Bruckner

THE FIRE in Bruckner had free channel. Logs were not felled across its road. No neuro-watchman sprang alert as to an alarm when it began its stirring and coilings preparatory to motion, and promptly set to beating it from its course and driving it in alien directions. No haggard fear commenced running about, hissing, "Take care, this is not modern; this is not the symphony of the future; this is not what is wanted by our time; this will not free the Austrian youth and let floods of life over the sands; this is not greater than Brahms; this is not the most important form of music; this is not carrying Beethoven further than Beethoven could go." Something did not shrill, "Yonder is a man, your contemporary, who has done revolutionary work; make this modern, make it new and important; you must give just this nuance, you must give just that tone!" There was no floating baseless mind to interfere, to wrench the bud from its root, to commence kneading and forcing and trimming, to look into the world and get ideas and then give the musician back his substance wrapped in tight neat packages. There was the fire, only; rising, towering, finding its path; and the road before it was clear of obstructions.

What came out of Bruckner and became song of instruments is unmarred by the choking fingers of the floating mind; witness of the easiness of the passage it had into the world. Symphonies and religious services composed by him have the innocency and the largeness of such stuffs as are dredged deep where life has no weakness. The music is the speech of the heart, simple and

direct and unaffected, and reverent and strong in mood. There is no room for jewelry, for the facile, for the pretty, where these grave and lofty tones are found. Bruckner's symphonies have scarce commenced heaving their mighty volumes through time, before we know we are come into the world of deep breaths and far vistas and profound experience. We hear some one singing; singing as though none were near to hear the song, and as though it issued forth for its own good sake; singing out of great ecstasies and great solitudes. The tones have their own distinct accent, strong and uncouth and soft-colored. A horn commences its dreamful speech over *pianissimo* strings; and what comes is old, something which must have been in every *allemande*, something which must have been in Allemanic forests long since, and that was again in Weber; and which is new nevertheless, freighted with new solemnity and melancholy and pain.

And Bruckner's works are large in form as in conception. They bring us into contact with an elemental and taurian strength. The lung capacity of the man, the vast span and breadth of his themes and thematic groups make the majority of composers seem asthmatic. The rhythmic hurl, curve, and freshness of his rude, lumbering, and troll-like scherzi subjects; the Homeric delight shown by him in ruddy sonorities, in the exuberant blasts of the reinforced brass; the cubical bulk of so many of his opening and final movements, make it appear to the fancy as though an elemental spirit had broken forth. Once the slow, oxlike power is gotten in motion; once the Bruckner orchestra begins squaring its great monoliths of tone, then, mountainous things commence to happen. The great gradual climaxes of the adagios of the symphonies; the long powerfully sustained ecstasies with their wildly and solemnly chanting trumpets, have something almost terrible in their vehemence and amount. The great battering-rams are slowly gotten in action. But, once heaved forward, they crash walls down.

The man was an innocent, seeing only his own idea. Modern music has no greater example of perfect unsophistication and oneness. Bruckner must have lived in complete obliviousness of

his surroundings. A sort of rudimentary consciousness of things was there, perhaps, sufficient to steer him through a few duties; but the greater part of this man was walking always in the high cathedral of his vision. Waltz-blooded Vienna could scarce have existed for him. What rumbled and flowed beneath his windows; what he passed through in his courses through the streets, was vapor merely. Where a world felt lightness of life and the decay of a state and modern commercial tempi, there the little organist found the walls and windows and vaulting of a cathedral nave; and the high experiences that transformed themselves imperceptibly into the solemn trumpetings and ecstatic gamuts of his unworldly musics. No brother in blank Carthusian aisles could have paced sunken further in prayerfulness, God-passionateness, and Lenten mood, than Bruckner through the city roads. There was the Father in heaven. There was the Father in heaven, and not the houses and the people. There was the Father in heaven who could open his robes and hang them about his child in the cold as the walls of a woolen tent. There was no realness in the world except the sovereign moments when he lifted his child out of the lonely gray air into his bosom, and held him tight with his hand till the good minute went and the clouds of beatitude dwindled in the sad color of the world.

