

When we think of Austrian music in the last third of the nineteenth century, we most likely think of Johannes Brahms. The music of Brahms is like the mountain summit that is clearly visible in all parts of the valley below; but to those who have taken the trouble to climb it, mountaineers have seen a second summit that is equally majestic and this peak may be likened to the music of Anton Bruckner. Unlike the music of the popular Brahms, Bruckner's music was ignored by the Viennese musical Establishment and only in the last twelve years of his life did Bruckner receive the recognition due him. In fact, the Seventh Symphony in E Major proved to be the turning point in Bruckner's life. He had been a school teacher and church organist in various provincial Austrian towns and not until he was forty-four did he venture to Vienna to become a professor at the Vienna Academy of Music. Here he remained until retirement and, two years later, his death in 1896. The Seventh Symphony marked the beginning of Bruckner's late period and brought recognition and more frequent performances in the concert hall. Nevertheless, even after the Seventh Symphony was finished and acclaimed by the world, Bruckner remained more popular in Germany and other parts of Europe than in Austria. The Austrians were the last Europeans to accept Bruckner.

It is unfortunate that Bruckner was a victim of the battle between Brahms supporters and Wagner supporters. Looking back from today, it is hard to imagine why such cross-fire took place and it made it very difficult for Bruckner to get performances of his symphonies. It is the supreme irony that Bruckner, who was very much attracted to Wagner's music even though he did not understand the opera plots, should proclaim his fidelity to Wagner's cause and yet work in a completely different musical vineyard. It was one which resembled Brahms' rather than Wagner's, but from which the fruits of his labors were kept from the Viennese public by a cabal of Brahms supporters led by the Viennese critic Edward Hanslick (who became the Beckmesser of *Die Meistersinger*). Certainly the two men had little in common but Bruckner worshipped Wagner and was too naive to realize how this hurt him in the game of musical politics. Bruckner also had little in common with Brahms except that both men lived and worked at the same time in Vienna where Brahms completely overshadowed Bruckner in the concert hall. Brahms, in fact, lived comfortably on the income from his compositions while Bruckner, who earned almost nothing from his music, had to support himself by teaching. Eight of Bruckner's symphonies were completed between 1866 and 1886, while the four by Brahms were completed between 1876 and 1885. Bruckner's symphonies show the influence of Beethoven and Schubert: the former influence can be seen in the slow movements and scherzos, while Schubertian influences are best observed in the use of melodies which both composers would repeat over and over, extracting every possibility from them.

Bruckner was fifty-seven years old when he began to work on the Seventh Symphony in September of 1881. At the beginning of the same month he had completed his Sixth Symphony, a work which had occupied him for the two previous years; it is part of Bruckner's tragic syndrome that he never heard the first or last movements of his Sixth Symphony, only the two middle movements which were performed in February, 1883, by the Vienna Philharmonic. In fact, two days after this performance, Bruckner learned the news of Wagner's death; at this time Bruckner had almost finished composing the Adagio for the Seventh Symphony, and in conceiving it, had realized that Wagner might be near his end. In a letter to Felix Mottl he wrote, "One day I came home and felt very sad. I thought that it would be impossible for the Master to live much

longer; and, at that time the Adagio in C sharp minor came to me."

Bruckner, however, was so saddened by the actual news of Wagner's death that he wrote a coda to the Adagio in memory of the Bayreuth master. Interestingly, the movement opens with a very famous as well as beautiful passage using four Wagner tubas which are instruments with a slightly different parabolical bore and a mouthpiece similar to that of a French horn; the sound is smoother and more refined than the regular tuba. The Adagio also contains a quotation of the "Non Confundar" chorale theme from Bruckner's *Te Deum*. This full-scale work for chorus and orchestra was one of Bruckner's two last religious choral works and was composed between 1881 and 1884, the same time he was working on the Seventh Symphony. Like the Seventh Symphony, the *Te Deum* enjoyed instant success after its first performance in 1886.

Nikisch agreed to perform the symphony in Leipzig at a performance in June, 1884. The concert had to be postponed twice and the actual premiere did not take place until December 30, 1884, when it was performed at a concert to raise money for a Wagner memorial. During the intervening time, Nikisch played the work on the piano for several important music critics. A typical result was described by Nikisch in a letter to Bruckner in October, "Today I played the E Major Symphony to Herr Oscar Schwalm, the music critic of the most influential Leipzig paper, the *Leipziger Tageblatt*. He was beside himself with delight and asked me to tell you that he is full of enthusiasm for your masterpiece and that he considers it his duty to use all his influence in the press on your behalf, in order that you may be acclaimed as you deserve. . . ."

