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ORGELPARK

ANTON BRUCKNER

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Herman Jeurissen

Peter Planyavsky

Orgelpark Research Report 1

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Orgelpark Research Reports

Practical information

Orgelpark and VU University

[§1] The Orgelpark is a concert venue in Amsterdam. Its aim is to integrate the organ into musical life in general. The Orgelpark initiated the Orgelpark Research Program in 2008.

[§2] The Orgelpark Research Reports are published in cooperation with the Chair Organ Studies at VU University Amsterdam.

E-books

[§3] Publications about music gain when they include sound examples and short movies. Therefore, the Orgelpark Research Reports are “electronic books”: e-books, to be read online on tablets, computers and comparable devices. Reading is easy: just use any standard web browser.

[§4] The Research Reports are accessible for free at www.orgelpark.nl.

Full-text search

[§5] Since full-text search is standard in e-books, the Research Reports do not contain indices. Click on the line *Click here to read this text in a window allowing full-text search* in the footer of each page (available only in the original e-book versions) to view the text in a separate window. This window allows full-text search, and selecting text parts. Also, this option may make reading on mobile phones more convenient.

Paper copies / Pdf's: no sound examples

[§6] Paper copies of the Reports can be ordered per mail (info@orgelpark.nl) at additional cost. Pdf's are available on www.orgelpark.nl. Paper copies and pdf's do *not* include indices nor sound examples (see §5).

More information

[§7] For more information, please visit www.orgelpark.nl and www.vu.nl.

Orgelpark Research Report 1

Introduction

Orgelpark Research Report 1: Third Edition

[§8] This is the third edition of Orgelpark Research Report 1. During the preparation of the first edition in 2012, electronic publishing technology was still rather young. As a result, the e-book versions of the Orgelpark Research Reports had a so-called “reflowable” format, which meant that the reader herself could decide the font, the font size, the size of the pages and the amount of text per page, to name just a few details. Therefore, the Reports were given paragraph numbers instead of page numbers; otherwise, referencing (identifying) text fragments would be impossible.

[§9] As soon as technology was advanced enough to give the Reports a fixed layout, the second edition of this Report was published. Paragraph numbers were no longer necessary: each page now got its own page number, just like in a “normal” book. This third edition is the same as the second edition. Whereas the first and second editions required sophisticated e-book readers, the third edition can be read using a standard web browser.

References

[§10] Since the first edition of Report 1 worked with paragraph numbers instead of with page numbers, edition 2 kept the paragraph numbers intact, as does edition 3.

[§11] It is strongly advised to use the paragraph numbers to reference text fragments in this Report. Otherwise users of the first edition will not be able to keep track.

Organ Studies

[§12] Between 2008 and 2011, the Orgelpark undertook an extensive research project, focusing on several aspects of the phenomenon of improvisation; the art of making music without scores, without much preparation and “on the

spot". The immediacy of this manner of making music is fascinating: both musician and listener experience something which can never be repeated. Moreover, improvisation appears to be the 'first' way of making music: the history of music undoubtedly started with an improvisation. In fact, scores appear to be necessary only at the point when a larger group of musicians intend to play together, or when a specific musical situation requires prepared complex music. Interpreting and performing scores is, in this perspective, the 'second' way of making music.

Anton Bruckner

[§13] It is far from co-incidental that the history of Western music, which has promoted the development of this 'second way' to the point of its becoming the 'main' way of making music, has documented the changing relationship between improvisation and performing from scores more than the history of any other musical culture.

[§14] The change in emphasis towards the predominance of performing from scores seems to have taken place in the 19th century. Anton Bruckner is particularly interesting in this context as he, more than any other composer before or since, seems to have valued the two ways of making music equally. His symphonies belong to the best the 19th century has left us, so it goes without saying that Bruckner understood the value of a proper score profoundly. On the other hand, Bruckner preferred to improvise as soon as he was asked to play an organ, be it in a concert situation or otherwise.

[§15] It seems that the secret of this balance lies in the fact that Bruckner did not distinguish between improvised music and performed music based on scores in the way we do today.

[§16] This is suggested by the way Bruckner constantly worked on improving his scores. Time and again he chose to reconsider them, whether in order to adjust a detail (for example to comply with the rules of harmony and counterpoint) or because a better idea regarding the development of the piece at hand had come to mind. While this may seem rather self-evident, it becomes especially interesting when we consider the way in which Bruckner improvised at the organ. The basis of his improvisations was a small set of existing scores, such as Handel's

Hallelujah chorus; Bruckner had no qualms about extending, changing or adding elements to such a composition in the context of his extemporizing.

Articles in this volume

[§17] In this volume, Herman Jeurissen and Peter Planyavsky examine the unique phenomenon of Bruckner, the composer who composed like an improvising organist, constantly focusing on improving his scores, while improvising like a composer, finding constant inspiration in a small number of existing works.

[§18] Herman Jeurissen is Principal Hornist of the Residentie Orkest and teaches at the Conservatoria of The Hague, Amsterdam and Tilburg. He studied the horn under Adriaan van Woudenberg and Michael Hölzfel and was awarded the Prix d'Excellence (1978) and the Silver Wreath of the Friends of the Concertgebouw (1979). As a solo horn player, chamber musician and teacher, Herman Jeurissen appears regularly at international festivals and horn symposia and is especially fascinated by the instrument's less well-known repertoire. He is also active as a composer and arranger for horn.

[§19] Peter Planyavsky was appointed to the position of organist of the Stephansdom in Vienna in 1969, later becoming 'Musikdirektor' between 1983 and 1990. His association with the Stephansdom ended in 2004. Since 1980, Peter Planyavsky has taught organ and improvisation at the 'Musichochschule' in Vienna where he was also Head of Church Music between 1996 and 2003. He performs throughout the world, is an active researcher in the field of church music and an advisor on the building and restoration of organs. Peter Planyavsky is also frequently invited to sit on juries and publishes articles in specialist journals.

Why are the paragraphs numbered?

[§20] The numbers which appear in square brackets prior to each paragraph are intended to facilitate references to specific passages of text from the Orgelpark Research Reports. See also §§8-11 for more information.

‘To build high towers, you must first consider the foundations’

Herman Jeurissen - Anton Bruckner, builder of symphonic Cathedrals

Introduction

[§21] ‘Wer hohe Türme bauen will, muß lange beim Fundament verweilen.’ This nugget of wisdom, which has already clocked up more than 150,000 hits on Google, is attributed to Anton Bruckner (1824-1896). Whether he really said it, or even if the attribution is apocryphal, this platitude coincides perfectly with Bruckner’s musical career, his artistic insights and his obsessions. Barely interested in literature or pictorial art, Bruckner was fascinated by cathedrals and church towers. During his music theory tutorials at the University of Vienna, students were constantly reminded of the importance of the correct application of the rules of ‘musical architecture’. He was also highly aware of the similarities between all kinds of mathematical relationships both in music and in architecture. Towards the end of his life, this interest manifested itself in his craze for counting, which even extended to the relentless counting of leaves on trees.¹

[§22] Bruckner’s nugget of wisdom is also applicable in a metaphorical sense: this uncertain, slightly shy, awkward man waited until he was 42 years old, after years of study and countless degrees, to present his first symphony to the outside world. Two years later, in 1868, the symphony was successfully premiered in Linz, conducted by the composer. In total, Bruckner would go on to compose 11 symphonies. The official first symphony (1866) was preceded by a ‘study’ symphony in f minor (1863, not performed during his lifetime). The so-called ‘Symphony No 0’ (composed between the first and second symphony) was also rejected by the composer.

¹ Reeser 1936: 376.

[§23] This essay sketches Bruckner's slow, but gradual, line of development. Thereafter, I will consider his symphonies, often described as musical Cathedrals. Although a cliché, found in virtually every review of these pieces, this characterisation contains more than a grain of truth, as we shall see. Musical examples will illustrate the influence of Bruckner's background as an improvising organist and church musician on his symphonies. I will also pay considerable attention to Bruckner the musical theoretician who himself saw a clear link between music and architecture. His own music was constantly scrutinised for its adherence to the rules of 'musical architecture', resulting in the works' constant revision and our having inherited as many as five versions of certain pieces. Finally, we will look at different editions and the reception afforded to all these 'building plans'.

Foundation

[§24] In 1836, the 13 year old 'Tonerl' as Anton Bruckner was known in typically Austrian fashion, was accepted into the boarding school of the monastery at Sankt Florian near Linz. He could already play the organ, piano and violin to a respectable level and would receive his first composition lessons at the school. As the son of a village teacher in Ansfelden, it was initially Bruckner's intention to follow in his father's footsteps. Following his education at the training college in Linz, he combined a rather unsuccessful career as a teacher with that of a choral director, church organist and violinist in several village dance bands. In 1848 he obtained a part time job as organist of Sankt Florian. In 1855, he was appointed organist of the Cathedral in Linz which allowed him to give up his teaching post. The basis of the repertoire heard in the high baroque monastery in St-Florian was the music of Franz Josef Aumann (monastery organist from 1755 to 1797), augmented by church music by the latter's fellow students Michael Haydn and Johann Georg Albrechtsberger. The music by these three composers had its roots in the late baroque musical tradition and was composed in a relatively conservative style unlike, for example, the music of Michael's older brother, Joseph Haydn. This tradition is continued by Bruckner's own early compositions. For example, all the choral compositions, up to and including the four voice Ave Maria of 1856, feature a figured bass. Organ works served as a point of departure in this

tradition which placed the emphasis on largely improvised liturgical organ playing. Bruckner wrote music for his own instrument only sporadically and his choral compositions from this period are more interesting. Here and there, we find a harmonic twist which hints at the composer Bruckner would later become, such as in the *Tantum ergo* in A dating from June 1845/1846. In the middle of this, otherwise conventional, piece, Bruckner suddenly writes a polyphonic, quickly modulating passage which, in a melodic sense, anticipates the *Liebestod* theme from Wagner's *Tristan* (1856/1859) (example 1).

Example 1: *Tantum Ergo* (1845/1846)

play
stop

no - vo - ce - dat ri - tu - i

[§25] Bruckner had still not received a professional musical training and was unsatisfied with his skills. Between 1855 and 1861, therefore, he undertook harmony and counterpoint lessons with the famous Viennese music theoretician and 'königliche & kaiserliche Hoforganist' Simon Sechter (1788-1867). During this period he was discouraged from composing and found an outlet in improvisation at the organ, which to quote him 'shielded me from musical barrenness'.² In 1861, Bruckner completed his studies with the

² In a letter dated 10 November, 1861, Bruckner writes the following to the exam committee:

'Freien Compositionen gönnte während seiner Studienzeit (seit 1855) der Gefertigte nicht die

highest possible distinction; the famous seven-voice setting of Ave Maria for a cappella choir, composed in the same year, bears witness to his enormous development as a composer during this period. Bruckner's task now was to develop his sense of taste and he undertook lessons twice yearly from Linz theatre conductor Otto Kitzler (1834-1910), who was 10 years Bruckner's junior. Kitzler encouraged him to study the symphonies of Beethoven, Schumann and Mendelssohn. The curious composer also became familiar with the new music by Berlioz, Liszt and Wagner. Kitzler taught Bruckner to write in the established forms, from sonata to march, and gave him exercises in instrumentation, ranging from wind band to symphony orchestra.