Here was the paradox: the medieval God-lover, God-embracer, in contemporary Vienna! Bruckner not only was an innocent; he was a mystic, too. On the back of this subject of Francis Joseph's, there sat the robe of the world-estranged seer. The German mystics are his kinsmen more than are the musicians; more than is the religio-philosophical Beethoven of the Ninth Symphony and the *Missa Solemnis*, from whom he stems; more than is the pietistic Bach, whose God-love he shared. To be sure, Bruckner remains an Austrian composer in his idiom, if not in his thought. His love for soft orchestral effects, for rich full color, links him with Schubert. Like Schubert, he speaks major in the minor keys. Indeed, there are pages of his that make him seem the most Austrian of all composers; the one

least affected by Italian sweetness, and imbued most strongly with the uncontaminated racial traits. The contemporary of Wagner and Brahms and Franck, Bruckner brings to mind not so much the refinements of his own century as the uncouthness of the Allemanic tribesmen, his ancestors, who smeared their long hair with butter and brewed thick black beers. For all the magnificences of his orchestration, he remains the Upper Austrian peasant, uncultivated, clumsy, naïve. One of his works, a *Te Deum,* is qualified with the adjective "peasant"; all his work, so heavy-limbed and slow-blooded, deserves the title. The spirit of lightness, of the graceful dance, of the delicate jest, of the subtle half-statement, present in so many Austrian musicians, in Mozart, for example, is absent almost entirely from his work. Absent, too, is the gaiety and charm and sweetness of Schubert. Bruckner's dance is all hoofs, all heavy springs, and drunken fury. Even the trios of his scherzi, tender, dreamy, and intermezzo-like, have a certain predominant homeliness and humbleness. The good-natured, sluggish South German farmer dreams across his sunny land.

And yet, of course, one finds oneself setting him by the side of the religious mystics. One feels in Bruckner a complete removal from the wórld of objective reality, a completer tendency to consider all events purely from a psychological viewpoint, a completer habit of perceiving in the outer world merely the image of his own inner, than one finds either in the later Beethoven or in the most Mennonite pages of Bach's cantatas. It is in the company of a seer like Jacob Boehme, say, that one finds oneself instinctively placing him. In the square massive symphonies of the modern, as in the confessions of the seventeenth-century imaginer of the *centrum naturae,* the "virgin Sophia," one glimpses the workings of a similar excessive transformation of the lust of the eye and the other senses into the power of mystical and almost hallucinatory vision. There are pages in the adagios of Bruckner that appear strangely akin to the records of his inner experiences left by the cobbler of Görlitz; to the experiences of the mystic marriages, the perception

of fiery symbols, the progression from lugubrious depressed states through ecstasy to tranquillity. How it comes that in listening to the performances of ninety instrumentalists on their fiddles, pipes, and horns, one should enter through such forbidden doors: that, it is not easy to explain. Perhaps the cause of the strange communication lies in Bruckner's predilection for themes of a chorale or hymnlike character. It is possible that it results from the general austere and yet strangely soft and tender character of his style. His harmony is rich, solemn, stately. He delighted in the use of full, grandiose progressions of chords in the brass, through which harp music sweeps. His climaxes are slow, distended, piercing; it is possible that the solemn tones of the trombones, the sobbing of horns through pulsating chords of shrilling wind and strings, are in some measure the origin of the sensations communicated. It may be that the general character of the work, merely, predisposes one to interpret so the ecstasies. We cannot say for sure. It is doubtful whether any analysis of form, no matter how keen and scientific it may be, can arrive at elucidating these mysteries of art. And yet, we know full well that just as, in some mysterious manner, the Bruckner scherzi bring one the sensations of being in the open air, of seeing the green earth and gray sky, so, too, the Bruckner adagios give us the sensations of an inner hallucinatory vision. The light that goes up in us from the chanting of the clear, high, loud orchestra in those movements, is not, we are somehow positive, the light that comes from the sun. It is not the light irradiated into an hundred tints by the orchestra of Debussy and the other impressionists. It is the dazzling shine that some dreaming men have suddenly seen piercing at them from out an opaque wall, or seen flooding upward at night from earth strewn thick with leaves.

