

Ohio Bruckner Tour Report.

By Dale Johnson

The month of January 2010 provided those of us in the Ohio area with some wonderful opportunities to hear some Bruckner works live: 2 motets and 3 Symphonies, 2 of them twice. Of course, we went to them all. The following is a short trip report for for enjoyment and edification.

The Symphony #3 in D minor by Anton Bruckner (Version of 1877-1878). Neal Gittelman conducts the Dayton Philharmonic at the Shuster Center in downtown Dayton, OH. Jan 6 and Jan 8, 2010

The day dawned early on Jan 6, 2010, and periodic checks out the lab window showed gradually increasing snow throughout the morning. The forecast was for 4-6 inches of snow. No big thing for folks in Wisconsin, but with most of the drivers around here that could be paralyzing to traffic. I check the website, and, to my wonderment and appreciation, tickets for these 2 concerts are 2 for 1! Outstanding! Looks like we're going both days....

The day wound interminably on, and, at the last time came to go home, or more properly, time to get ready to go. After a short stop at my brother's house for some Diet A&W and a good cigar (not to mention some wonderful music on WGUC-FM 90.9) it was time to move on to my rendezvous with Ken. I arrived at his place to the great excitement and vocalizations of his dogs. After a short visit with Lois, and some eggplant parmesan with garlic toast we loaded into his little sedan and drove northwest to Dayton for the concert.

Figuring (quite correctly as it turned out) that rush hour traffic on I-75 would be a nightmare with this weather, Ken drove up Hwy 781, a 2 or 4 lane secondary road, that, despite a few stranded vehicles here and there gave us no trouble. Not even a traffic jam. As a matter of fact, we stopped for a snack at the Dorothy Lane Market in Springboro on the way up. When we returned to the road it had gotten slicker and a bit busier, but, still not bad at all.

We arrived in time to catch the pre-concert chat with Maestro Gittelman. He is a personable fellow, appreciative of us 'winter travelers' and entertaining. It is interesting that he would not program Bruckner when the Dayton Phil played at Memorial Hall because 'it's too small for Bruckner', and only now in the beautiful Shuster Center has he begun to favor the works of Anton Bruckner for orchestra in live performance.

He seemed to be very interested in the sound for tonight's concert, as the fewer number of people should allow for more 'echo' in the hall, and with a small crowd it would more favor the sound of a big cathedral, for example.

Ken checks the program, and finds to his overwhelming delight that they are doing one of the longer versions of the work, and he's ecstatic.

Our assigned 'cheap' seats up in the balcony are not going to be used this evening. They are short 27 ushers for the evening, and so we are moved to the lower balcony. Not bad seats, but I really wanted nothing but roof overhead to get the best sound the hall has to offer. Still, we're front row on the left balcony, and can see everything.

We work was well done, despite some rushing in the Adagio, and a couple of 'support issues' with trumpet tones, further, some problem at one point with the oboe part. I'm not trying to be picky here, for overall the Dayton Philharmonic did quite well, and we enjoyed the concert thoroughly. I cannot imagine the stress of wondering if all your players were going to make it despite the weather, as some come from far away.

The hall was nice, only several years old (unlike Music Hall in Cincinnati, where I usually catch the symphony, which is 132 years old). The ceiling is rather interesting with a starfield which sparkles, but was dimmed for the concert. Good ambiance in the hall; it was quite comfortable. The outer foyer is interesting; lots of glass for exterior walls, and we can see the folks trudging or driving by we enjoy the warmth.

The trip home was uneventful, but the hour was late. We didn't care, still glowing and stoked from this performance.

Still, after studying it in preparation for months, wearing out my records, CDs, not to mention my Schalk transcription it was glorious to hear it done live. I'd go back in a heartbeat, and, as it stood, we went back 2 days later to hear it again.

Symphony # 3 in D minor by Anton Bruckner Neal Gittelman conducting the Dayton Philharmonic.....Second time around.....8 Jan 2010.

The deal was sealed even before we found out tickets were 2 for 1; as dedicated Bruckerians we had to return once more. This time the weather was more reasonable, and the concert was far better attended. This time we added my brother Brian (a trumpeter....of course) to the party. Also this time we took my 1996 Buick Regal (which for years has been affectionately known as the 'Brucknermobile') to make the trip to Dayton once more. After meeting up, and a toast to the memory and work of our favorite composer we were off once more. It was still cold, but snow and traffic were not a consideration. We rolled up I-75 and found a parking spot a couple blocks away. We actually arrived after the concert started (by design) and we (and quite a few other late-comers) were seated just before the Liszt Concerto #1 in E flat for Piano (and triangle....hehehe) began.