[§26] Bruckner attended the 1863 Linz performance of Tannhäuser conducted by his teacher and in 1865 was present at the première of Wagner's Tristan und Isolde in Munich. The music made an overwhelming impression on him and, from then on, Wagner became his idol. Bruckner studied 'Tristan' from a piano reduction by Horn but without the text which Bruckner considered to be wicked.³

The Cathedral

[§27] Perhaps equally important for Bruckner's development as an artist was the construction of a new neo-gothic Cathedral in Linz which, in terms of scale and grandeur, sought to equal the Stephansdom in Vienna. The building of the Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception was begun in 1863 but only completed in 1924, around a quarter of a century after Bruckner's death. Until that time, the old baroque Cathedral, where Bruckner had been organist from 1855 to 1868, had served as Linz's Episcopal church. Bruckner was actively involved in the festivities surrounding the construction of the new Cathedral. He composed the seven-voice Ave Maria and a festive cantata for male voice choir and wind band for the occasion of the laying of the foundation stone (1863) and the great mass in e minor (choir and brass, 1866) for the dedication of the votive chapel. The mass's première took

erforderliche Zeit [...] Erst jetzt nach der Prüfung will er sich der freien Composition widmen. Durch vieles Fantasiren auf der Orgel suchte Gefertigter sich vor Trockenheit zu bewahren, so wie durch vieles Anhören gediegener Musik in Wien.' Quoted after Louis 1918: 288.

³ Auer 1941: 162.

place later, in 1869, due to delays in the new church's construction. For this occasion, Bruckner also composed 'Locus iste'.⁴

The transition from the baroque to the monumental neo-gothic was witnessed at close quarters by Bruckner and left a lasting impression. [§28] The first symphony (1866) was composed during this period. In 1868, Bruckner succeeded his teacher Simon Sechter as professor of harmony, counterpoint and organ at the Conservatory of Vienna. What should have been the culmination of a successful career instead became a bitter disappointment. Bruckner, the simple, somewhat boorish, completely awkward, deeply pious, single man, wrestling with an inferiority complex, did not fit in at all in the liberal, worldly Vienna of the second half of the 19th century. The manner in which he awkwardly and indecisively dealt with the outside world and his endless, hopeless marriage proposals to girls who were far too young, led to his mockery.

[§29] His colossal symphonies impressed his contemporaries just as little. Moreover, the conservative Vienna press compared him, unfairly, with the 'anti-Wagnerian' Johannes Brahms. The devastating criticism of his creations caused Bruckner to lapse into deep depression on a number of occasions during which he continued tirelessly to compose one symphony after another, often without any prospect of their being performed. As a result he was only able to hear the third and fourth symphonies for the first time after the composition of the fifth. He never heard the fifth symphony nor the outer movements of the sixth nor the unfinished ninth.

[§30] We must not forget that the composition of symphonies had fallen completely out of fashion following the death of Mendelssohn (1847) and Schumann (1856). Beethoven's symphonies were still considered the 'non plus ultra'. Richard Wagner described Beethoven's ninth symphony in 1856 as 'unquestionably the last work in this genre' and held the ambition to expand Beethoven's legacy through his musical dramas. Franz Liszt

⁴ 'Locus iste' is a 'Pars Pro Toto' reference to 'Terribilis est locus iste' ('Great is this place', from Genesis 18:17). The text was already favoured in the Renaissance for music used during the dedication of churches such as by Dufay in 1436 ('Nuper Rosarum Flores'), for the dedication of the Cathedral in Florence.

was also actively developing the genre of the tone poem at the same time. Bruckner was the first German-speaking composer who dared to compose symphonies again. It would be another 10 years, in 1876, before Brahms would compose his first symphony. By then, Bruckner had already composed seven (if we include the 'Study-Symphony and the 'Symphony No 0').⁵ In his symphonies, Brahms drew from the experiences he had gained composing chamber music. Each of his four symphonies has an entirely unique character in the same way that Beethoven's dramatic symphonies, nos 3, 5, 7 and 9, contrast strongly with the more lyrical symphonies, nos 2, 4, 6 and 8. Just like Brahms, Bruckner oriented his symphonic writing to the music of Beethoven. Their musical background and working methods were, however, entirely different and the reason will, by now, be clear - Bruckner was, in the first instance, an organist and church musician and felt at home primarily in monumental churches.

Opening Movement

[§31] Just as the Gothic Cathedrals each had a single floor plan, each of Bruckner's grandly conceived symphonies has a single canvas.

In Beethoven's ninth symphony, Bruckner found an ideal model.

Beethoven's symphony begins as if from nothing; thematic elements appear cautiously and only after 32 bars is the main theme heard. Contrasting elements are systematically introduced, woven together and only in the final coda does everything find its place. Almost all of Bruckner's symphonies begin hushed with a tremolo or a neutral ostinato and, just as in Beethoven's ninth, the themes evolve naturally, as it were. Only in the fifth symphony does Bruckner attempt a different approach. Just as in Beethoven's first, fourth and seventh symphonies the work begins with a slow introduction. Cellos and double basses lay a foundation with a simple bass line in B-flat major, while violins and violas provide counterpoint in a romanticised Palestrina style. The music then stops and is followed by a loud, rising, unison motive in G-flat major, a majestic brass chorale in D, a general pause,

⁵ Bruckner's pupil Gustav Mahler expanded Bruckner's structure. He composed his first symphony between 1884 and 1888. The symphonies of Dimitri Shostakovitch are unimaginable without Mahler's examples.

another rising motive (this time in B-flat), silence once again, the brass choral in A and only then does the music gradually start to develop (example 2).

Example 2: Symphony V, opening

play stop

[§32] The influence of the Catholic church music of the second half of the 19th century is evident. At the time, the Cecilia movement was in the ascendancy. The musical counterpart to the neo-gothic, the Cecilia movement, sought to rid the music of the Catholic church of all secular and opera-like elements, taking inspiration instead from the diatonic music of Palestrina.⁶ The chorale genre also appears in the Catholic church music of

⁶ It seems strange, considering Bruckner's background, that he should chose to compose symphonies primarily, rather than a large corpus of mass settings. The Cecilia movement was against the performance of great orchestral settings during the liturgy.

the 19th century: the Gregorian chant was sung (just as the psalms in the reformed churches) in equal, long-held notes, each of which was separately harmonised. Examples of this include Bruckner's harmonisation of 'Veni Creator spiritus' and his own, neo-Gregorian, Ave Regina coelorum (example 3).

Example 3: Tantum Ergo (1845/1846)

play

stop

[§33] From the organ, Bruckner translated the idea of terraced registrations in his instrumentation. At the opening of the fifth symphony, strings, woodwind and brass are juxt- and superimposed. In the tuttis (Bruckner even used the organ term 'pleno')⁷ these are 'coupled'. The attention-grabbing general pauses are familiar to any organist without the services of a registrant. The length of these pauses also illustrates the length of pauses favoured by Bruckner in his improvisations. This abrupt alternation of entirely autonomous blocks of sound is typical of Bruckner's symphonic style. A greater contrast with Wagner's 'Kunst des Übergangs'⁸, as found in *Tristan und Isolde*, is barely imaginable.

⁷ Cohrs 2003: 4.

⁸ 'Meine feinste und tiefste Kunst möchte ich jetzt die Kunst des Überganges nennen', remarked Wagner in 1859. Dahlhaus 1974: 475-486.

[§34] In addition to Bruckner's background as an organist, there is another significant influence at work here. The opening, for example, of Bruckner's fifth symphony clearly has the effect of a construction box which is unpacked, so to speak, and assembled during the performance. The rising unison motives in G-flat and B-flat stand entirely isolated in the musical landscape. Bruckner's style has obvious parallels with the (neo-)gothic building style. The composer saw how at Linz, in the first instance, the buttresses and domes of individual chapels, which would later bear the weight of the, as yet unbuilt, quire were constructed. On viewing this early phase of the project, one could barely imagine how the finished Cathedral might look. Bruckner placed themes alongside each other like blocks of granite, separated only by unexpected general pauses. Initially, one asks oneself what the relationship between these themes might be. Only in the later development of the material is the logical link between each element established. In addition, Bruckner, the church musician and improviser at the organ, makes free use of traditional counterpoint and Beethoven-like thematic development. The third group of themes is subjected, as in Beethoven's *Eroica*, to sonata form treatment, mostly with the theme played in unison. These, more or less neutral, building blocks have their origins in the pre-classical unison conclusions of sonatas and concertos. In those works, thick horizontal walls of separation mark the various sections, in Bruckner's case, the unison passages are in fact thematic material which is contrapuntally developed, directly after their introduction, in inversion, augmentation and diminution. Just as in the (neo-)gothic architectural style, each motive maintains a relationship with the thematic construction of the whole (example 4).

Example 4: Symphony VII, movement 1: third group of themes

play stop

[§35] Bruckner's background as an organist is not only evident in the 'terraced' orchestration, both in terms of the juxtaposition of families of instruments and in his abrupt terraced dynamics (as in the opening of the fifth symphony) but also in the registration-like thinning or thickening of the various orchestral families in order to influence the dynamic.⁹ The instrumentation of the following passage from the opening of the second symphony bears witness to the work of an organist: a four voice contrapuntal passage is played *sempre ff*, the accompanying figure ebbs away and the 'registration' is systematically thinned out. As an organ composition, various things are un-performable. Even with a registrant, the organist has at least one hand two few (example 5).

⁹ Cf. Oeser 1939.

Example 5: Symphony II, first movement

play stop

[§36] Bruckner's symphonies are certainly not, however, orchestrated organ works or orchestral masses. Rather, he sketches apocalyptic visions and scenes from nature while the scherzos paraphrase Austrian peasant dances and hunting scenes. Even German nationalistic elements feature: the opening to the finale from the eighth symphony depicts the meeting of the three emperors of Austria, Germany and Russia in 1885 near Olmütz: a Cossack gallop in the strings, military music in the brass and fanfares at the moment of the meeting itself. Just as Beethoven before him in the latter's *Eroica* and *Pastorale* symphonies, Bruckner was also inspired by extra-musical influences.¹⁰ The musical development occurs, nevertheless, autonomously and Bruckner's music, like Beethoven's, features no heroic narrative. Finally, all Bruckner's symphonies feature the influence of Wagner's new and original harmonic language.

