

Anton Bruckner

Symphony No. 4
in E Flat Major
("Romantic")

Original Orchestration

Played by the
SAXONIAN STATE ORCHESTRA
Conducted by
KARL BÖHM



M-331

NORMAN H. ROBERTS

M-331 (14211-14218)

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Anton Bruckner

(1824-1896)

BECAUSE he came of a line of schoolmasters it seemed inevitable that Anton Bruckner should follow in the footsteps of his forbears. But Nature had endowed the lad with unusual musical gifts, so that when he began preparing himself for the work of teaching, his musical talent elbowed its way to the foreground with an urgency too strong to be ignored. At the age of twelve he attended the Jesuit Abbey of St. Florian, and no doubt much of the loftiness and magnitude of his compositions were the result of his life there.

At the age of twenty-five Bruckner was appointed organist of the Cathedral at Linz. Here he became friendly with Kitzler, conductor of the opera, whose extensive experience was of great benefit to him. Kitzler introduced Bruckner to the music of Wagner—a shrine at which the composer never ceased to worship.

During the years his fame grew slowly but steadily. In 1867 he was made professor of organ, counterpoint, and composition at the Vienna Conservatory. Later he was appointed lecturer on music theory at the Vienna University. A group of his admirers helped establish him further, in the face of the opposing Brahms faction, who particularly disliked him because they regarded him not only as an adherent of Wagner, but also accused him of attempting to apply Wagner's theories to symphonic art.

While it is true that in many instances a resemblance to Wagner is evident, it has been proved that both men oftentimes had the same musical idea, Bruckner in some cases having had it first. Be that as it may, the grandeur of Bruckner's music is undeniable. It is different. And that is perhaps the reason why it has been long in moving from the realm of infrequent performance to the place on orchestral programs it so richly deserves.

Bruckner's music is not identified by the characteristics that mark symphonic works of the 19th century. While not lacking in lyrical and dramatic touches, it is essentially epic. Two distinguishing features are outstanding, an expression of rustic naïveté, the result of atavism; and a religious ecstasy which had its origin in the cathedral organ, the mass, and other contributing influences of his environment at St. Florian.

His symphonies are not the sensuous, amorous expressions of a highly nervous nature; they are not vehemently revolutionary like Beethoven; nor are they flavored with the sweetness of Schubert. They are more like the outpourings of some forthright medieval believer, disturbed now and then by the torment of doubt and despair.

BRUCKNER'S FOURTH SYMPHONY

It has been known for some time among students of Bruckner that the scores from which his works have been played, as well as the miniature scores, varied in certain respects from the manuscripts. The nature, the full extent, and even the causes of these differences between the manuscripts and the printed scores and parts are not yet

all known, but the publication of several volumes of the Critical Complete Edition of Bruckner's works of the Musikwissenschaftlicher Verlag of Vienna, under the editorship of Robert Haas and Alfred Orel has revealed in the older scores a mass of editings, discrepancies, alterations and falsifications without precedent or parallel in the history of music.

It is as well here briefly to review the relation between the scores by which Bruckner's Symphonies have hitherto been known and upon which the existing estimate of him has been based, and the recent published scores which are held to be authentic Bruckner, "founded on the last known wishes of the composer." The old scores are the result of editings made by at least three men—Franz Schalk, his brother Josef, and Ferdinand Loewe. Bruckner's simplicity and servility are proverbial—in his naïve gratitude he tipped Hans Richter a thaler for conducting the first performance of this Fourth Symphony. Bruckner was not well treated by the majority of his Viennese contemporaries. Brahms despised him, and Hanslick, as the avowed anti-Wagnerian and loud-speaker of the Brahms party, saw to it that Bruckner was well and thoroughly damned in the most widely read section of the Viennese press. Bruckner had a small but brilliant group of admirers who regarded him as Wagner's symphonic counterpart. The leading lights of this group of young progressivists were Hugo Wolf and the aforementioned editors of his scores. To the end of his life Bruckner lacked complete confidence in his power and he craved performances of his music. His childlike and pathetic reverence for men of any eminence made him wax in the hands of such cultivated and already well-known young men as the Schalks and Loewe. They, for their part, acted with the best of intentions. They were above all things Wagnerians, their ideal of instrumentation was that it should make music sound like Wagner's, and since Bruckner's scores were not Wagnerian enough they altered them until they came nearer to their ideal specification. Their line of reasoning seems to have been that this process of Wagnerization was the only satisfactory and speedy way of establishing Bruckner in the esteem of the important section of the public which shared their Wagnerian tastes. It is not known with any degree of certainty to what extent Bruckner himself willingly acquiesced to these emendations—it is, I think, probable that he would have agreed, to get his works performed, to alterations even more drastic than those to which the Schalks subjected his works: but there is evidence which leads one to believe that he regarded the alterations as a temporary measure. Only in the last two years have some of Bruckner's original scores been published and these records of the Fourth Symphony are made from the newly published *Originalfassung* which was first performed in Germany a few months ago, in Austria at the Linz Festival in July 1936, and in London by the Royal Philharmonic Society, on November 12th, 1936. Dr. Karl Böhm conducted both the German and the London performances. The principal importance of the publication of the authentic scores is that they compel a re-estimation of each of Bruckner's orchestral works and of Bruckner as a composer. The weightiest and most often repeated criticisms of Bruckner have been directed at the frequent long pauses—his habit of stopping, drawing a line and taking a deep breath before starting again—his too frequent employment of pedal points, his many changes of tempo and his Wagnerian orchestration (c.f. Professor

Tovey's suggestion that Bruckner would make a welcome substitute in the concert repertoire for bleeding chunks of butcher's meat chopped from Wagner's operas). Nearly all these charges upon which Bruckner has been arraigned and condemned are the faults of his editors, not of Bruckner himself. He had his faults, but they were not those for which he has been blamed, and the publication of the new scores and of these records are most important steps to the revaluation of a great composer long neglected, underestimated and misunderstood in this country.

