

There is a famous silhouette by Otto Bohler showing Bruckner being greeted by Wagner at Bayreuth. Bruckner is standing in frock coat, top hat in hand, his expression (so far as one can see) rather coy, his trousers baggy, his body tilting forward comically in a way that recalls Groucho Marx. Wagner is obviously master of the situation. He is standing very grandly with his chin jutting out. His clothes are worn with a swagger and he is resting one hand magnanimously on Bruckner's shoulder. As a character study the drawing is not without interest. We all know what Wagner was like. For what Bruckner was like (and there are many misconceptions) let us turn briefly to Tovey: "Of the childhood rustic person that Anton Bruckner was apart from his music there are anecdotes without number and without form. They should be told where his music is understood."

Tovey's second sentence was particularly meaningful. Some of the anecdotes about Bruckner suggest that he was something of a village idiot, a characteristic in no way compatible with his music. But as his music has always aroused controversy, and frequently been misunderstood, it is better to approach it for the first time with a mind uninfluenced by too close a knowledge of the composer's eccentricities, such as they were. Bruckner was a simple, blunt, quiet-living man, an Austrian villager whose heroes were God and Wagner, in that order. He was, admittedly, gauche enough to tip Richter a thaler for conducting his Fourth Symphony and to believe a practical joker who informed him that the people of Bulgaria wanted to crown him their king. But he was also musically inspired enough to compose a series of works that glorified exultantly and with the utmost majesty his God and that were widely hailed as the abstract equivalent of Wagner's music dramas.

Anton Bruckner was born at Ansfelden, in Upper Austria, in 1824. He came of a family of schoolteachers that could be traced back to the sixteenth century. His father taught in the local school, and he himself would have followed the same career had not music intervened. The switch, happily for posterity, happened as follows. In preparation for his duties as schoolmaster, which entailed a certain amount of music teaching, Bruckner was sent to the *Volksschule* in another village. There he became a chorister in a foundation of Augustine monks, and learnt the organ, piano, and violin. Inspired by the atmosphere of the place, he composed a series of organ preludes at the age of thirteen and devoted more and more time to the performance and study of music. A few years later he dutifully enrolled at a teachers' training college in Linz and subsequently worked for a spell as a teacher, but music was by now tugging at him still more strongly. The break finally came in 1856, when he was given

the chance to become organist of Linz Cathedral. From there he journeyed regularly to Vienna to study counterpoint under Simon Sechter, Austria's leading musical theorist of the period. His first symphony dated from 1863 and his career as a composer, somewhat tardily perhaps, was at last solidly launched.

By now, Wagner was exerting his spell. Bruckner was swept off his feet by a performance of "The Flying Dutchman" in Linz, travelled to Munich to hear the world premiere of "Tristan," and was rewarded for his efforts by a conversation with Wagner. Their friendship developed through the years, by way of intermittent meetings at Bayreuth, and Wagner was so impressed by Bruckner's Third Symphony that he asked for it to be dedicated to him. This was duly done, and the work has ever since been known as the "Wagner" symphony.

"If you want Wagnerian concert-music other than the few complete overtures and the *Siegfried Idyll*, why not try Bruckner?" So wrote Tovey in the days when people were more cautious about trying Bruckner than they are now. Tovey's was, or seemed at the time, a bright way to sell Bruckner to a suspicious public, but a new generation of Brucknerians has grown up that accuses even Tovey of spreading misconceptions about this most misconceived of composers. In reality, claims Dr. Robert Simpson in a pamphlet written in guidance to the 1963 broadcast of the complete symphonies by the B.B.C., Bruckner's work is deeply un-Wagnerian, and touching evidences of Wagner's influence serve only to illuminate the alien world in which they are discovered. "Bruckner's vast time-scale is often said to be Wagnerian," Dr. Simpson continues, "but it is more like an extension of Schubert's, with Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in the background." Maybe so, but Bruckner nevertheless owed to Wagner the realisation that a symphony could be conceived on a scale even more massive than Beethoven's Ninth and that Wagnerian chromaticism could be used symphonically, although in an entirely different and quite unerotic way. What, then, are the component parts of Bruckner's symphonies, if we allow that they contain less Wagner than was once believed? It is sometimes said, as of César Franck's Symphony in D minor, that they are nothing but inflated organ works in which a massive orchestra is employed to imitate at length the sound of a cathedral organ. There is

an element of truth in this, too, but once again it is by no means the whole story. There is more to Bruckner than meets the ear, and, as his popularity steadily increases (a popularity encouraged more by the Concertgebouw Orchestra than by any other orchestra outside Bruckner's native Austria), all the old misconceptions about his music are being examined and refuted in the light of modern scholarship. Much has yet to be learnt about this simple, sturdy composer, whose symphonies pose so many problems (not least of which is the number of different editions that exist of each symphony). But the chase is on and his music is now arousing more world-wide interest than ever before — more, certainly, than the Viennese premiere of the first of his revised versions of his Third Symphony in 1877, when a section of the audience fled from the concert-hall at the end of each movement, leaving the orchestra to play the finale to a completely deserted hall. A full analysis of so vast and elaborate a symphony is impossible here, and those wanting to learn more about Bruckner and the symphony are referred to Hans Redlich and other experts. As a brief guide to the general layout, however, it should be observed that the large and splendidly-wrought first movement follows the Brucknerian equivalent of sonata-form, much use being made of a downward arpeggio in D minor, reminiscent of the opening of Beethoven's Ninth. This is very much a Bruckner fingerprint, as is the introduction of a third subject-group in the exposition of the movement. Another characteristic feature is the abrupt alternation of *fortissimo* and *piano*, a trait in which Bruckner the organist is clearly audible, imitating, as it were, the tonal contrasts between two manuals. The slow movement, in E flat major, is based on three important themes and falls into three well-defined sections. After an impressive climax the movement ends in a mysterious *pianissimo*.

The scherzo, as usual with Bruckner, is built on classical lines, and here a hint of Schubert may be discerned. The grandiose finale combines music of chorale-like solemnity with the cheerfulness of a light-footed dance. Bruckner referred to this himself as an example of life's sharp contrasts: "the polka depicts the humour and gaiety in the world; the chorale, all that is sad and melancholy." At the end of the movement, the main theme of the first movement is brought back, now transformed into a triumphant D major.

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