[§37] This colourful melange is cast by Bruckner using Beethoven's symphonic mold. Bruckner sought to renew Beethoven's symphonic form

¹⁰ Letter to Felix Weingartner, dated 27 January 1891. Dorschel 2005, 382.

without seeking to achieve a style-copy. Instead, he adopted only the outer form of Beethoven's ninth symphony, just as the new Cathedral in Linz primarily adopted the (gothic) form of the Stephansdom in Vienna. (The neo-gothic Cathedral of Linz is decorated using then modern means, such as steel joists and cast iron ornamentation).

[§28] To summarise: Bruckner witnessed the building of the Cathedral of Linz and saw how the building gradually took shape. His symphonies also seem to come into being gradually during their performance. Beethoven's ninth symphony provided, in this sense, the most important model. During the construction of the cathedral, the rivalry between provincial Linz and the international city of Vienna played a significant role: the new Linz Cathedral had to prove itself a worthy counterpart to the Stephansdom. Bruckner was in truth a provincial man who was, nevertheless, endowed with enormous willpower. During the construction of the Cathedral in Linz, he must have been gripped by the ambition to create monumental symphonic Cathedrals and thus to emulate the symphonies of Beethoven.

Scherzo and Adagio

[§39] In Beethoven's ninth symphony, the opening allegro is followed by the scherzo and then the Adagio. Bruckner adopts this model in his eighth and ninth symphonies while the remaining symphonies make use of the classical order: opening allegro – slow movement – scherzo – finale.

[§40] The scherzos in 3/4 reference Beethoven's, but in general have a completely different musical outlook. Bruckner's background as a (lonely, as far as we can tell) violinist in various dance orchestras is reflected in the scherzos: distilled Austrian alpine farmers' dances with often sombre, threatening ostinatos reminiscent of the medieval 'Totentanz' paintings. The contrasting trios (all in the major key) remind us of Schubert's German dances. Only in the fourth symphony does Bruckner compose a scherzo in 2/4 time: here we hear carefree hunting music which refers to Beethoven's Eroica.

[§41] Bruckner's Adagios are modelled on the 'Adagio molto e cantabile' from Beethoven's ninth symphony. The content of these movements, which often have a religious feel, allowed Bruckner to draw on his experiences as an organist and church musician. His own improvisations were assembled

from new material, combined with quotes from his own compositions as well as well-known, and loved, themes such as Händel's Hallelujah, Haydn's Emperor Hymn and in later years, themes from Wagner's musical dramas. The Andante from the second symphony quotes, for example, thematic material from his own Mass in f minor. Typical is the slow movement from the first version of the third symphony in which Bruckner combines, among other things, a Beethoven-like adagio theme, a tragic melody which came to him following the death of his mother, a twist from the seven-voice Ave Maria, a romanticised baroque sarabande (to be played 'misterioso') and Brünnhilde's sleep motive from Wagner's Walküre. Bruckner dedicated the work to 'Richard Wagner, the unmatched, world famous and distinguished master of poetry and music'¹¹ and gifted the manuscript to his idol in 1873. The first edition of the symphony (1878) saw the sleep motive and a number of other Wagner motives removed. As a church organist, Bruckner was of course used to adapting the content and length of his improvisations to the liturgical circumstances. His working in blocks of material allowed him to lengthen or shorten works relatively easily.

[§42] Bruckner's later works feature more subtle quotes and references. Nevertheless, Bruckner's contemporaries recognised the close relationships with his organ improvisations. Max Kalbeck, a good friend and first biographer of Brahms, writing at the time of the premiere of Bruckner's seventh symphony, described the Adagio as follows: 'Siegfried's departure from Götterdämmerung, the funeral march from the Eroica, the lament of the Saviour from Parsifal and thematic material from the Adagio of Beethoven's ninth are skilfully woven by Bruckner into a darkly coloured sound carpet.'¹² The implied criticism is, in fact, unfair: while the use of

¹¹ The title page reads as follows: 'Sr. Hochwohlgeboren Herrn Richard Wagner, dem unerreichbaren, weltberühmten und erhabenen Meister der Dicht- und Tonkunst in tiefster Ehrfurcht gewidmet.' Auer 1941, 237.

¹² 'Siegfried's Exequien aus der Götterdämmerung, der Trauermarsch der Eroica, die Heilandklage aus Parsifal und thematische, dem Adagio der neunten entlehnte Bestandtheile sind mit großem Geschick zu einem Tongemälde verwoben, dessen vorwiegend düstere

Wagner tubas alludes to Wagner and the rhythmic structure is similar to Beethoven's Adagio from the ninth symphony, nowhere in this funeral march (in memory of Richard Wagner) does Bruckner incorporate any direct quotations. This description pales into insignificance when compared with the descriptions of Bruckner's own organ playing. For example, in the Linzer Tagespost of 1 September, 1885, one finds a description of an organ improvisation in St.-Florian: Bruckner began with Siegfried's funeral music from *Götterdämmerung*, treating it contrapuntally. The music then developed into a direct quote from the Adagio from Bruckner's own seventh symphony. This was followed by an intermezzo 'alla Händel' in which the funeral music was combined with a theme from the eighth symphony. In the reprise, the Wälsungen and Siegfried motives from the Ring were heard once again, after which followed a triumphant conclusion in the major.¹³

[§43] A literal reference to Wagner's Siegfried motive (an improvisation theme much liked by Bruckner in his organ concerts) is found in the Adagio of the eighth symphony. During this passage, intended as a homage, the strings accompany the quote with figures borrowed from Wagner's overture to *Tannhäuser* (example 6).

Farbgebung und Klangmischung einen starken Eindruck bei dem Zuhörer hervorbringt.'

Göllerich / Auer IV, 2, 447-448.

13 Karl Almeroth writes: 'Anfangs leise, immer mehr anschwellend, bis zu ungeahnter Kragt steigend, erklang die hehre Totenklage um Siegfried aus der *Götterdämmerung* und erschütterte die Zuhörer. In genialer Weise folgte die kontrapuntische Verarbeitung; doch bald fügte sich ein neuer Trauergesang, ebenso hehr und erhaben an: es war Bruckners Trauermusik aus dem Adagio der VII. Symphonie, welche er im tiefsten Schmerz über Wagners Tod niederschrieb. – Da klärte sich der Himmel, und mit gottvoller Weihe ertönte ein in Händelschem Stile gehaltenes Intermezzo, welche Bruckner den Trauerweisen, verwoben mit einem Thema der in Steyr vollendeten VIII. Symphonie, als jubelnder Gesang folgen liess. Nochmals kehrte das Wälsungen- und Siegfriedmotiv aus der Trilogie zurück, die Trauer aber war verschwunden, in grossartigem Gesange, aus allen Registern ertönend, rauschten mächtige Akkorde und eilten jubelnd und jauchzend dem Ende zu.' Göllerich / Auer 1974, II.1, 292.

Example 6: Symphony VIII, Adagio

play stop

[§44] At the conclusion of the Adagio from the ninth symphony, the terminally ill Bruckner glances back at his life: he was aware that he could no longer develop the sketches for the finale and wanted his *Te Deum* to be performed as a replacement last movement. His swansong combines the main theme from the Adagio of the eighth symphony, the finale theme from the seventh and the ostinato accompaniment figure from his *Te Deum*.

Finale

[§45] Beethoven's ninth symphony provided, therefore, the blueprint for the first three movements of Bruckner's symphonies. The finale, though, presented Bruckner with a problem: Beethoven's chorale finale was already seen as an anomaly by 19th century music theoreticians. However, the idea of a monumental chorale was highly appealing to Bruckner. Moreover, Beethoven created a link with the previous movements in the ninth symphony finale by opening it with a sort of quodlibet, referencing what had come before. Bruckner adopted this model in his fifth symphony. In his other symphonies the various movements are connected by deriving the finale's themes from previously used melodic material (example 7).

Example 7: Symphony VII, First Movement and Final



Allegro moderato

etc.

Bewegt, doch nicht zu schnell

pp

mf

[§46] Bruckner's finales remind us in this sense of his improvisations at the end of the service. Everything returns in a slightly more light-hearted vein, is combined in all manner of contrapuntal ways and climaxes with a majestic closing chorale. Although the chorale theme from Beethoven's ninth was Bruckner's direct source of inspiration, the idea of a final hymn of praise to the creator is more reminiscent of the concluding chorales from Bach's cantatas. The 'resurrection' of the brass chorale at the close of the fifth symphony's finale is a good example, accompanied by the characteristic motive in the violins and violas, derived from the 'Ex resurrexit' of Bruckner's Mass in f minor.¹⁴ The finales also feature countless toccata-like

¹⁴ Cohrs 2003/2010, 11-12.

passages which seem to be directly derived from the organ literature.¹⁵ The jumping pedal-like bass line at the beginning of the third symphony's finale seems as though it were borrowed from an organ work. Another typical example is the opening of the finale of the second symphony (example 8).

Example 8: Symphony VIII, Adagio



Ziemlich schnell

p

p

[§47] The first sketches for this finale were composed by Bruckner in London in 1871 immediately following his debut there as an organ improviser. It is no co-incidence, therefore, that we find this Bach-like figuration (as in the fugue theme from the Toccata and Fugue in d minor BWV 565) in an improvisation sketch from 1870¹⁶ (example 9).

¹⁵ On the relationship between finale and toccata: Cohrs 2003/2010, 19 ff.

¹⁶ For an extensive explanation see Cohrs 2002

Example 9: Improvisation sketch, fragment (1870)

play stop

[§48] In the finale of the sixth symphony, Bruckner assigns a pedal-like line to the entire string section, so that the bass voice sounds above the (8 foot) melody in the horns (example 10).

Example 10: Symphony VI, Final

play stop

[§49] Another passage reminiscent of Bruckner’s experience as an organist is found in the finale of the third symphony: reverberating, roaring organ sounds are evoked by dividing the orchestra into two groups which imitate each other at the distance of a quaver (example 11).

Example 11: Symphony III, Final

play stop

[§50] Bruckner's refined instrumentation is demonstrated by a passage from the finale of the seventh symphony (example 12).

Example 12: Symphony VII, Final

play

stop

[§51] Here, the orchestra plays two-voice counterpoint. The spatial effect is the result of Bruckner's brass writing: the first trumpet plays (together with the first Wagner tuba) a simplified version of the upper voice. In the second and fourth bar of the excerpt, the horns support the arpeggiated triads with sustained chords while, in the third and fifth bar (when the melody stops), they strengthen the overtones of the bass line. Although somewhat contrived, one can, nevertheless, view the A-flat in the horn chord of the second bar as the 'mixture' quint of the D-flat in the bass.