A universal genius, of course, the man scarcely was. Immense though his breath, his oxlike power of sustainment, the power of his rhythmical impulse were; clear though the channel through which he gave himself to the world was; something, something important, was wanting in his mentality. One feels composers

dwarf in stature beside him. His muscle is greater than theirs. Yet, they are shapelier, nimbler, livelier than this lumbering man. He seems one of the Titans who sought to storm Olympus; never one of the calm gods who vanquished the frenzied Ossa-pilers.

The balance, the round development, the many-sidedness which were Beethoven's, for example, never were in Bruckner, it seems. The maturity upon which solid musical culture can erect itself did not come to him. Had Bruckner grown to the point where condensation, close interpretation, rigorous selection of material would have become a necessity to him, it is possible he might have accomplished loftier things. His rhythmical sense, his feeling for color, particularly the color of horns, was superior to the master of Bonn's. And still, his achievement is really vaguer than Beethoven's; for the reason that his sense of form remained unevolved. The corner movements of the symphonies, in particular, for in the organization of scherzi and adagios Bruckner was far more able, suffer from brokenness. They are not really organic. They heave directly into life, it is true; Bruckner's attacks are exciting and daring; he begins right in the middle of things. But when, in accord with the demands of sonata form, he introduces his second subject, or, more exactly, his second group of subjects, one finds that apparently the trajectory has been broken and another one is commenced. It is as though the composer were commencing his work over again. Beethoven made sure that a musical logic demanded, at a certain place, the entrance of the lyrical theme. But Bruckner appears to have trusted to another logic; one perhaps not musical, for the justification of the entrance of the balancing principle. He merely sets a second piece beside the first; and leaves us to reconcile them in our minds as best we may. Not before the arrival of the development section does he commence his own "composition" of the two warring principles.

With all his faults, Bruckner remains the most neglected of symphonic composers. To be sure, there is no major symphonist, Brahms, Schubert, and Tchaikovsky excepted, whose work is

not neglected by the conductors of the American orchestras. Even here in New York, where two resident and two visiting orchestras play regularly,* Beethoven himself is known to the concert public principally through five or six of his nine symphonies. Mozart is even more shabbily treated. Once, or, at the utmost, twice a year, a program holds the *Jupiter,* or the G-minor Symphony. The rest—is silence. But, when compared with Haydn, Mozart is as one being rushed. Ever since the departure of the terrible Dr. Muck,† Haydn the symphonist remains very much in the abodes where the eternal are, and returns but seldom to the earth. The lions of the podium now rampant are very insensitive to the beauties of the adorable Haydn. They are too busy savoring to the full the subtleties of the C-major Symphony of Schubert, the *From the New World* of Dvořák, to penetrate the scores of one of the most perennially fresh and delicate of composers. Smaller, though scarcely less brilliant, men fare quite as illy at their hands. Scarce ever are to be heard the symphonies of the generous and colorful Borodin. Sibelius is miserably neglected. So, too, are the modern Frenchmen. The hard, scintillant B-flat Symphony of d'Indy is the rarest of visitors. That of Dukas is entirely unknown. Unknown are the works of Magnard.‡ Meanwhile the program-makers invariably find opportunities galore for bringing before their audience the indecent exposures of Tchaikovsky.

But of all symphonists, it is Anton Bruckner who is most severely mistreated. For he wrote little besides symphonies. As

* The two resident orchestras were The Philharmonic Society of New York and The Symphony Society of New York, which were merged in 1928; the two visiting orchestras were the Boston and Philadelphia Symphonies.