Lise de la Salle was the soloist. It was wonderfully done, and we enjoyed it, with the exception of some bone-head's cell phone going off during the slow movement. I suppose they made an announcement, but late-comers don't get the announcement. I

don't even bring a cell phone or anything like that to a concert hall. Leave the blasted thing in the car!

After intermission we went up to the topmost tier (where we were supposed to be seated 2 days past). The view was great, the sound was far better there, and, frankly the Orchestra was in splendid form for this reading. The trumpet and oboe redeemed themselves, and I found the tempi to be a bit more leisurely, with great clarity, dynamics, and phrasing, fine power; all in all a great interpretation! That's what we came for, and we let them know with raucous applause and many Bravos! The trip back was uneventful, yet we were giddy with excitement and appreciation at this performance. When they program more Bruckner, needless to say, we'll be back.

THE CONCERT IS AVAILABLE AT WWW.DPR.ORG, AND WILL BE BROADCAST ON W DPR FM 88.1 AT 1000 HRS ON MAY 8TH IN THE DAYTON AREA.

Symphony #8 in C minor by Anton Bruckner (1890 Nowak Edition of 1955). Paavo Jarvi conducts the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra. 22 Jan 2010. Cincinnati, OH

FINALLY, the weekend we anticipated all year had come. The home team, in the home court with one of my favorite conductors, doing my favorite symphony by my favorite composer. It doesn't get much better than that. I had whetted my appetite with Orff's 'Carmina Burana' the weekend before with the CSO and the May Festival Chorus, and that was a great one! We were in for a treat, as the ensemble is 'on like neckbone'. The only disappointment was the realization that this weekend would be the last subscription Bruckner symphonies presented with Maestro Jarvi at the helm. Earlier in the month he announced that the next year would be his last as Music Director, alas. What a bummer! He's awfully busy with European ensembles (Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra, Orchestra de Paris, etc.) but he will be missed. He did outstanding work here. The other disappointment was that NO Bruckner symphonies were programmed for the 2010-2011 season. They are doing Mahler 5 & 7, which is nice, because there was none programmed this year (Although the May festival last year featured Mahler 8 with James Conlon conducting and it was breathtaking; earlier that year we got Gilbert Kaplan directing his beloved Mahler 2nd.) I give Paavo major programming props, though. We got about a Bruckner symphony a year for nine years, and that's not too bad. We got 2, 3, 5, 8, and 9. Could've been worse.

We took Ken's car down to Music Hall and found street parking a few blocks away. We arrived in plenty of time for the pre-concert talk, which was given by a Violist (whose name escapes me) with the CSO which focused on Bruckner, and featured some handouts (one of which demonstrated the uncommonly long fingers of the Master, which doubtless facilitated some of the wonderful organ work he was famous for in the day). He also included some of the melody lines from the Symphony, and he spoke of the beauty and structure of those themes. He also included a copy of a photo of the statue of

Bruckner in the Vienna Stadtpark, which is now framed beside my portrait of Wagner. Ken had heard the fellow speak before; at that time he spoke of the pilgrimages he had made to Linz.

This was a bit different, but very informative. After a brisk walk to get the blood going, we returned for the concert. The concert 'set-up' presentation featured Owen Lee, principle Bassist, rather than Paavo speaking about the work. He obviously loves Bruckner (as do we all), and did say one thing that struck me hard. He (and some of the others) considers when they do Bruckner 'the high point of the season'. I'd have to agree wholeheartedly. It leaves unexplained what happened to the next season (2010-2011). They are doing all 5 Beethoven Piano Concerti, and a bunch of other good stuff, but Bruckner in late January doesn't pack them in like some other composers at some other times.

Ken and I settle in the right Balcony. Great seats. By coincidence, we start with Liszt's Concerto #1 in E flat for Piano (and triangle....). This time the artist is Alice Sara Ott making her North American Debut. She is petite but powerful, and just does a fabulous job. Despite her smaller frame (and skinny arms) she summons a lot of power in her playing, and her technique is sparkling and crisp. Sure makes it LOOK easy. The audience is quite appreciative, with 3 curtain calls and lots of applause.

At intermission we move down to front row seats in the balcony which we were scouting during the first half of the concert. I've got my score, a pencil, a silent metronome, and I'm ready to get at it. The first and last movements were brisk, really moving along, and the Scherzo was lively and focused. The Adagio was one for the ages. Just beautiful. Amazing.