[§52] Bruckner's most notable successes were as an improviser. The irony of this is that it was Bruckner's finales especially, in which the organ elements are at their most prominent, which were most mercilessly criticised. At the première of the second symphony in Vienna on the 26th of October, 1873, Bruckner opened the concert with an organ toccata by Bach and followed it with an extended improvised fantasy. After the interval he returned to conduct his new symphony. The organ playing was praised in the Viennese press, but the symphony, according to the (in)famous critic, Eduard Hanslick, despite many beautiful moments, suffered from a 'weak,

fragmentary, mosaic-like form'. The music historian August Wilhelm Ambros was even more negative, fearing that the extreme fever from which the music suffered would lead to the death of the art: 'We expected solid musical architecture, instead we were breathlessly hunted through an entirely random collection of sound assemblages'. He also protested at the influence of Wagner's harmonic language and orchestration. The play on words 'Venusberg-Geigen' refers to the ballet music from Wagner's *Tannhäuser*, but could also be translated as 'bastard violins' (literally, pubic violins) which would have deeply shocked the pious Bruckner.¹⁷

[§53] Max Kalbeck described the finale of the seventh symphony as a half-improvised farce ('Stehgreifkomödie') and sneered: 'Bruckner handles the orchestra as an instrument on which one can improvise or create the mood or co-incidence at will.'¹⁸ Beethoven's symphonic structures had received so many extra layers that Bruckner's contemporaries could no longer see the wood for the trees. Kalbeck heard only 'a musical drama without text'¹⁹ and Hanslick was amazed how 'the gentlest, most peace-loving person in the world could be revealed as an anarchist composer, mercilessly sacrificing logic, clear development, form and tonality.'²⁰

¹⁷ Eduard Hanslick (*Neue Freie Presse*, 28 oktober 1873) refers to 'zahlreiche schöne, bedeutende Einzelheiten' and 'haltlos zerfallende musivische Form'. August Wilhelm Ambros (*Wiener Abendpost*, 28 oktober 1873): 'Wo wir eine festgefügte musikalische Tektonik erwarten, werden wir durch willkürlich aneinandergereihte Tongebilde bis zur Atemlosigkeit gehetzt.' He criticises the 'Venusberg-Geigen' and concludes: 'Mass, Mässigung, Selbstbeschränkung. Unsere modernste Musik leidet an Masslosigkeit. Und diese wird am Ende der Tod der hypersthenisch gewordenen Kunst sein.' Quoted after Louis 1918, 305-308.

¹⁸ Auer 1941, 347: 'Bruckner behandelt das Orchester gleich einem Instrument, auf dem sich nach Laune und Zufall improvisiren und phantasiren läßt.' Göllerich/Auer 1974, IV.2, 447-448.

¹⁹ Louis 1918, 310: 'Die Symphonie macht den Eindruck eines Musikdramas ohne Text.'

²⁰ Hanslick's criticism in connection with the first performance of Bruckner's string quintet, in the *Neue Freie Presse*, 26 februari 1885, quoted after Louis 1918, 318: 'Es bleibt ein psychologisches Rätsel, wie dieser sanfteste und friedfertigste aller Menschen [...] im Moment des Komponierens zum Anarchisten wird, der unbarmherzig alles opfert, was Logik und Klarheit der Entwicklung, Einheit der Form und der Tonalität heisst.'

[§54] We know that Bruckner very often improvised on the same themes and can therefore assume that large parts of his improvisations consisted of variants of a, more or less, fixed model which he held both in his head and, probably, in his fingers. Was a definitive version of his improvised organ compositions therefore, unnecessary because he created the music solely for his own use? Organs, rooms and circumstances vary so much, however, that there was plenty of reason to preserve his organ fantasies: it is conceivable that Bruckner preferred in his organ music to seek the best solution in the heat of the moment as it were, rather than be restricted by a pre-existing score. An orchestral work on the other hand must be notated. Bruckner wrestled throughout his life with the definitive version of his symphonies.

Musical science

[§55] Bruckner himself recognised the danger of working in too intuitive a manner and gradually opted, during the course of his career, for a more compact, thematic construction. The already composed pieces did not escape Bruckner's critical eye – he chiselled and filed away constantly at earlier compositions. The final movements especially are preserved in completely different versions. The so-called 'Volksfest' version of the finale from the fourth symphony shares only the thematic material with the well-known version of the same movement.

[§56] In the earlier symphonies, Bruckner, maintained a baroque-like symmetry but, primarily under the influence of Wagner, who saw music as a continuum in time (a musical passage could, therefore, never precisely be repeated), he abandoned this practice and avoided literal repeats.

Only in the scherzos did Bruckner continue to make use of the traditional three-part form with a literal repeat of the Scherzo after the Trio. From the sixth symphony onwards, the development and recapitulation flow into one another,²¹ allowing the narrative to continue unabated. Bruckner's

21 The avoidance of literal repetitions of thematic material co-incided very well with Wagner's ideals about form. However, even 19th century music theoreticians saw the sonata form from two sides, before and after the double barline, exposition on the one side, development and recapitulation on the other. See, for example, Anton Reicha's *Traité de haute composition musicale* (Paris 1824), German version of Carl Czerny (Vienna 1832).

later finales seem to progress in a more rhapsodic manner but, even here, the sonata form (albeit freely treated), lies at the root of the structure. For example, the recapitulation (see musical example 7) of the finale of the seventh symphony presents the main theme in inversion. Here, one can appreciate the key difference between architecture and music: the beauty of an architecturally symmetrical form can be appreciated at a glance. Musical repetitions, on the other hand, separated by time and not entirely 'symmetrical', ensure that the listener is held in check.

[§57] Nevertheless, the relationship between architecture and music remained an obsession for Bruckner. In 1876, he was appointed lecturer in harmony and counterpoint at the University of Vienna. His inaugural speech, on the 24th of April that year, emphasised the importance of a scientific approach to the study of both aspects of his subject. Bruckner saw it as his mission 'to analyse the entire musical construction right down to the atoms, to group the various elements into specific rules, in short, to create a subject which could also be described as musical architecture.' It was, in his opinion, essential that both composers and performers had 'a complete knowledge of the aforementioned musical architecture, or, to express it more accurately, the foundations of the subject.'²² To add weight to his theories, Bruckner once again studied, in great detail, the symphonies of Beethoven, applying his discovered rules to his own compositions.²³ Symphonies 1-4 were revisited and, to use Bruckner's own word 'restored'.²⁴ Even here, we

22 Quoted after Auer 1941, 249: 'Die musikalische Wissenschaft – ich erlaube mir, ihr dieses Attribut beizulegen – [...] hat] ihren ganzen Kunstbau bis in die Atome sezirt, die Elemente nach gewissen Gesetzen zusammengruppiert und somit eine Lehre geschaffen, welche auch mit anderen Worten die musikalische Architektur genannt werden kann [...] Zur richtigen Würdigung und genauen Beurteilung eines Tonwerkes [...] ist] vor allem die volle Kenntnis von der erwähnten Musikarchitektur, beziehungsweise von den Fundamenten dieser Lehre notwendig.'

23 Cf. Grandjean 2001, 82-96.

24 Auer 1941, 390

can observe a parallel with architectural philosophies in the 19th century. Cologne Cathedral, for example, was 'restored' to a previous ideal which had, in fact, never existed.

[§58] Irregular passages were 'corrected' (in the score, the bars are evenly numbered in groups of eight or 12), parallel fifths and octaves are improved and extended passages are re-arranged. Awkwardly scored, sometimes almost unplayable passages were re-written, the instrumentation refined according to Wagner's model and, through the application of extensive cuts, the form of various pieces was made more concise. The groupings of eight and 12 bars both in the later versions of earlier compositions and in new works results in large-scale musical waves. Bruckner marks the most important notes with strong accents (^), and the remaining emphasised notes with lighter accents (<) (example 13).

Example 13: Symphony VIII, Final

play stop



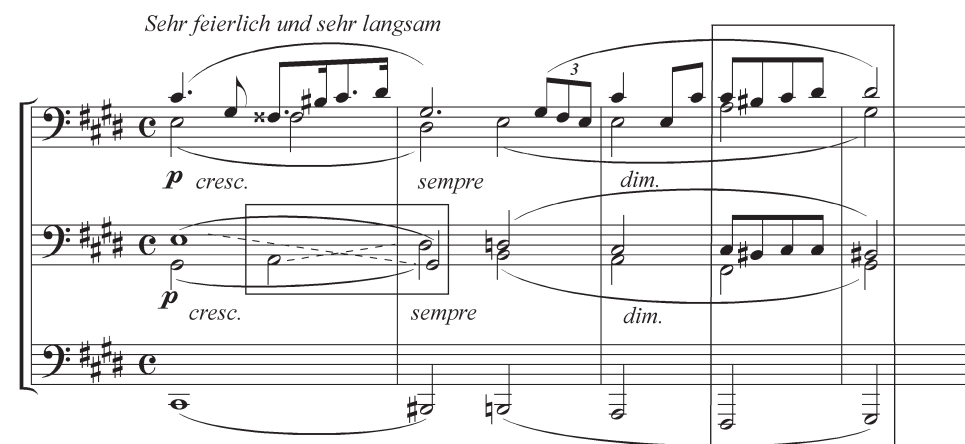
[§59] The later music is clearly intended for a more dynamically flexible orchestra, contrasting strongly in this sense with the sometimes quasi-improvised (organ-like) earlier music which jumps from idea to idea.²⁵ The strongly contrapuntal fifth symphony is Bruckner's masterclass in writing an entirely 'correct' symphony from a music-theory perspective. Bruckner was never able to hear this piece. Only after years of study and the endless refinement of his works would he enjoy his international breakthrough as

25 Cohrs 2002/2010, 5

a composer: the debut of his seventh symphony by Arthur Nikisch and the Gewandhaus Orchestra on 30 December, 1884 in Leipzig. Bruckner's ambition to leave flawless scores sometimes results in remarkable voice-leading. For example, at the beginning of the seventh symphony Adagio, one immediately hears a parallel fifth; the third and fourth Wagner tuba parts cross with the result that the music appears correct, but sounds like the so-called 'Mozart fifths'. The accented fifths between melody and bass in bars three and four, in the eyes of every harmony and counterpoint teacher much worse, remained unaltered. A b-sharp would be correct as the concluding melody note, but this is nullified by the interruption of the melodic progression and the dramatic effect (example 14).

Example 14: Symphony VII, Adagio

play stop



[§60] In 1887 followed the megalomaniac eighth symphony, at that time the longest (at one and a half hours) and most grandly scored orchestral work in musical history. The intended conductor Hermann Levi (conductor of the première of Wagner's Parsifal) had no idea what to do with such a work and Bruckner sank into a deep crisis. In the end, he re-wrote the symphony

in 1890 on the advice of his pupils and musical advisers, shortening it by more than a quarter of an hour. At the same time, he re-wrote the entire first symphony²⁶. In the latter work's Adagio, we find a curious example of Bruckner correcting parallels (example 15).