† Karl Muck (1859–1940), German conductor who conducted the Boston Symphony first in 1906 and was made permanent conductor in 1912. His pro-German sentiments during World War I led to his internment until the end of the war and his dismissal from his post.

‡ Albéric Magnard (1865–1914), French composer and student of Vincent d'Indy's. Magnard was interested in "musical architecture, not poetic expression."

composer, he is principally the composer of nine massive compositions of the sort. The body of his chamber music is a very slight one. The chief of his compositions other than his symphonies are a few church works, the *Peasant Te Deum,* and three instrumental masses. In performing him with great infrequency, the orchestral leaders are consequently effectively depriving the man of the life rightfully his, and us, the public, of the music of a weighty artist. For he lives either in the symphony concert, or no place at all.

It is not difficult to guess why a spirit as mighty as Bruckner's should be kept, like a genie of the *Arabian Nights,* corked in a jar by the confraternity of musicians. The musicians, for their part, harp on Bruckner's grotesqueries. There are two composers on whom musicians are most stupid, Moussorgsky, and the Austrian mystic. Every day one meets some solemn performing person who informs one that Moussorgsky could not compose; and one has but to mention the name of Bruckner to him, too, to hear remarks equally inane. Bruckner "was a madman"; did he not most childishly dedicate his Ninth Symphony *Zum lieben Gott?** To be sure, the dedication makes one smile. But then, Bruckner had presented his Eighth to His Imperial and Royal Apostolic Majesty Francis Joseph I, Emperor of Austria and Apostolic King of Hungary, etc., etc.; and for a devout Austrian there was only one person to whom one might fittingly present a ninth, the Francis Joseph beyond the clouds. Moreover, the "madman" had taken the opening phrase of Isolde's Liebestod and fugued it! And though tomes have been written to prove that several centuries before Bruckner other composers lifted the same theme from Wagner and fugued it, the musicians must have their little joke.

No, it is the confraternity that is grotesque. If *Boris* is withdrawn from the repertory of the Metropolitan Opera House, to the applause of all the Henry T. Fincks;† if the

* "For the love of God."

† Henry T. Finck (1854–1926), music critic for *The Nation* and prolific author. He wrote books on Chopin, Wagner, Grieg, and Richard Strauss.

conductors of the metropolitan orchestras neglect above all others the symphonies of Anton Bruckner, it is not for the reason the Russian and the Upper Austrian could not make music. It is for the reason that the rarefied air that blows through the works of both demands lungs stouter and hearts higher than the musical unions and the company of the conductors can plentifully supply. One can scarcely be a practicing musician and do the little jobs the public demands musicians do, and still feel life with the altitude and the solemnity and reverence with which these men felt it. The world would first have to be lost to one.

Strauss

STRAUSS was never the fine, the perfect artist. Even in the first flare of youth, even at the time when he was the meteoric, dazzling figure flaunting over all the baldpates of the universe the standard of the musical future, it was apparent that there were serious flaws in his spirit. Despite the audacity with which he realized his amazing and poignant and ironic visions, despite his youthful fire and exuberance—and it was as something of a golden youth of music that Strauss burst upon the world—one sensed in him the not quite beautifully deepened man, heard at moments a callow accent in his eloquence, felt that an unmistakable alloy was fused with the generous gold. The purity, the inwardness, the searchings of the heart, the religious sentiment of beauty, present so unmistakably in the art of the great men who had developed music, were wanting in his work. He had neither the unswerving sense of style, nor the weightiness of touch, that mark the perfect craftsman. He was not sufficiently a scrupulous and exacting artist. It was apparent that he was careless, too easily contented with some of his material, not always happy in his detail. Mixed with his fire there was a sort of laziness and indifference. But, in those days, Strauss was unmistakably the genius, the original and bitingly expressive