I quietly mark my score with approximate metronome and dynamic markings for posterity (and, of course, the piano) for the first 3 movements and just enjoy the last one. Frankly, we were blown away. This orchestra is so good with Bruckner it's kind of a shame that Paavo's doing the cycle with Frankfurt Radio Symphony Orchestra instead of ours, but at least he's doing it with someone, somewhere. Words fall short; suffice it to say that it was everything you could want in this work, and SO tastefully done. I can't wait to record it! The audience was very appreciative (3 more curtain calls—or was it 4?), and we rained Bravos and Hurrah's down from above. We headed out into the cold night more floating than walking. Just think. They're doing it again tomorrow!

Symphony #8 in C minor by Anton Bruckner. Paavo Jarvi conducts the Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra 23 Jan 2010 in Cincinnati, OH.

One more time... We head down separately this evening, and arrive just at intermission (again, by design). The crowd is a bit bigger, and this time I just concentrate on enjoying the first 3 movements, and do my score work/meter/dynamics markings during the last movement. It's even better, if that were possible. What a night! After the concert, I head backstage to congratulate Maestro Jarvi. The line to the green room was very long,

so I contented myself on congratulating and thanking the other, more accessible members of the orchestra, to include the violist who gave the pre-concert chat. He mentioned that he, too had hopes for a Bruckner symphony to be included in next years subscription concerts; his hope was for a Bruckner 1st, as the ensemble hadn't done it since Thomas Schippers conducted it literally decades ago! (Fortunately Ken & I went to Indianapolis last year and saw Mario Venzago conducting the ISO do a terrific job with it.) It was great to enjoy the post-concert 'vibe' with these talented artists.

Then, once more to the cold night, flush with excitement and appreciation at the adventure. How blessed we are!! Tomorrow's another day; Bruckner 6th in Toledo...

Approximate tempi for these 2 performances:

Movement 1 quarter note = 66

Movement 2 (Scherzo) dotted half note = 56

Movement 3 (Adagio) quarter note (or 'pulse') = 42

Movement 4 quarter note = 96

**THIS CONCERT WILL BE BROADCAST ON WGUC FM 90.0 ON SUNDAY
MARCH 7 AT 1930 HRS.**

Symphony # 6 in A major by Anton Bruckner. Stefan Sanderling (son of Kurt....) conducts the Toledo Symphony Orchestra Sunday 24 Jan 2010 at the Rosary Cathedral in Toledo, OH.

Preceding this the "Locus Iste" and "Ave Maria" motets by Anton Bruckner as performed by the Masterworks Chorale under the direction of Donna Tozer Wipfli.

Another day, another live Bruckner symphonic performance. The coordination began weeks ago for this exodus. Ken had an early student, and I took the morning to prepare for the trip; my worship ops today would be delayed by a several hours and removed a couple hundred miles from my usual congregation. Though I always enjoy helping with musical accompaniment (I'm a Brucknerian, of course) I had a hunch that this concert was going to be really, really good. Ken had forewarned me how good Stefan Sanderling is, and we were looking forward to this one.

We met at his place at 1015 AM. I had brought transcriptions, as well as our lunch/dinner and some cookies. We cleared the snow off the car, loaded up, and off we went. We had light traffic and splendid scenery for our trip up I-75. At a rest stop we considered eating at a picnic area, but it was really too cold and blustery for that, so we munched on some lasagna, and shortly continued our trip. Another hour later we stopped briefly at a Panera in the Toledo area, snacked on a loaf on excellent bread and after a brief rest we loaded up and continued our trek.

We arrived at the Rosary Cathedral about an hour before the performance. The choir was arriving and we were very fortunate to catch the ensemble in rehearsal. It is classic, with

a long nave, and that shape that reminds me of so many of the churches in Europe. There are some people milling about, and we take several minutes to view the large, gorgeous stained glass windows in the cathedral. The ceiling and the area behind the altar, wall, floor and ceiling are all beautifully painted. I was also giddy at the acoustics. It sounded like a seven second delay from an audible tone, so I feared muddiness in the works, but our fears were groundless. Ken took a walk, and I headed to where I naturally would gravitate in this setting: the choir loft and the organ. The choir loft was elevated in the back of the sanctuary, up long set of spiral stairs. I opened a wooden door, and I found the spot from which I would view the concert. There were a set of classic wooden church pews, with aisles down the thirds. The organ console was on the right, shuttered. No pipes or other ornamentation was visible. The first row of pews actually had book holders mounted to the balcony in front of them. No one else was in the choir loft. Enjoying the solitude for a moment, I sat quietly, praying, preparing as the choir assembled for their rehearsal of the motets. From the first note it was enchanting. Though there were folks down below milling about and talking, to me, the ensemble focus grabbed my attention. Their voices blended wonderfully, and the director coaxed excellent intonation and mix from the group. It was spellbinding, to me, far more, than 'just a rehearsal'. I had heard recordings of these works, but hadn't yet heard them live. I could well imagine a similar sound when they were first performed, over a hundred years ago. The acoustics of the cathedral added an eerie quality: crisp cutoffs echoed and faded slowly. The power of the sound of the group seemed magnified by the space of the cathedral. A personal moment, a musician connecting with the message, touched in a very spiritual way. Tears flowed. They did both works, and then were off. In the distance I could hear the Symphony Orchestra warming up. The players were assembled, and I went to find Ken and bring him up to the loft. In short order we were ready, along with a dozen or so other hardy souls who make the trek up the stairs to get the best view, and, arguably, the best sound as well. Further, if Bruckner were here, he'd be up here himself. The cathedral begins to fill up, and the Chorale assembles. They did a fabulous job with those works; I wished they had prepared more. The two motets take about 7 minutes. I believe those two, and two others are scheduled to be performed during the Cincinnati May Festival at Cathedral Basilica in Covington, KY this year.