Example 15: Symphony I, Adagio

Linz and Vienna version



[§61] In the first version of 1865-1866, the fourth horn plays C-A-flat in bar 61, thus forming octave parallels with the melody in the oboes. In the 1890-91 revision, the fourth horn plays a rest on the first beat but, because the second horn still plays A-C on the first beat, the result sounds precisely the same. In order to allow the phrases to progress more regularly, bars are added or removed throughout, such as in the example below (example 16).

²⁶ For a detailed study of the differences between the Linz (1866-77) and Vienna (1890) version, see Grandjean 2001, 103-119.

Example 16: Symphony I, Adagio



[§62] The third and fourth symphonies were also revised and re-printed. The third symphony especially was drastically cropped and extensively streamlined. Of the 27 characteristic general pauses in the finale, only three survived.

Return to the 'Ur-Bruckner'?

[§63] The question must of course be asked whether Bruckner carried out all these revisions from an inner sense of necessity or whether he was influenced by the well-intentioned advice of his colleagues. In practice, Bruckner was always prepared to carry out practical changes if it worked to the advantage of his works' performances. He did much the same as an organist and choral conductor. At the première of his Mass in e minor in 1869 he added, for example, extra winds to the sometimes difficult choir entries. Equally, he often had no problems with revisions made by others. Bruckner reacted enthusiastically, for example, when his almost un-singable work for a capella male voice choir 'Um Mitternacht' (1886) was performed in Linz with a supporting harp accompaniment. In Vienna, the difficult tenor

solo was sung by a group of singers with the composer's permission.²⁷ A particular remark made by Bruckner during a rehearsal with the Vienna Philharmonic in 1874 is notorious. When conductor Hans Richter asked Bruckner what his intention was with regard to a doubtful note in the third symphony, Bruckner is supposed to have reacted: 'Just as you would like Mr Capellmeister.'²⁸

[§64] In terms of the definitive corrections to his own works, Bruckner was, nevertheless, highly meticulous. His pupils and assistants Ferdinand Löwe and the brothers Franz and Joseph Schalk were diehard Wagnerians and, in a number of cases, would undoubtedly have exerted their influence. We will never know precisely the extent to which Bruckner of his own accord exchanged, in certain circumstances, his early organ-like instrumentation for his later, more refined orchestration. Nevertheless, the correction of parallel octaves and fifths and the regularising of the lengths of musical passages corresponds entirely with Bruckner's own wish to leave behind works which were 'musicologically' perfect 'artistic structures.' Due to Wagner conductor, Hermann Levi's desire to conduct the first symphony, Bruckner spent around a year completely re-writing the piece, despite the urgent advice of the conductor not to change too much. Bruckner considered the work to be too capricious reacting 'Aber 's Beserl mueß ja erst ausgeputzt wer'n', or 'the uncouth lady must surely first be washed and tidied up'.²⁹

[§65] Bruckner was, however, less enthusiastic about making large-scale cuts to his works. Although, in anticipation of the planned première of the completely revised eighth symphony, he urged the intended conductor Felix von Weingartner to make a large number of extra cuts, he also wanted the score and parts to be printed unaltered 'with an eye on the future and for a circle of friends and experts'.³⁰

27 Göllicherich 1974, III.1, 596.

28 'Ganz wie Sie wünschen, Herr Hofkapellmeister' (Göllicherich 1974, IV.1, 633).

29 'Bitte – ändern zu Sie nicht zuviel – es ist alles gut, wie es ist, auch die Instrumentation!' Cf. Auer 1941, 375.

30 Letter from Bruckner to Weingartner, dated 27 January 1891: 'Bitte sehr, das *Finale* so wie es angezeigt ist, fest zu kürzen; denn es wäre *viel zu lange* u. gilt nur späteren Zeiten und zwar für

[§66] During the 1920s and '30s, 'Musikwissenschaftlicher Verlag Wien' (although located in Leipzig during the war) began a 'musicological' edition of Bruckner's symphonies. Universal Edition printed the fifth and ninth symphonies shortly after the composer's death. These versions had been so radically altered by Bruckner's pupils (who shortened them and 'improved' the original instrumentation in the style of Wagner) to suit the prevailing taste that a new edition became essential. The remaining symphonies followed thereafter in an edition by MWV. The editions of the symphonies which had already been published during Bruckner's lifetime (1 to 4, 6, 7 and 8) were published by Universal Edition, of whom the Nazis took a dim view due to their publishing experimental, atonal, Jewish and other 'degenerate' music. These versions had been approved by Bruckner but were considered unreliable because the unsure composer could have been unduly influenced by his (not exclusively Aryan) pupils. A new edition was more, therefore, than a corrected version of the old, sloppy editions, but rather a deed of righteousness, a tribute to the naive but genius ultra-German sound poet. The fictitious return to the original Bruckner was even a subject for discussion in the German music magazines of the time. Musicologists in Nazi Germany shamelessly falsified the character of the composer as a sort of Parsifal, a 'reiner Tor' (pure fool) who, unknowingly, became a medium for the German National spirit.³¹ The monumental edition of Bruckner's majestic works served as a bastion against the modern, cosmopolitan, Jewish bolshevist conspiracy.

[§67] As a point of departure, the MWV editors consulted only Bruckner's manuscripts. The composer's corrections of the test prints, the parts from

einen Kreis von Freunden und Kennern.' On 27 March, he added: 'Aber die *Partitur* bitte ich *nicht zu ändern*; auch bei Drucklegung die Orchesterstimmen unverändert zu lassen; ist eine meiner innigsten Bitten.' Quoted after Cohrs 2003/2010, 2, 3.

31 Oskar Lang, for example, wrote about 'Der Ur-Bruckner', in *Die Musik* no.28 (Berlin, 1935) and Franz Wohlfahrt (1937-38) about 'Der Ur-Bruckner' in *Zeitschrift Deutsche Musikkultur* II (Berlin 1938). It wasn't until Constantin Floros' 2004 biography *Anton Bruckner Persönlichkeit und Werk* (2004) that the image of Bruckner as an idiot was completely rejected, Floros instead consistently emphasising the relationship between the man and his work.

which the first performances were played, related correspondence etc was completely ignored. Robert Haas, the first editor, combined, in a number of instances, the various handwritten versions to draw together an imaginary ideal. Haas decided, based entirely on his own musical intuition, where the 'improvements' were made as a result of Bruckner's own conviction and where his choices were made as a result of the influence brought to bear by his advisers.³²

After the Second World War, the actively national-socialistic Haas was removed to make way for Leopold Nowak. Nowak revised all of Bruckner's symphonies once again, basing each edition on a single manuscript version. For the first time, the original versions, barely performed during Bruckner's lifetime and never printed, were released as separate editions. The editions published during Bruckner's lifetime remained, for a considerable period, out of print.

[§68] Only in recent years has interest once again developed in the editions which were published during Bruckner's lifetime. Not only is the instrumentation more detailed, but these versions also contain countless tempo indications approved by Bruckner together with dynamic details which are missing in the autograph manuscripts (and, therefore, in the editions produced by Haas and Nowak for the Musikwissenschaftlicher Verlag). The MWV catalogue presently contains both the Haas and Nowak versions of the symphonies, while a new edition of the versions printed at the end of Bruckner's life is in preparation. Today, for example, one can choose from four complete editions of Bruckner's fourth symphony: the second version of 1881 in the edition of Haas (1936), the same version in the edition of Nowak (1953), the very first manuscript version from 1874 (Nowak 1975) and the third version of the printed edition of 1888 (Korstedt 2004). The strikingly different version from 1878 and the Finale ('Volksfest') where published separately by Haas (1936) and Nowak (1981).

³² An extended essay about the reception of Bruckner's music during the Nazi era: Korstedt 1997.

A chronological survey of all the modern editions of the various versions can be found on the website of the MWV.³³

Inventory

[§69] From today's perspective, the various versions can be viewed artistically on an equal basis. An orchestral work for around 100 musicians must, of course, be written down but, whichever way one looks at it, striving for an ideal, definitive, let alone 'pure' edition of Bruckner's giant symphonic cathedrals is ideological pie in the sky. While it is true to say that Bruckner wanted to compose eternal monuments, as an improvising organist he knew like few others that the assembling of his materials depended entirely on the circumstances. Moreover, the dramatic construction of these 'wahre Symphonien-Tetralogien'³⁴ provides a sometimes obvious contrast with Beethoven's classical forms. And, although Bruckner was often highly uncertain and faced the world with angst, all versions of the symphonies evoke a harmonious sense of confidence. In the music of Bruckner's pupil Gustav Mahler, on the other hand, the collage-like aspects become so magnified that the music itself seems to hang constantly between hope and fear. Bruckner's use of very heterogeneous stylistic elements, including early church music, via Bach-like counterpoint, Beethoven-like melodies and structures which extend to Wagner-like outbursts, inspired him as a symphonist to consistently innovative constructions. The various versions often share no more in common than the mysterious opening, the final apotheosis and the choice of thematic material. Bruckner's insights constantly changed with the result that all surviving versions are equally valid. Modern listeners, on the other hand, become used to the same recordings and their listening habits become fixed. Performances of the non-standard versions, though, oblige the listener to re-consider Bruckner's music. For, however carefully one revises a Bruckner score, the result is never a complete cathedral. On the contrary, Bruckner describes in his music the cathedral's construction: all of the symphonies begin mysteriously, individual elements are established as buttresses, and only at the climax

³³ <http://www.mwv.at/english/TextBruckner/BruckStart/BruckStart.htm>.

³⁴ Max Kalbeck (Louis 1918, 309).

do all the ideas come together in a grand chorale in honour of the creator. As performing musicians, we have the unique opportunity to rebuild the Cathedral of Sound using different blueprints. A study of the pieces' conception history and a glimpse of Bruckner's long development as a composer can help us in this regard: to build high towers you must first consider the foundations.