FIRST MOVEMENT

(*Bewegt, nicht zu schnell*)

The Symphony opens magically. Over *pianissimo* string tremolos a solo horn plays the theme. Search where you will through symphonic literature there is no work which begins more impressively than this: even Brahms's greatest admirer says "at no time ought it to have been possible not to recognize that the opening of the Symphony is a thing of extraordinary beauty and depth." This theme is soon taken over by the woodwind with the horns in imitation from which clever and impressive modulations lead to a subsidiary subject.

This coming as it does at the fifty-first bar, is the first evidence of the energy and tempo customary in first movements. The mixed rhythm was a favourite device with Bruckner, who made much use of it in both the third and eighth symphonies. Incidentally, from bar 43 onwards almost to the introduction of the second subject the old score is entirely different in lay-out—the scoring is so altered as to be almost unrecognizable: the editors also inserted a *langsamer* at bar 43 and a *Tempo I* at bar 51.

A long-held horn note leads to the second subject, which is two-fold, a lovely lyrical tune in the violas and a gayer melody in the violins, which Bruckner said that he had taken from the "Zizibe" call of the tomtit.

The rhythm and character of the subsidiary subject burst in for a while, but give way to a repetition of the second subject group. Again the second subject asserts itself, now in masterful form, and holds almost undisputed sway until a long upward crescendo of chromatic string figures leads to an arresting fanfare for the whole brass choir. The end of the exposition is masterly. Over a soft drum roll on B flat vitality seems to ebb, the second theme falls slowly into fragments and animation is almost entirely suspended. The development begins with chromatic scales from the strings with soft echoes of the first theme in the woodwind, after which more chromatic passages, now from the flutes and clarinets, usher in the same idea in F major. This is magnificently developed in conjunction with its subsidiary theme. Inversions are, as was Bruckner's wont, there in plenty, but only an academic devoid of aesthetic sense would protest against Bruckner's free employment of this device in the light of the results he obtains with it. The climax of this section is the statement of the chief subject now amplified to the proportions of a mighty chorale.

There is not here the space for analysis of the remainder of the movement, neither would it much profit the listener. With the foregoing material Bruckner builds up a recapitulation and a *coda* of awe-inspiring majesty and grandeur.

SECOND MOVEMENT

(*Andante quasi Allegretto*)

The slow movement of this symphony has much of the character of a long funeral march. Over a rhythmic figure set in the first two bars 'cellos play a long elegiac melody which has a short but much used pendant figure.

The woodwind and the violins present contrasting material. A deeply moving chorale-like episode for the strings leads, via a descending chromatic woodwind figure, to the second subject, sung by the violas against a background of violins and 'cellos *pizzicato*. The beauty of sound in the succeeding passage has few equals in all music. Three counter-melodies of exquisite lyrical charm are woven around the principal theme (horn) and as it progresses from C flat major through D major to F major and A flat major the texture becomes ever richer until a sudden quick drop to sinister depths in the horns and basses makes way for a return of an earlier subject to which plaintive cries from the oboe are now added. The movement ends with a deeply moving *coda*.

THIRD MOVEMENT

(*Scherzo—Bewegt, B flat major*)

This fine scherzo was an afterthought on Bruckner's part. Four years after he had completed the symphony (1874) he revised it, cutting out the original scherzo in favour of this so-called "Hunting Scherzo." It begins with a delightful figure for the horns:

A quieter counter-theme is soon added.

The form is simple: an exposition ending on the dominant (F major), a middle section followed by a repetition of the first section closing in B flat. The short trio is an easy going Landler.

The Scherzo is repeated after the trio, which means playing side 10 again after side 9, if the work is to be heard as Bruckner intended.

The Schalks and Loewe took it upon themselves to make a cut of 66 bars in the repeat of the Scherzo, an excision which Sir Donald Tovey, believing the older scores to be authentic Bruckner, approved in these terms, "The da capo of the scherzo violates Bruckner's precedents in another way by taking an extremely effective short cut from the first stage of the exposition to the beginning of the development, the sudden hush being highly dramatic."

The alterations in the scoring of this movement are unusually extensive even for Bruckner's well meaning friends. Whatever their intentions they did not lack patience and industry.

FINALE

(*Bewegt, doch nicht zu schnell, E flat*)

Over a pedal on B flat which is held for over 40 bars, the germ of the main theme is given out, and quickly rises in pitch, speed and intensity. The rhythm of the horns

from the Scherzo cuts across it as it surges its way to the climax at which it suddenly assumes this marmoreal form.

A second mighty wave of sound sweeps upward to a peak at which the first subject of the first movement is prominent in a triumphant affirmation of the key of E flat. The second subject has an affinity with the thematic material of the slow movement, and a pair of enchantingly simple pendants and with which it is soon combined.

An energetic tutti in which the violins maintain figures against brilliant writing for the brass, leads via a bridge of the second subject group and Bruckner's favourite solo flute link-device to the development. This begins with an earlier subject now inverted. Bruckner has so carefully and fully stated his material in the long exposition that by now the listener knows it almost by heart and he will have no difficulty in following its subsequent adventures and eventual glorification.

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