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0521823544 - Bruckner's Symphonies: Analysis, Reception and Cultural Politics

Julian Horton

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Bruckner's Symphonies

Few works in the nineteenth-century repertoire have aroused such extremes of hostility and admiration, or have generated so many scholarly problems, as Anton Bruckner's symphonies. Julian Horton seeks new ways of understanding the symphonies and the problems they have accrued by treating them as the focus for a variety of interdisciplinary debates and methodological controversies. He isolates problematic areas in the works' analysis and reception, and approaches them from a range of analytical, historical, philosophical, literary-critical and psychoanalytical viewpoints. The symphonies are thus explored in the context of a number of crucial and sometimes provocative themes such as the political circumstances of the works' production, Bruckner and post-war musical analysis, issues of musical influence, the problem of editions, Bruckner and psychobiography, and Bruckner's controversial relationship to the Nazis.

JULIAN HORTON is Lecturer in Music at University College Dublin. He has contributed an essay to *The Cambridge Companion to Bruckner* (forthcoming) and has also published articles and reviews on Brucknerian topics in *Music and Letters* and *Music Analysis*.

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A. R. Horton

in memoriam

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Preface

Although work on this book has, in the most immediate sense, spanned a little over four years, some of its aims and ideas have had a much longer gestation period. The initial impulse stems from the sense of dislocation that accompanied my first encounter with the critical orthodoxies surrounding Bruckner's symphonies, especially in the older English-language literature, marked above all by a feeling that entrenched views emphasised concepts or criticisms that bore little relation to my own experience of the music. In many ways, the studies comprising this book collectively represent an effort to close this gap: to establish grounds for understanding Bruckner that do justice to an unmediated sense of music-historical and analytical significance that I have never quite managed to reconcile with prevailing debates.

This, however, is not to propose yet another round of Brucknerian revisionism. As I shall argue, the perpetuation of the revisionist impulse has in some respects been one of the most debilitating aspects of the musicological reception of Bruckner. Nevertheless, it is hard to deny that the symphonies are still attended by an array of clichés, which hardly contribute beneficially to our understanding of the composer or his work. Whilst many of these preconceptions have lost musicological credence today, their hold on public perception has endured. Two strands of criticism have proved especially durable, and it is hoped that what follows accelerates their demise. On the one hand, the old accusations of formlessness, naïve atavism or the simplistic imitation of Wagner have persisted with remarkable tenacity, despite the longstanding irrelevance of their formative cultural-political context. On the other hand, the defence against these criticisms has often involved a kind of special pleading, imbuing the music with a type of constitutive otherness or detachment from the Austro-German mainstream that is in its own way just as damaging. Much work has recently been done to unravel or dispose of these mythologies in specific instances; yet there remains the need for a study that advances, so to speak, on a broad front, tackling issues and their attendant methodological dilemmas as part of an expansively defined critical problem. This book is an attempt to supply such a study.

Undertaking this project has necessarily entailed the adoption of what might be described, in the most modest sense, as an inter-disciplinary

approach. The motivation for this is not so much a purposeful postmodernity, *pace* the views of Jean-François Lyotard and many others after him, but rather a kind of musicological pragmatism, born of the conviction that critical difficulties are best addressed as part of a general nexus of analytical, textual, philosophical, historical and social matters. There is scarcely an issue in Bruckner scholarship that does not, by its very nature, straddle some kind of disciplinary boundary. If we try to constrain such issues within the areas on which they appear initially to be centred, we ultimately defer consideration of the critical problems that they pose. Editorial questions, to pick perhaps the most contentious Brucknerian topic, are certainly also analytical questions; they similarly engender problems of reception history, cultural politics and philosophical orientation that cannot be detached without disabling the critical process. Rather than retreat into disciplinary or methodological specificity as a way of dealing with the fact that multiple versions and editions of a Bruckner symphony exist, it seems more constructive to allow the context of disciplinary interactions to guide our critical and interpretative responses.

Inevitably, this technique has required engagement with a wide range of texts and areas of scholarship, and this in turn has entailed seeking advice from a diversity of sources, not all of them musicological. In terms of the provision of materials, I am greatly indebted to the Music Collection of the Austrian National Library, for making vital manuscript sources and texts available. Similar acknowledgements are due to the British Library and Cambridge University Library, both of whom supplied many key resources, and to the Medical Library of University College Dublin, for providing important psychoanalytical texts.

At the same time, it seems appropriate at this stage to make one significant apology. As I write, *The Cambridge Companion to Bruckner* is in press. Leaving aside my own contribution to this volume, it contains a wealth of important new scholarship, to which, for reasons related to the chronology of preparing the present study, I have not alluded. In the light of this publication, the arguments I have proposed will undoubtedly require modification. I apologise to the authors represented therein if any of my work neglects their contributions or else glosses, without acknowledgement, ideas they have put forward.

A great many people also deserve profound thanks for their help, contributions and encouragement. I am profusely grateful to all at Cambridge University Press involved in the book's preparation, production and marketing. Particular thanks must go to Paul Watt for his assured handling of design and the process of production, to Michael Downes for his patient and careful copyediting, and to Vicki Cooper for overseeing the project in its latter stages. An immense debt of gratitude is also owed to Penny Souster,

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without whom this book, like so many others, would not have been born or come to fruition. I wish her every happiness in her retirement.

The early stages of research and planning occurred during my tenure of a Junior Research Fellowship at Trinity College, Cambridge, and I would therefore like to offer sincere thanks to the Master and Fellows of that institution. My colleagues at University College Dublin likewise deserve considerable praise for their continuing support. Harry White's encouragement and many constructive suggestions are greatly valued, now as always. Wolfgang Marx and Patricia O'Connor offered much apposite criticism of the text and help in translating aspects of the German-language literature. Helen Smith deserves particular gratitude for her unending patience with my technological shortcomings, and for more instances of practical assistance than I can reasonably enumerate. Máire Buffet, Therese Smith, Adrian Scahill and Thomas McCarthy have all graciously accommodated the demands of preparing a study of this magnitude in the midst of three busy academic years.

Elsewhere, many individuals have given invaluable assistance. Lorraine Byrne read early drafts of parts of the book, and made considered and generous remarks. Jill Varley appraised aspects of my German translations, and offered helpful corrections. Rachel Wingfield and Lorenz Welker proffered essential advice on psychoanalytical matters, specifically in connection with the nature and diagnosis of Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder, and thereby gave professional guidance in a field in which I am a complete amateur. Fruitful conversations with Nick Marston on the subject of sonata deformation have vitally informed the analysis of that topic, and I am grateful to him for allowing me to include terminology he has suggested, particularly the concept of reformation. One reader, of whose identity I remain unaware, offered very positive criticism at a key stage of preparation. Your comments are greatly appreciated, whoever you may be.

I must reserve special acknowledgements for two people. The first is John Deathridge, whose careful reading of the text was vital in bringing it to completion, and for whose wisdom and support in this project, as in many others before it, I am deeply grateful. The second is Paul Wingfield, who furnished penetrating and detailed critiques of many features of the book's content and style, and who has provided more selfless advice and help over the years than I can ever hope to repay.

Finally, profuse thanks are due to my family, and especially to Janet, for encouraging and sustaining my Brucknerian preoccupations and the endless amounts of work they seem to generate.

J. H.
Dublin
May 2004