

When recognition finally came to Anton Bruckner, conductors began to take a livelier interest in his music. Among them was the great Hans Richter. In search of possibly overlooked music by Bruckner, Richter called upon the latter at his lodgings in Vienna. Bruckner obligingly pulled from its place upon a shelf his First Symphony and handed it to the conductor for examination.

Richter turned the pages of the score with increasing wonder and surprise and finally exclaimed: "Professor, you must have been madly in love when you wrote this symphony!"

"Yes, I was always madly in love in those days," said Bruckner.

Deciding that he had found the very thing he was looking for, Richter tucked the music under his arm and was making off with it when Bruckner restrained him, saying: "But Mr. Conductor, *das kecke Beserl* must first be polished!"

This term, by which the Symphony has since been known, is an Austrian expression for which an English equivalent is not easily found. The composer's biographer, Gabriel Engel, has translated it: "the fresh young girlie." Some commentators believe that Bruckner had facetiously bestowed upon his symphony a name given by Viennese students to snappy young girls of the town. It was Engel's belief that the elderly composer was reminiscing when he spoke the words and that he had in mind the 17-year-old Josefine Lang, who was his current "crush" in 1865, when the Symphony was begun.

Like Beethoven, Schubert and Brahms, Bruckner never married, and even less than any of these was he cut out for matrimony. Yet he was always succumbing to the charms of some pretty girl years his junior.

Emma Thaner, one of his former pupils at Linz, where he was Cathedral organist for many years, has given us this picture of the rustic swain, for even though he lived in cities, first Linz and then Vienna itself, Bruckner's peasant upbringing never deserted him. His speech was provincial, his clothes unpressed, his table manners atrocious. Her pathetically amusing sketch of the always courting, always frustrated Bruckner is given us in Auer's *Anton Bruckner*:

"Love played many a prank upon him. I believe he was in love with every one of his girl pupils who had passed her sixteenth year, though it was the dark-eyed, black-haired ones whom he preferred above the others . . .

"I can still see him before me, telling about his experiences and enlivening his stories with expressive gestures, while he would cast frequent side-long glances towards a large mirror. He loved to talk about his 'conquests' (as he called them) which were in reality only his pursuit of this or that girl (she might have been a servant girl for all he cared, so long as she was pretty). How happy he was when at a turning of the way, his 'victim' would finally bend her head nervously in answer to his effusively 'polite' greeting, giving him (as he called it) 'a smile full of meaning.' Invariably he would end these stories in a voice raised to an exultant pitch, exclaiming triumphantly, 'I'm a regular devil I am! A regular devil!' Then he would gaze at himself in the mirror with frank admiration."

For the benefit of those who are discouraged by the length of the Bruckner symphonies and their general slowness of pace, it may be said that No. 1 is shorter and more animated than any of its successors. It was not, however, the first symphony that Bruckner wrote. His initial effort was a *Symphony in F minor*, composed when he was a student of Otto Kitzler. The orchestral score has not been published, only a transcription for piano.

There followed a *Symphony in D minor*, published posthumously. In 1895, the last year but one of his life, Bruckner came upon this work in a bundle of old manuscripts. He claimed to have forgotten it and wrote upon the score: "Symphony No. 0 not at all valid (only an attempt)."

Actually, then, Bruckner wrote not nine symphonies but eleven. Of these, three are in D minor (Nos. 0, 3 and 9) and three are in C minor (Nos. 1, 2 and 8). Rarely indeed have composers written two successive symphonies in the same key. This emphasis upon the keys of D minor and C minor bears witness to Bruckner's own fondness for them, and some have gone so far as to suggest that in displaying this partiality, Bruckner was consciously following in the footsteps of Beethoven. (That composer's Ninth Symphony is in the key of D minor and he chose C minor for his mighty Fifth and other significant works.) Also attributable to the Beethoven Ninth, as many believe, is Bruckner's trick of beginning his symphonies with a string tremolo. That device is not employed in No. 1, which commences in march-like fashion with reiterated C's in the basses and cellos and E-flats in the violas.

Some first symphonies disclose the essence of a composer's style, while the majority of them are largely imitative of the music of others. But since the composer of the Bruckner First had written not only the two symphonies mentioned above, but also a considerable quantity of other music, we are not surprised to find in it his unmistakable voice and style. It still has certain features that set it apart from its successors. One of these is an abundance of notes of small denomination. Thirty-seconds, rare in Bruckner, even in his Adagios, swarm across certain pages in the first movement and an unusual number of 16ths are found in the Finale. All this contributes to the un-Bruckner-like animation that sets *Das Kecke Beserl* apart from the other symphonies.

Many have commented upon its youthful freshness and that quality is most certainly in evidence. It is invigorating, while the others, especially the last three, are profound. In this connection, however, the word youthful, while it accurately describes the symphony, must be taken with reservations. Bruckner was forty-one when he began it and he completed it at forty-two.

In addition to Beethoven, the composers who chiefly influenced Bruckner were Schubert and Wagner. There is not much Wagner in No. 1, though certain proclamations in the brass will remind some of the master of Bayreuth.

Bruckner and Schubert had much in common. Both were native Austrians who reflected in their music certain aspects of the life of their country. They were the sons of impecunious school masters and for a time taught school themselves. Both had a gift for spontaneous and memorable melody, a fondness for harmonic color and a facility in modulation. We also find in both an occasional prolixity and looseness of structure, together with a preference for themes of a melodic, rather than a motive character, that have given us collectively what we call the Austrian, as

opposed to the German type of symphony. The next and last composer in this particular succession was Gustav Mahler.