There is a brief break while the Orchestra sets up. Shortly they are ready, Maestro Sanderling steps up, and we're off. I'm transfixed. It's an unbelievably effective performance. Apparently they've been doing a Bruckner symphony a year for the last 5 years (this being the sixth) and we had no clue. I don't even open the score. The Toledo Symphony is outstanding, and Maestro Sanderling leads then to a wonderful interpretation. His conducting style is somewhat mesmerizing: rocking to and fro, forming large U-shaped ictus' simultaneously as if he were fanning the players to his left and right. Loved his tempi, but was too overcome to record them. It was everything we came for, and more. At the conclusion the place erupted. World-class music in church. That's the way it ought to be. Afterwards, we're ecstatic. We make our way back to the car for the 3 hour ride home. Some more bread and lasagna, and we make our way safely back to Cincinnati, enjoying a Bruckner 2nd as the miles roll by, but, for days afterward, and even still, I'm haunted by the melodies of the 6th Symphony, especially the Adagio. If I can't get a replay of this on the internet, I'll have to make a trip back up just

to record it on FM radio. Amazing. Watch for Maestro Sanderling and this Toledo Symphony Orchestra. They're something else!

THE CONCERT WILL BE BROADCAST ON THURSDAY FEB 25TH AT 8:00 PM
ON WGTF FM 91.0

Symphony # 7 in E major by Anton Bruckner (1884 version) by the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music Philharmonia Orchestra under the direction of Marc Gibson
26 Jan 2010 at the J. Ralph Corbett Auditorium at the University of Cincinnati.

The CCM is one of the premier music schools in the world. This concert was an unexpected treat, and these students are very skilled and talented just to get into the program. It was held in the evening, and Ken & I didn't meet beforehand, but got there in plenty of time for this one. I saw him on the left halfway down from the stage. I was in the box seats at the far right. Maestro Gibson addressed the group before they began and basically recapped all the Bruckner we've had in the area lately (but not mentioning the concert in Toledo), and mentioning how wonderful that it (Amen!) and also remarking that at one time Bruckner sought an honorary degree from UC. He didn't get one, but, according to Maestro Gibson, 'here is your degree'. They opened with the Prelude to Die Meistersinger by Wagner. It's nicely done, and we are suitably pleased and appreciative of the work. It's all I can do not to start singing: "Da zu Dir der heiland kam..." as it finishes. [James Levine (CCM alumnus) will be coming back to conduct a new staging of Die Meistersinger this summer at Music Hall with the Cincinnati Opera.]

The 7th Symphony begins, and I follow in my score, enjoying every minute! It's just sparkling, moving, and, with the exception of a horn warble or two here or there, quite good, and very polished. Maestro Gibson's expression transmits his intention, and this interpretation is super as well. All these young players are so talented. Afterwards we express our appreciation—applause and Bravos, and I take a moment to congratulate and thank him personally. I mention the Toledo concert. "Oh, the things you miss out on..." he replies. Very personable fellow with a talented young Orchestra. If this is the future, then we're in pretty good hand.

Ken & I meet briefly in the foyer, raving about the work, and, before long it's back out into the cold air from whence we came, thrilled and inspired, because that's what the music of Anton Bruckner does to us! God bless his memory and God surely takes the glory for this inspired genius' music.

To my knowledge there's no radio broadcast scheduled for this work, but I will check the CCM website to see if it's offered there. I hope that you enjoyed this report, and the next trip we're looking at is the Symphony #4 in Columbus, OH with the Columbus Symphony Orchestra with Christopher Seaman conducting. Respectfully submitted:

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