



Otto Böcher

*Bruckner in Bayreuth.*

Following upon the "storm and strife" spirit of Bruckner's First symphony and the self-contemplative Second symphony, Bruckner's Third marks the first great work from that composer's mature period. It is probably the first one in which Bruckner planfully applied his self-constructed symphonic style, and, at any rate, the first one which may be termed truly "Brucknerian". Such statement should not be interpreted as an attempt to belittle the two preceding symphonies of the master both of which are important and characteristic of their kind.

The MS. of Bruckner's third symphony does not contain any suggestions as to the date when the composer began work upon it. However, this was most likely in 1872. The draft of the first movement was completed on February 23rd, the complete score of this movement on July 16th of that year. The Adagio was composed between February 23rd and May 24th. The orchestration of the Adagio was finished at Vienna on March 11th, 1873, the composition of the Finale on August 31st, at Marienbad (Bohemia), and the scoring of that movement on December 29th. This first version of the symphony, however, was not retained by Bruckner. Owing to his severe and often shown self-criticism, Bruckner revised it in 1876/77 and again in 1889. The first version of the symphony contained several Wagnerian reminiscences, indeed in many places literal quotations from Wagner's operas which Auer interprets as a "naive homage to the revered master", since Bruckner had composed this work with a view to dedicating it to Richard Wagner. When the draft of the Finale had been completed, Bruckner interrupted his cure at Marienbad and travelled to Bayreuth to persuade Wagner to accept the dedication. Max Auer's excellent biography of Anton Bruckner gives a long and amusing narrative of this episode. Bruckner's efforts actually resulted in the desired acceptance on the part of Wagner who thought very highly of Bruckner. The later version of the third symphony

eradicating the Wagner quotations, with the exception of one passage towards the close of the Adagio (bars 209—211) with its reminiscence of the Slumber motive from *The Valkyrie*.

It would be utterly wrong to interpret Bruckner's symphonies as "programme music"; even the Fourth (Romantic) symphony where such attempts may to some extent be justified, makes no exception in this respect. Rather one may speak of a certain uniformity of "atmosphere" within each of Bruckner's symphonies. There is undoubtedly a certain "heroic" mood which forms the basic character of the third symphony. Strength, even pomp coupled with most tender feeling; humble devotion to the will of the Almighty; fervent prayer; but also a sturdy, robust merriness; strife and victory and, above all, the lofty and triumphant idealism: all that we find in the music of Bruckner's third symphony, which may justly be by-named "Eroica" like Beethoven's Third.

The first performance of the symphony (in its second version) occurred on December 16th, 1877, through the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra under the direction of the composer -- and met with complete failure. Both public and press were unanimous in their dislike of this symphony which was too novel and too bold for its time. But few were able to follow Bruckner on his new and daring road -- among them Th. Rättig, the Viennese music-publisher who, notwithstanding the failure of the symphony, mustered the courage to publish in print the score, orchestral parts and the piano score.

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