

Anton Bruckner's Symphony in E-flat major, called the "Romantic," is the best-known of this master's symphonies. This is, no doubt, largely due to its subtitle and the associations connected with it. It was Bruckner himself who coined it, presumably on the advice of his pupil Franz Schalk. The designation "Romantic Symphony" is more than justified in view of the nature-poetry and ingratiating beauty of this work, which is probably more easily accessible to the listener than any of Bruckner's other symphonies. It is difficult to understand why it needed many years — two decades in fact — for the Symphony to win general recognition. Its start was by no means inauspicious. After its first performance in Vienna on February 20th, 1881 not even Hanslick, Bruckner's enemy among his critics, was able to pass over in silence the "extraordinary success" of the new work.

But then, seven years had already elapsed since the E-flat major Symphony was composed. There is little in Bruckner's Fourth to show that it was written during a period full of disappointments for its composer. Round about 1874 Bruckner was most anxious to secure an appointment as a lecturer in the theory of music at Vienna University. His efforts were frustrated by Eduard Hanslick, not only the most influential music critic in Vienna but at the same time professor of musical history at the University. Bruckner's hopes to be appointed to a professorship were not to materialize until the following year.

Working on his E-flat major Symphony was the compensation for these often humiliating efforts to secure an appointment. The first version of the work was begun in 1874 and was completed before the end of that year. In 1878, however, Bruckner fundamentally revised this early version and sketched out a new Scherzo "which describes a hunt, whilst the Trio is a dance tune which is played to the huntsmen during their 'repast.'" Thus the composer himself classified the famous Hunt-Scherzo, the best-known movement from his Fourth Symphony, as an important programmatic episode. This Scherzo, then, occupies a unique position among Bruckner's works which otherwise never show any trace of "program music." The "Romantic Symphony" with its Hunt-Scherzo holds more or less the same place in Bruckner's works as the "Pastorale" among Beethoven's symphonies, and the governing thought of the "Pastorale": "More an expression of sentiment than a description," is equally true of Bruckner's pastoral E-flat major Symphony.

In 1880 the work was revised again; this time the Finale. The score published in 1889 was subject to yet another revision which was made as "the result of the interpretation of the practical musicians

around Bruckner," according to Robert Haas, the editor of the "Original Version" first published in 1936. "Their conception may appear justifiable on account of the unfavorable conditions prevailing at the time of publication, when potential performances by second-rate orchestras and, in general, a limited intellectual capacity on the part of audiences had to be taken into consideration. This point of view, however, now belongs to the past. It led to misinterpretation of the carefully thought-out and logical intentions of the composer and could only have been tolerated by Bruckner as an unavoidable makeshift."

This is also the justification for the far-reaching undertaking of restoring the original versions of Bruckner's symphonies. Today it is the almost generally accepted practice to perform Bruckner's symphonies only in their original form, purged of all additions. The term "original version," however, requires some further explanation: In each case, it refers to the last version authorized by Bruckner himself—without any outside influence. In the case of the Fourth Symphony this is not the first version of 1874, but the second version of 1878 with the Finale of 1880, as it exists in the original manuscript in Bruckner's own handwriting, which the composer himself referred to as the "final version" and which he left to the *Hofbibliothek* in Vienna.

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The "original version" which restores to the score Bruckner's original intentions, is of particular importance in the Fourth since this Symphony owes its character to certain qualities of sound which cannot be arbitrarily changed. These are determined by the timbre of several prominently treated instruments, particularly violas and horns. An example is the very opening of the first movement (*Bewegt, nicht zu schnell* — Moving, not too fast). Above the tremolos of the strings (*ppp*) which are so typical for Bruckner, the solo-horn makes its entry in the third bar with a descending fifth-motive which becomes the central idea for the whole of the E-flat major Symphony. The first subject derives its material from this motive and ends with a vigorously ascending passage. The second subject, too, is initiated by the horn: a blissful chant by the violas, surrounded by birdcall-like violin-figures, supported at its second entry by the horn. This section becomes the center of a thematic group which again abounds in episodes and is linked to the first thematic group by a kind of early development section. The development proper is again introduced by the horn call; it employs mainly material from the first

thematic group. In addition, a solemn chorale played by the brass makes its entry, transforming the "pastoral idyll" into a "heroic landscape," into a religious, sublime mood. The recapitulation, introduced and proceeding in the normal manner, ends in a coda in which the horn motive rounds off the first movement.

The second movement (*Andante quasi Allegretto*) in C minor has the character of a funeral march with its rhythmical figures in the strings and its elegiac cello melody. But this is not Beethoven's heroic chant, it is rather the melancholy of Schubert, with its mixture of grief and consolation, with its simultaneous appearance of bird-call episodes and hymn-like melodies. The second subject of this movement is once again a viola-cantilena above drop-like pizzicatos. The development section, too, is characterized by this ambivalence, by human sorrow and by the voices of nature as a comforting echo. Bruckner provides his own answer in the conclusion of the recapitulation, when the theme of the funeral march assumes hymnic and devoutly religious significance. The movement ends quietly in C major.

The Scherzo (*bewegt* — moving) in B-flat major with its felicitous use of the horns is — even without Bruckner's interpretation — the most popular part of the whole work. String tremolos again start the movement and once more, the horns are the first to raise their voices in an unmistakable hunting call. Horns also play the leading part in the rest of the Scherzo, while a lyrical role is assigned to the violas. The Trio in G-flat major with its "Ländler" melody is a dancing scene full of Austrian charm.

The Finale (*Bewegt, doch nicht zu schnell* — moving, yet not too fast) returns to the original key of E-flat major. After the idealizing pastoral idyll of the first, the elegiac second movement and the hunting episode of the Scherzo, this Finale appears to be the exorcism of all that is demoniac and elemental in Nature. After a grandly conceived introduction the rugged principal theme suddenly makes its entry in unison. As the rather complex movement progresses, elements of the previous movements are re-introduced: the horn call of the first movement as well as melodic reminiscences of the *Andante* of the second subject, which contrasts sharply with the gigantic first theme of the Finale. In the extensive development section, the tender second subject only succeeds in asserting itself in the form of a chorale. A typical Bruckner coda ends the rather freely treated recapitulation. It carries the horn motive to an exalted climax which — even in this "Nature Symphony" of Bruckner — is clearly inspired by the composer's unflinching faith in God.