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Scaling the peaks of improvisation in a flat musical landscape

*Peter Planyavsky - Anton Bruckner's organ
improvisations*

Introduction

[§70] In Austria and South Germany it has become common knowledge, perhaps to the point of dogma, that Anton Bruckner was an exceptional phenomenon in the field of organ improvisation. There is rarely an article or a book about Bruckner in which his role as the father of modern improvisation is not mentioned. In a recent survey of Austrian organ music since World War II, Roman Summereder suggests 'that an extensive study of the art of improvisation in Austria and how it can be traced back to Anton Bruckner' should be carried out.¹

[§71] A closer investigation into Bruckner's improvisations is hampered by the fact that, naturally, it is not possible to study and evaluate them; neither transcriptions nor recordings of any kind exist. Half a century later this could have been so much different thanks to the invention of recording devices. These enable us to have much more concrete evidence of such masters of improvisation as Marcel Dupré or Albert de Klerk. What we do have regarding Bruckner's improvising is a patchwork quilt of comments by listeners, reviews in newspapers and Bruckner's own testimonials, with all the capacity for bias and subjectivity inherent in such information. A closer look, nevertheless, seems necessary; even comments from the glowing admirers of Anton Bruckner sometimes betray a certain ambiguity as to

¹ Summereder 2010, 160: Summereder gives a 'genealogical' list of improvisers: Karl Walter, Josef Messner, Wilhelm Mück, Anton Heiller, Hans Smejkal, Hans Haselböck, Herbert Tachezi, Kurt Neuhauser, Augustinus Franz Kropfreiter, Peter Planyavsky, Elfi Stadlmann, Rupert Frieberger, Johannes Ebenbauer.

whether these improvisations really were of a long-presumed Olympic class. [§72] Instead of going into all the details of Bruckner's improvisations, it should be made clear that for a complete reference, such as dates, locations and themes, the following studies are indispensable, and I will rely upon them to a great extent: the article by Ernst Tittel in the magazine *Singende Kirche* and the publications by Erwin Horn.² It is a near impossible task to come up with new facts that have not already been offered in these texts which themselves also include their own conclusions and evaluations. Please forgive me for not making separate quotations for every single detail that comes from these essays; as far as musical examples are concerned, they present nearly the same material, and I will not repeat all of these here once again. Instead, I will try to look at Bruckner's fame as an improviser within a greater context, which in turn may help to re-evaluate our perception of the artist.

Reference System

[§73] More than hundred years ago, one of the early Bruckner-biographers, Rudolf Louis, cast some doubt on the surviving information about Bruckner's improvisations.³ Among the many articles written on the occasion of the Bruckner centenary, Hans Haselböck - a famous improviser himself and thus knowing the trade from the inside - offers well founded considerations about Bruckner's playing and the accounts of it - including possible discrepancies.⁴ In a thorough evaluation of the facts he comes to the conclusion that the bulk of appraisal comes from friends and fans of the master (as well as considerable amount from Bruckner himself), and that the comments that were printed in newspapers or magazines are not at all unequivocal.

[§74] Let us look at the reference system from which listeners came to their exuberant appraisals of Bruckner's improvisations. What other organ music would they typically hear, and how much chance had they to listen to organ music of larger scope?

² Tittel 1968, Horn 1996, Horn 1997.

³ Louis 1904, 118-126.

⁴ Haselböck 1996, III.

Organ Recitals

[§75] Organ playing outside, or apart from, the liturgy in the 19th century was not unknown but its frequency differed greatly between regions and denominations. In her voluminous survey of organ concerts in the 19th century, Cordelia Miller offers a quite impressive list of cities where organ recitals took place in Lutheran churches, but the list contains only two cities within the territory of today's Austria: Vienna and Krems.⁵ In Catholic churches, concerts were not allowed as a result of principle and ideology. Miller: 'In fact, recitals in Catholic churches account for less than one percent of all concerts mentioned in the sources.'⁶ The possibility of an audience anywhere in Austria encountering organ playing of a secular, let alone virtuosic, character can be virtually excluded.

[§76] According to Cordelia Miller's research, the few organ concerts an Austrian citizen could have heard in the middle of the 19th century can be identified very quickly: Adolph Friedrich Hesse in Vienna in 1831, 1835 (also in Salzburg) and 1838. The days of Abbé Georg Joseph Vogler's touring Europe and playing in Vienna (1813) were long gone before Anton Bruckner began to astonish his admirers. While concert halls were established as a part of public life in England during the mid 18th century, the building of concert halls on the continent only began gradually one hundred years later. One of the first secular locations on Austrian territory where an organ was installed was the Great Hall of the Musikverein ('Grosser Musikvereinsaal', 'Goldener Saal') which would eventually become one of the best-known concert halls in the world.

Organ playing within the liturgy

[§77] In the Austria of Bruckner's lifetime, we can ignore the Lutheran churches as a medium for the promotion of organ playing of any scale to the general public; as we have already seen, the reformed denominations played only a very minor role in this region.⁷ Catholic liturgy, on the other

⁵ Miller 2010, 101.

⁶ Miller 2010, 122.

⁷ Robert Louis had already explained (Louis 1904, 127) that the standard of organ playing was traditionally low in Catholic churches - as opposed to 'the Lutheran North of our country'.

hand, was not the place to perform organ pieces either. The postlude after mass or vespers would have been the only opportunity for a longer piece but, in addition to practical limitations, a general defensiveness against 'non-sacred' elements in music had begun to spread widely in the Catholic church. This was taken up by the Cecilian movement in the middle of the century and finally led to a series of legislations culminating in the encyclical⁸ *Tra le sollecitudini* of Pius X in 1903. A style of music characterised by humility and smoothness had begun to creep into organ lofts and chapel floors long before 1903, however, interrupted only by a 'pastorella' here and a pseudo-Mozartian 'scherzo' there. Miller: 'Within the service, the predominant vehicle was improvisation consisting of short modulations and interludes between the liturgical elements. As far as written organ music was concerned, only short pieces were possible.'⁹

[§78] In order to evaluate the impression improvisations could have made, we first have to evaluate the music which was written down.

In his grand panorama of the history of organ music, Gotthold Frotscher summarises the ideology behind the then current conservative tendencies: 'Avoiding any vital means of expression, they were afraid to fall back on secular subjectivism, identifying ecclesiastical with rigorous, spiritual with lifeless and religious with impersonal. Thus, theatrical pieces were banned from the church, but along with these also the Preludes, Fugues and Toccatas of Bach, for the reason that the vigorous momentum of this music could not be accommodated within the present concept of the ecclesiastical. Instead, the liturgy was the home of all those Lento, Adagio, Largo, and Cantabile pieces; their measured atmosphere was supposed to put the faithful into a "serious religious mood".'¹⁰

⁸ Technically speaking it was not an encyclical but a *motu proprio*.

⁹ Miller 2010, 121.

¹⁰ Frotscher (1935), 1124: 'Das Vermeiden aller lebendigen Ausdrucksmittel, die Furcht, in weltliche Subjektivismen zu verfallen, die Gleichsetzung von kirchlich und streng, geistlich und unlebendig, religiös und unpersönlich. So werden theatralische Stücke aus der Kirche verbannt, aber mit ihnen auch die Praeludien, Fugen und Toccaten eines Bach, und zwar deshalb, weil ihr

[§79] This description covers one side of the church repertoire; the other side was the area of counterpoint - or what was called counterpoint and titled *Fugue*. Counterpoint was regarded as the most appropriate way to play the organ, and this became more true as times changed. In contrast to Johann Sebastian Bach and, to a certain extent, his contemporaries, for whom expressing ideas was most commonly achieved through composing counterpoint in virtually all pieces of music, not just those titled Fuge or Trio, composers now put more emphasis on melody, harmony and dynamics. Counterpoint was primarily something to study in order to prove one's ability to compose it, but it was no longer the 'natural' environment. Counterpoint had become a tool and ceased to be an integral part of the musical essence. Forms of counterpoint began to stagnate, and the concepts 'organ' and 'fugue' were identified with each other more and more.

[§80] It goes without saying that many of the thousands of fugues composed in the early 19th century are merely fugatos at best; a superficial browse through editions shows that, in many cases, the contrapuntal momentum is lost after two or three entrances of the subject, and the artistry melts away in chains of sequences and suspensions. Otto Biba, one of the specialists on 19th century organ music in the region, writes: 'Fugues continued to be in demand in great numbers and therefore were composed and published. Strict counterpoint was still regarded as the actual and proper organ style, and the fugue was seen as the most distinguished genre for that instrument. But not everybody could improvise it. Therefore it was the most sought-after type of organ composition. [...] We know of course that not everything that was called 'fugue' and composed and played as a fugue was in fact a fugue. But that goes also for the late 18th century.'¹¹

[§81] This is not intended to denounce 19th century organ composers as though none of them could write a decent fugue, but we can assume that counterpoint in a theoretical and lifeless form dominated the average church

Kraftimpuls mit dem zeitlichen Begriff des Kirchlichen nicht in Einklang gebracht werden kann. Statt dessen finden im Gottesdienst alle jene Lentos, Adagios, Largos und Cantabiles ihre Stätte, deren Getragenheit in "ernste religiöse Stimmung" versetzen soll.'

¹¹ Biba 1983, 42.

organ playing. It seems that everybody moved their fingers continuously in subject-and-answer-fashion. Memorised patterns almost certainly played an important role; memorised not only in the mind but also 'with the hands' (i.e. motorical memory).¹²

[§82] Although chorale preludes were written that used the entire melody, a lot of trash was produced as well. This situation was exacerbated by the fact that chorale preludes were not part of the customary musical currency in Austria and South Germany. The Catholic liturgy generally called for flexible intermezzo music as we have already seen. And it seems that as soon as such an intermezzo contained a noticeable amount of (at least pseudo-) polyphony and started with some kind of fugal exposition, albeit of very little consistency, the title would read 'Fugue'. The few pieces that Bruckner actually composed for organ are clearly significantly different from his improvisations, but not from the average repertoire of the period under discussion. We should be thankful that these pieces were written long before he undertook studies with the famous counterpoint expert Simon Sechter. Even Ernst Tittel, a writer who certainly lacked nothing in understanding of, if not adoration towards, Bruckner, calls the pieces 'merely chippings from the work bench'. He states that the fugues are hardly more than clumsy counterpoint studies and that the preludes employ simple harmonic schemes that had been used a thousand times before.¹³

H. Paul Shurtz comes to the conclusion that Bruckner's written organ compositions are 'perhaps an indication of the early [!] training of an organist in Austria in the 19th century. [...] The question rises whether these compositions are really by Bruckner or perhaps by his teacher.'¹⁴

¹² When Bruckner applied for the position at the Cathedral in Linz, one of the competitors tried to impress the committee with his usual fugato: '[Engelbert] Lanz briskly sat down at the organ and started to "fugue around" [hatte zu fugieren angefangen] but not on the given theme. "Stop it," said [committee member] Dürrnberger, anyone can drum that sort of thing into his head' ['Hören Sie auf,' sagte Dürrnberger, 'das kann sich jeder einlernen']. Quoted after Göllicher/Auer 2/1, 189.

¹³ Tittel 1968, 113-114.

¹⁴ Shurtz 1979, 1-2.

[§83] There is one piece, composed much later, the *Perger Präludium* (1884), where we can find the complex harmonic progressions known from the symphonies; many of them, in fact, when compared with the brevity of the piece (27 bars). From here we get some idea of the daring harmonies in the improvisations which were understandably praised by many.

[§84] Put simply, organists and organ composers were quite conservative. The great inventions made outside the realm of organ music and all the associated developments generally bypassed the church and its organ. Not that this was true exclusively of Austria. Mendelssohn's organ music, initially essentially conservative, was not intended for the liturgy and, moreover, was written for England. Franz Liszt's large organ pieces were created because an exceptionally large instrument was at hand: the organ of the Cathedral of Merseburg, built in 1853-1855 by Friedrich Ladegast had 81 stops and would be the largest organ in German-speaking Europe for some time.

