgetting all origin and clinging sense of reminiscence, we may revel in the rich romance, the fathoms of mystic harmony, as the main

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song sings and rings from the depths of dim legend in lowest brass, amidst a soft humming chorus, in constant shift of fairy tone.

A flight of ascending chords brings the big exaltation of the first prophetic phrase, ever answered by exultant ring of trumpet, ending in sudden awing pause. An eerie train of echoes from the verse of prelude leads to a loveliest last song of the poignant answer of main song, over murmuring strings. It

(Tremolo violins with lower Sve.)
(Reeds)

pp (Horns)

(Violas)

The image shows a musical score for three parts: Tremolo violins with lower Sve., Reeds, and Violas. The top staff is for Tremolo violins with lower Sve. and Reeds, marked with a tremolo symbol and a dotted line. The middle staff is for Horns, marked with a piano piano (pp) dynamic. The bottom staff is for Violas. The music is in a key with two sharps (D major or F# minor) and a 4/4 time signature. The score consists of several measures of music, with various rhythmic values and dynamics.

is carried on by the mystic choir of sombre brass in shifting steps of enchanting harmony and dies away in tenderest lingering accents.*

* In place of the uncompleted Finale, Bruckner is said to have directed that his "*Te Deum*" be added to the other movements.