Neither Schubert nor Bruckner could be properly described as intellectual, but Schubert was by far the more worldly of the two. The essence of Bruckner's nature was his deep religious faith that brings to his music the element of mysticism and in the later symphonies, particularly, a quality that has often been described as Apocalyptic. When Bruckner came to Vienna he was commonly referred to as "a humble musician of God" and nothing could better describe him.

Schubert, as we know, set texts of all kinds and proved himself responsive to their varied meanings. Bruckner set no texts other than those of a religious character and he is said to have confined his reading to the Bible. We can say of both composers that they were natural and instinctive geniuses who for the most part went about things in their own way and followed their native bent rather than a course prescribed by others.

Bruckner and Brahms were not only contemporaries, they were rivals, albeit quite unwilling ones in late 19th century Vienna. The Wagner faction, needing a symphonist to pit against Brahms, found its most likely candidate in Bruckner. The latter was savagely attacked by the ruthless and relentless Eduard Hanslick. More than anyone else, Hanslick should have appreciated the non-literary character of the Bruckner symphonies, but for him Bruckner was inevitably tarred with the hated Wagnerian stick.

The symphonies of Brahms and Bruckner are essentially dissimilar. Brahms achieves the Classical ideal of momentum and continuity, which in general either evaded Bruckner or failed to interest him. The most conspicuous lack in the Brahms symphony is the true scherzo of the Beethoven type, for which, save in the case of No. 4, he substitutes a sort of intermezzo and he replaced the broad Beethoven Adagio, imitated and ultimately eclipsed by Bruckner, with something more in the nature of the Schumann Romanza.

In the typical Bruckner symphony the Adagio is the climax of the whole. Such disproportion is not present in No. 1, which follows the usual course of 19th century symphonies in having a steady progress from first to last.

The composer whose name is most frequently associated with that of Bruckner is neither Schubert nor Brahms, but Mahler, to whom allusion as an "Austrian" symphonist has already been made. This linking of their names, so commonly encountered in this country, has been prompted not so much by resemblances in their music as by the fact that their symphonies are long. Mahler used voices frequently in his symphonies and even when he did not, his motivation was sometimes a song text and he incorporated in his symphonies songs he had previously composed. Anything farther from Bruckner's methods could hardly be imagined.

One thing that these two composers have been compelled to share was, and to some extent still is, the hostility of the professional critic. Mahler used to say, "My time will come" and history has proved him right. Bruckner could have said the same thing and have been no less accurate. Already in Austria and Germany his place is beside or even above that of Brahms. He certainly was far more original.

Critical opposition to the Bruckner symphonies began early. The premiere of the First at Linz, conducted by the composer, could not have been a satisfactory presentation of the work. The orchestra was that of the local theatre, augmented by players from a military band. In 1869 all the musicians must have found the music strange.

The audience received it cordially—Bruckner was a beloved figure in the Danube city—but the reviewers sounded the first notes in the long chorus of dispraise. So upset was Bruckner by this unfavorable verdict that he was compelled to seek medical attention, and the complete cure was only effected by the composition of his *F minor Mass*.

Reference has already been made to the march-like beginning of the first movement, marked Allegro. In measures 21-24 we come upon a striking anticipation of the chief theme of the Finale of No. 7. (Another premonition is found in the Scherzo. Here, in measures 46-50 occur the first of some descending scales that we hear again in the Scherzo of this same No. 7.) Woodwinds provide a transition to the expected lyric theme in the relative major and in such melodies Bruckner is always happy. The music turns vigorous and there are characteristic octave leaps in the trumpets. Brass instruments intone a broad theme against the aforementioned 32nds in the violins and violas. The development begins vaguely, but Bruckner soon gathers his forces and we are brought to the conventional reprise of the exposition with the second subject making its proper reappearance in the tonic major. This recapitulation is abbreviated and the movement ends with an exciting accelerando.

The opening of the Adagio is unusual. Bruckner starts off broodingly, mysteriously (in *F minor*) with free chromaticism and frequent modulations. There are two climaxes and this section ends quietly. Now comes the expected Bruckner melody, a theme that begins with the upward leap of an octave, mentioned above. The key is B-flat. There is a middle section in E-flat major, Andante,  $\frac{3}{4}$ . The free reprise brings what one analyst has called "the symphony's greatest pages." We are now in A-flat and the movement ends tranquilly in that key. Tonally, this is the most curious movement in all the Bruckner symphonies, and its genesis has been traced to the composer's famous organ improvisations, although the imaginative Engel prefers to connect it specifically with the "love affair" described at the beginning of these notes.

By comparison, the Scherzo is plain sailing. The key is G minor and Bruckner has given it the tempo direction *Lebhaft* (lively). The chief theme, which enters at the 10th bar, has been variously described as "drastic," "rustic," and "demonic." There is a Trio in the tonic major, marked *Langsam*. The slow Trio is a Bruckner peculiarity, more celebrated examples being found in the Seventh and Eighth Symphonies.

Bruckner has given the Finale the indication Fast and fiery (*Bewegt und feurig*). The movement is in sonata form. The chief theme, like that of the preceding movement, begins with the octave leap. The second theme is in E-flat. After a development both themes return in C major, and a transition leads to the triumphal Coda, in which we hear what has been described as a hymn of thanksgiving.

In 1891 the University of Vienna, where he had lectured on musical theory for fifteen years, gave Bruckner an honorary doctor's degree. He reciprocated by dedicating to the University his newly-revised First Symphony. *Das Kecke Beserl* had received the "polishing" that in Bruckner's opinion made her ready for performance. She has never had as many as she deserves.