[§85] Not only were the organ compositions by Franz Liszt (and, for that matter, by Julius Reubke) obvious deviations from the beaten track, but, for the reasons already discussed, the average Austrian organ enthusiast had no opportunity to hear them whatsoever.

[§86] The organ had always been the instrument *in* the church but had become, unmistakably, the instrument *of* the church. Just as liturgy had its inherent bias towards conservatism, so the organ began to give off a certain odour of 'timeless objectivity' which could not be disturbed by contemporary fashions nor by the emotions of the human who played it or composed music for it.¹⁵

Instruments

[§87] The conservatism of organists and organ repertoire mirrored, or perhaps resulted from, the conservatism of organ building in the region. At the time of Bruckner's initial success, all organs in the Austrian territory had a 'short octave' on both the manual and the pedalboard. The lowest octave ran thus: C F G A B, with the keys D and E being in the positions

¹⁵ An overview of such considerations is given by Schwarz: Schwarz 1973, 26-41. Cf. Vogt 1984.

occupied by F# and G# on modern organs; keys for C#, D#, F# and G# did not exist. The pedal differed even further from the design we know today. The bottom octave looked the same as the manuals (again, no C#, D#, F# and G#); then, a chromatic scale would continue up to a0 or sometimes b0. Smaller and older organs might even have a pedal playing not more than 12 notes; the bottom notes would repeat when the keys of the tenor octave were played,¹⁶ resulting in 18 key pedal boards (CDEF-a0) playing only 12 notes (B-a0). Biba: 'One has to bear in mind that, as late as 1804, Ignaz Kober built his famous organ in the abbey church of Heiligenkreuz [30 km southwest of Vienna] with a pedal compass such as that described here but containing no fewer than 17 independent stops. The first organ for Vienna with a pedal compass of C-d1 was built by Carl Ferdinand Buckow of Silesia in 1858 for the Piaristenkirche.'¹⁷ It was during this period (1856-1867) that Anton Bruckner, Cathedral Organist in Linz, had his organ rebuilt in several phases to his own design. Nevertheless, the pedal retained a compass of 12 notes played from 18 keys.¹⁸

[§88] Organists from abroad were not happy about these regional deviations. In a report about his travels, Adolph Friedrich Hesse, who had been crowned the 'the king of the pedal',¹⁹ refers to the short octave as 'a truly outrageous device' which, along with the restricted pedal compass [at the treble end] 'makes it impossible to produce anything meaningful on such an organ.'²⁰ One begins to wonder how common pedal playing

¹⁶ It should be noted that mid-19th century Austria was not the only region with a pedal compass that did not cater for the complete chromatic scale. When, for instance, Felix Mendelssohn played his first recitals in England in 1840, it was on an (otherwise large) organ where the pedal had 'only 15 pipes C-d to each of the [two 16'] ranks, though the pedalboard had 27 notes.' Cf. Thistlethwaite 1983, 44.

¹⁷ That was the organ on which Anton Bruckner was examined in 1856 and 1861. The choice of this organ was supposedly his own preference and contradicts his dislike of the full chromatic keyboard (see later).

¹⁸ Biba 1988.

¹⁹ In a review in *France Musicale* quoted in *Urania*. Miller 2010, 49.

²⁰ *Neue Zeitschrift für Musik* 39 (1853). 33. Quoted after Miller 2010, 48, 51: 'In einem

really was, and there is no doubt that obligato pedal writing of the kind common in Northern Germany for more than a hundred years was the exception in Austria. It was virtually impossible to play complex themes on most pedalboards; several important notes did not exist, and in other cases a chromatic scale would come out as a series of big leaps. A survey of organ compositions from Georg Muffat to Johann Georg Albrechtsberger and continuing on to Anton Bruckner's contemporaries clearly shows that common pedal playing consisted of pedal points and cadence notes (for this, of course, the short octave was very practical!), with the occasional entrance of a fugue subject, or perhaps only the first notes of it.

[§89] This corresponds very well with the fact that the organ works of Johann Sebastian Bach were played as piano duets in most cases and not on the organ. There were many editions of Bach's works for piano.²¹ Otto Biba concludes: 'The Bach tradition had been lost in Leipzig but lived on in Vienna. In Vienna, the classical style was not regarded as an antagonism to Bach, but instead Bach was accepted as the basis for the classical style.'²²

[§90] As a result, we have a situation where the standard of organ playing was certainly not high, neither in comparison with other regions of Europe, nor in comparison with the swift development of piano performance. But even a virtuoso player would have been hampered severely by the limitations of the region's keyboard compasses. Finally, we must consider two trivial practical matters: practising on an organ would always require somebody to pump the bellows and, during one third of the year, the temperatures inside the churches prevented organists from practising any more than was absolutely necessary.

Conclusion: Organ Perception in Austria around 1860

[§91] Organ playing could be heard almost exclusively within the Catholic liturgy. Longer and louder organ pieces were heard only at the end of the

Reisebericht bezeichnete Hesse die kurze Oktave als "eine wirklich empörende Einrichtung", die es zusammen mit dem beschränkten Pedalumfang unmöglich mache, "auf solcher Orgel [...] auch nur etwas von Bedeutung zu leisten".'

²¹ Haselböck 2000, Trummer 2005.

²² Biba 1988.

mass. The average mass (without choir) called for hymn accompaniments and for modulations and interludes between them. There was no place for larger forms and no opportunity to exhibit a great variety of registrations. The repertoire consisted of short fugues ('Versetten'), preludes and piano music. Pedal playing was greatly limited (pedal points, cadence notes, pseudo entrances of fugue subjects), not least by the compass of the pedalboards.

[§92] For practical reasons, the organ recital - as a genre of performance - did not exist. It was taken for granted that service music was conservative and differed considerably from 'modern' musical developments outside the church. Generally, the standard of playing was low.

Comments

[§93] In such an environment, a situation can be imagined whereby he who played longer and louder than the organist of the next village easily attracted audiences. Such an organist could easily prompt applause and astonishment. When Anton Bruckner was a schoolboy, he was introduced to the first steps of harmonisation and modulation at the organ; his teacher was Anton Kattinger, organist of the abbey of St. Florian where Bruckner would later become his successor. But even Mr. Kattinger was known as 'the Beethoven of the organ' among the locals: another hint at how prone music lovers were to regard organ improvisations (and organ playing as a whole) as something extraordinary as soon as it sounded a little more exciting than the harmonic meanderings flowing down from the balcony every Sunday.

[§94] Indeed, the rapturous comments of Bruckner's friends, disciples and colleagues about his improvisations are numerous and need not be considered, especially given that their existence was the starting point for our evaluation. There are, however, many positive, if not outstanding, reviews and commentaries in print regarding Bruckner's organ improvisations. One wonders how much differentiation has been made during the last 150 years between a polite mention and an actual review, and between remarks in a local paper (for example, in this case, the *Linzer Abendblatt* and the *Gmündner Wochenblatt*), a review in the national press (e.g. the *Neue Freie Presse*, Vienna's leading newspaper) or in a music magazine such as the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* or *Urania*.

[§95] A typical example of press commentary regarding Bruckner's improvising is this quote from a Linz newspaper: 'Mr. Pruckner [sic], the newly appointed organist, proved to be an artist completely at ease with the instrument both in contrapuntal and in free style. His prelude before the Agnus Dei, wherein he applied a combination of very effective stops, gained the highest admiration.'²³

[§96] Even more interesting is a review in an important Viennese paper, the *Fremdenblatt*, not least because it is comparably extensive and not without criticism for Bruckner's composition, but still emphasises the favourable words about his organ playing: 'Has no church been built for him and is there no chair vacant for him? We have experienced many times how he mastered the organ. Yesterday, again he sat down at the organ and freely developed a theme. Oh for the vigor and the abundance that flowed through the chapel! There's scarcely one around to challenge Mr. Bruckner in his virtuoso treatment of the pedal; he has really gained some dexterity with the feet. And this corresponds admirably with his agility on the manuals, an agility which is hardly ever confined by difficulties.'²⁴

[§97] Given the fact that such positive comments were repeated over and over in many publications, let us look now at some of the less favourable accounts as they have been quoted far less frequently. Some of the remarks will lead us to more detail about Bruckner's organ playing.

²³ *Linzer Abendbote*, 31 March 1856. Quoted after Maier 1996, 98: 'Hr Pruckner, der neu angestellte Organist, bewährte sich als ein, mit dem Instrument vollkommen vertrauter Künstler, sowohl im strengen als auch im freien Spiele. Im Präludio vor dem Agnus Dei, bei welchem sich H. Bruckner der Copplung sehr wirksamer Register bediente, erreichte die Bewunderung über sein Spiel den höchsten Grad.'

²⁴ *Fremdenblatt* (Vienna), in a report of a performance of Bruckner's Mass in d minor, February 10, 1867 in the Imperial Chapel, quoted by Maier 1996, 281: 'Ist keine Kirche für ihn gebaut, kein Lehrstuhl für ihn vakant? [...] Wie er die Orgel meistert, haben wir wiederholt erlebt. Auch gestern, am Schluß der Messe, setzte er sich an die Orgel und führte ein Thema frei durch. Mit welcher Kraft und Fülle das durch die Kapelle brauste! In virtuoser Behandlung des Pedals hat Herr Bruckner nicht leicht einen Nebenbuhler; er entwickelt darin eine wahre Fingerfertigkeit der Füße. Und dem entspricht eine wunderbare Gewandtheit auf dem Manual, eine Gewandtheit, für die kaum eine Schwierigkeit vorhanden ist.'

[§98] In 1869, organists from various countries were invited to play and test the new organ in the church of St. Epvre in Nancy. One would assume that the organ building firm Merklin & Schütze had an eye for the marketing potential that such a congregation of foreign organists would offer.

[§99] Bruckner wrote several letters from Nancy - firstly to Joseph Hellmesberger who was his director at the Conservatory in Vienna - in which he hints that the gathering had a competitive air: 'The recitals here [in Nancy] are over! It was most solemn. During the first days of my visit, and also for the first concert, it seemed to me that an organist from Paris (Mr. Vilbac) was preferred to us Germans. After the first concert I had the musical people on my side. After the second concert my performance was accepted in a way that has moved me but I don't want to describe it. The nobility, the people from Paris, the Germans and the Belgians competed to praise me [...] What the magazines will write about this, I don't know - and unfortunately I won't understand it! - All I have is the oral judgement of the professionals, but modesty commands me to keep silent about this - and also about the applause.'²⁵

[§100] In a letter dealing with another improvisation recital in Vienna, Bruckner remarks: 'Typically I don't prepare anything in advance but just have the themes given. This enabled me to become the winner of the organ congress in Nancy last year.'²⁶

[§101] There are grave doubts about the event in Nancy being some sort of competition and not just a gathering of organists.²⁷ There is no mention of the Nancy event in *Neue Zeitung für Musik*, but what we read in *Urania* sounds more like a competition: 'In Nancy an organ competition [Orgel-Wettkampf] has been advertised to which all (?) organists in Germany are invited. The prize money is up to 10.000 francs. Unfortunately, we do not have detailed information about the project. We hope however that we can

²⁵ Auer 1932, 225 f.