The Seventh Symphony was well-received by Leipzig. There was applause for fifteen minutes at the end of the work. The following March, 1885, another young conductor who had begun to espouse Bruckner's cause, Hermann Levi, performed the work in Munich where it had an even greater success. After that, it was performed frequently throughout Europe. Theodore Thomas introduced the work to American audiences in Chicago in July, 1886. During Bruckner's lifetime, it was his most frequently performed work.

Only in Vienna did the Seventh Symphony meet any resistance and it came, as might be expected, from Hanslick and the anti-Wagner group. When the Vienna Philharmonic decided to program the work, Bruckner wrote and thanked them for considering a performance but asked them to drop the idea because, as he wrote, ". . . of the influential critics who would only be likely to damage my dawning success in Germany."

The Vienna Philharmonic went ahead anyway and Hans Richter, a friend of Hanslick's, who had hitherto ignored Bruckner's music, conducted the work on March 21, 1886. A fellow composer, Johann Strauss, Jr., whose waltzes Bruckner enjoyed, attended this performance and afterwards telegraphed him, "I am deeply moved; it was one of the strongest impressions in my life."

From Hanslick's review of the work, which appeared in the *Neue Freie Presse*, it is obvious that the audience must have enjoyed the performance even if Hanslick did not. "It has never happened before that a composer was called out four or five times after each movement," he complained. Unable to conceal his hostility he also wrote, "Bruckner is the newest deity of the Wagnerians. It is hardly true to say that he has become a fashion because nowhere does the public want to follow that fashion; but Bruckner has become a regimental order, and the 'second Beethoven'—an article of faith for the Richard Wagner congregation. . . . Like everyone of Bruckner's works, the E Major Symphony contains ingenious inspirations, interesting and even

pleasant details—here six, there eight bars—but in between the lightnings there are interminable stretches of darkness, leaden boredom and feverish over-excitement.”

Max Kalbeck, an ardent supporter of Brahms, was also harsh in his criticism of the Seventh Symphony as was Dömpke, another critic, who complained of shivers going down his spine as he listened and who concluded, “Bruckner composes like a drunkard.”

Today, such criticism need not be taken seriously; Hanslick's opinions about Bruckner's art are more important for biographical reasons, including their effect on Bruckner's musical career, than for reasons of esthetics. Hanslick represented a late Romantic school of thought, that has since disappeared, in which fusion of the arts, such as music and drama, was considered detrimental to any one of them. Hanslick, Brahms and others believed passionately in keeping music independent. Wagner represented the opposite ideal. Hanslick did not want music to arouse the emotions; he had criticized Schumann's view that “the aesthetics of one art are those of the other; only the material is different.” Pure instrumental music, Hanslick thought, was the best way to keep music separate from the other arts. Thus, had Bruckner not supported Wagner, he might have had Hanslick's support since Bruckner's greatest achievements were in the area of pure music. From our present viewpoint we can see that despite Hanslick's narrowness, his group and Bruckner had much in common.

The Seventh Symphony was dedicated to Ludwig II, the eccentric king of Bavaria. It is scored for flutes, oboes, clarinets, and bassoons (all in pairs), four horns, three trumpets, three trombones, four tubas, one double-bass tuba, timpani, percussion and strings.

#### Overture in G Minor

Bruckner spent his life as a teacher, but he also spent half of it as a student. He was in his late thirties when he studied counterpoint with Simon Sechter, a musical arch-conservative whose creative thoughts were tied to the past. When Bruckner completed his studies with him in 1862, he decided to study form, orchestration and composition with the new opera conductor in Linz, Otto Kitzler. Although ten years younger than Bruckner, Kitzler was very knowledgeable about modern music, and he made Bruckner aware of Wagner's music.

While studying with Kitzler, Bruckner became interested in the symphonic form and he wrote, besides a string quartet, four pieces for orchestra, one of which is the Overture in G Minor. It is really a symphonic first movement and shows many characteristics of Bruckner's later style. It also has a slow introduction which is reminiscent of the Classical Period style of Haydn and Mozart but which Bruckner, in his later works, used only in his Fifth Symphony. The Overture in G Minor is occasionally performed although it has only been rarely recorded.

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