²⁶ *Urania* 28 (1871), 87. Quoted after Miller 2010, 222.

²⁷ Louis 1904, 118: 'The "Competition" in the "Cathedral" of Nancy was, in reality no more than the solemn inauguration of a new organ in the church of St. Epvre.'

report more about the outcome.' Footnote: 'We have heard that Bruckner, Court Organist in Vienna, has been victorious.'²⁸

[§102] Rumours about a contest in Nancy or in Paris persisted for years. When Otto Loidol, one of Bruckner's most ardent fans, wrote about his improvising in Kremsmünster in a newspaper, he concluded: 'Let us add that it was for fantasies and improvisations of this kind that our master has won his laurels in Paris.'²⁹ Hans Haselböck however is convinced that 'there was no competition, no jury and consequently no winner - as much as one would be glad for an artist who was undervalued many times.' There is no reason to doubt Haselböck's evaluation; had there indeed been a competition and a winner in the way the remark in *Urania* suggests, Bruckner would certainly have told his friends about the incredible sum of money he had won and we have been able to read about it as a consequence. [§103] A similar case of contradicting information can be encountered when considering Bruckner's engagement in London in 1871, especially - once again - about the occasion being a competition or not, and about a medallion 'awarded' by Queen Victoria being a prize or merely a souvenir.³⁰ After Nancy, according to Bruckner, 'the people wouldn't stop begging'³¹ him to make a detour via Paris to improvise on the large Cavallé-Coll organ in Notre-Dame. On this occasion, Camille Saint-Saëns, César Franck, Gustave Auber and Charles Gounod were present. Apart from César Franck, who mentioned Bruckner's improvisation with great respect to one of his pupils ('one has never heard anything like it before'), we have no comments from

²⁸ *Urania* 26 (1869), 109: 'In Nancy war für den Monat April ein Orgel-Wettkampf ausgeschrieben, zu dem alle (?) Organisten Deutschlands geladen sind. Die Preise betragen bis 10.000 Franks [sic]. Leider fehlen uns über das projektirte Unternehmen nähere Nachrichten. Über den Ausgang des fraglichen Turnirs hoffen wir jedoch Specielleres zu bringen.' Footnote: 'Dem Vernehmen nach hat Hoforganist Bruckner in Wien den Sieg davon getragen.'

²⁹ *Linzer Volksblatt*, August 24, 1884, quoted by Tittel 1968, 158. Otto Loidol's first name is sometimes spelt as Oddo; this was his monastic name.

³⁰ Louis 1904, 123-125.

³¹ Auer 1932, 226.

the aforementioned musicians.³² In the salon (the demonstration room) of the organ building company Merklin-Schütze, Bruckner played another joint recital together with the blind organist Pierre-Edmond Hocmelle.³³

Bruckner's standard of organ playing

[§104] After a concert by Bruckner in the Piaristenkirche in Vienna on June 10, 1870, a reviewer remarked: 'We, the colleagues from North Germany, had expected more variety in the programme as far as [written] compositions were concerned. We may be spoiled in this respect; the South Germans left the church thoroughly pleased with what they had heard.'³⁴

[§105] This draws our attention to the fact that Bruckner's programmes consisted mostly of improvisations. He played a limited number of pieces but was decidedly not keen on the idea of studying compositions by other composers. We know of several performances of the first and second movements of Mendelssohn's first sonata; there is Bach's Toccata in F major (BWV 540) and the ominous Toccata in d minor (BWV 565). Other pieces found on the few recital programmes are various Bach Preludes and even more Fugues (obviously from the Well-Tempered Clavier as one of them is in c# minor).³⁵

[§106] One of Bruckner's remarks has been quoted many times: 'Well, I'm not going to fumble around with a Bach piece for any length of time - that's for those who have no fantasy; I'm going to play [improvise] on a free theme.'³⁶

³² According to Auer (1932, 227), a Mr. Lamberg reported the favourable comments of Cesar Franck.

³³ Ochse 1994, 84.

³⁴ *Urania* 28 (1871), 87 f. Quoted by Miller 2010, 221: 'Wir norddeutschen Collegen hatten mehr erwartet, d. h. was Mannigfachheit des Programms in Bezug auf Compositionen anbelangt, da wir in dieser Beziehung verwöhnt sein mögen, die süddeutschen Collegen aber verließen höchst befriedigt die Kirche.'

³⁵ Horn 1997; Moser 1961, 33.

³⁶ Auer 1932, 245: 'No, i werd net lang den Bach einwerggln, dös soll'n die mach'n, die ka Phantasie haben, i spiel über a frei's Thema.'

[§107] Anton Bruckner was known as an 'organ virtuoso' but this refers primarily to his improvisations as we can conclude from various remarks. When Bruckner finally obtained a professorship at the Conservatory in Vienna, his responsibility was divided between teaching music theory and organ. But there was no organ to teach on; after several attempts to find a church for the organ class, and after some time using a piano as a substitute, a harmonium was finally organised.³⁷ It was only after some time that the organ lessons could be accommodated on the new organ in the great hall of the Musikverein (1872). A contemporary account says: 'Bruckner preferred to have the students play fugues by J. S. Bach. But he himself never demonstrated these for the students, simply remarking: "Just go on and keep practising - I can't waste much time on that, and if somebody wants me to play Bach's fugues I tell them to consult my students."³⁸

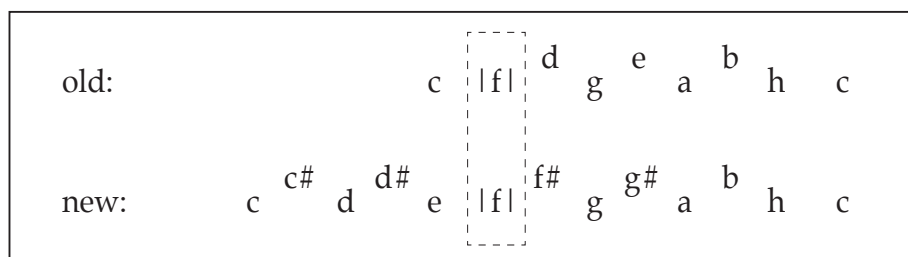
[§108] Bruckner was even more hesitant about playing any compositions other than those already mentioned. Whilst contemplating whether to accept an invitation to play recitals in Germany, he wrote to his friend Rudolf Weinwurm: 'As far as the tour is concerned, I have to say that, alas, I don't have any repertoire yet despite the fact that I have already played Bach and Mendelssohn. I don't have the time and the inclination to burden myself with that. For there is no use; organists always get paid very little, and if it is impossible to arrange concerts without having some profit at the end, I think it is best to perform without a fee, and to play only [improvised] fantasies without music. For excellent performances of other masters' works there must be an abundance of splendid organists out there [in Germany] I should think. Don't you think so? In this case I do not want to waste time for nothing; who knows whether the concerts will be possible at all.'³⁹

³⁷ Maier 1996, quoted by Göllicher-Auer IV/1, 33.

³⁸ Tittel 1969, 111; Tittel quotes Hermann Habeck uit Göllicher-Auer IV/3, 115.

³⁹ March 1, 1864. Maier 1996, 227: 'Bezüglich der Reise muß ich leider schreiben, daß ich noch kein Repertoire habe, obwohl ich Bach und Mendelssohn gespielt habe. Ich habe wenig Zeit und Lust, mich sonderlich in dieser Beziehung zu plagen; denn es hat keinen Zweck: Organisten sind stets schlecht gezahlt und wenn man Konzerte am Ende nicht mit Vortheil arrangiren kann, meine ich, ists am besten unentgeltlich, und dann auch nur Fantasien etc. ohne Noten aus dem

[109] On another occasion Weinwurm planned for Bruckner to play during a concert by a well-known choir in Vienna. Bruckner was once again reluctant, however, concerning his organ playing, and about something else, as we learn from his response to Weinwurm: 'I am quite pleased with this project. But my playing is much better suited to larger organs. On smaller organs, the whole effect is lost and often even becomes ridiculous when I play in a specific way. How many manuals and how many stops has this organ? Is the pedal key of F in the same place as on an old organ with shortened [sic] octaves, or is it situated higher up? In that case, I cannot play on the pedal at all. Here in Linz, we have two new organs built by Moser, in the Main Parish [Stadtpfarre], and in the Minoriten church [Church of the Conventual Franciscans] where I absolutely cannot play the pedal because it is as described above, while I have no such trouble in the Main Parish church. Likewise, I have no problems in the Imperial Chapel in Vienna and in the Piaristenkirche; there the F is in the same direction [i.e. in the same place] as the former (old) F. Something like this [the lines beside the f are drawn by Bruckner]:



But wherever the pedal is not situated slightly to the left, I cannot play. Please be so kind as to check this thoroughly. Moreover it is not possible for me to learn foreign compositions, and also I would have to be down there [in Vienna] for a longer period of time; I would have to confine myself to my own fantasies and improvised fugues. To play foreign compositions, by the

Kopfe zu spielen. Zum gediegenen Spiele fremder Meister glaube ich werden draußen sehr tüchtige Leute in Hülle und Fülle sein. Meinst Du nicht? Dann möchte ich umsonst die Zeit nicht so vergeuden.'

way, there are many people in Vienna who can do that; I think only my own way would be characteristic for me, don't you think?'⁴⁰

[§110] First, we learn about a certain inflexibility on the part of our respected master when it comes to variations in the layout of the pedalboard. This is underlined by another story related by Josef Gruber, Bruckner's second successor in the abbey of St. Florian. During a festive mass on Christmas Eve, Bruckner reportedly got completely lost while accompanying the choir to the extent that the choirmaster was obliged to abandon his position in order to indicate to Bruckner the place in the score which had choir had reached. The reason was 'that Bruckner was not at all familiar with the 30-key-pedal'⁴¹ and had problems specifically with contrapuntal music.'⁴²

40 March 8, 1868. Maier 1996, 306: 'Ich freue mich, ob einer solchen Aussicht. Mein Spiel ist aber leider nur für größere Orgeln mehr angepaßt. Bei kleinen Orgeln geht der ganze Effect flöten und wird sogar oft lächerlich, d. h. wenn ich absonderlich spielen wollte. Wie viele Manuale und Register hat die Orgel? Trifft das Pedal F mit dem der alten Orgel mit abgekürzten Oktaven in gleicher Richtung, oder kommt es weiter herauf. / Im letzten Fall kann ich das Pedal gar nicht mitspielen. Wir in Linz haben 2 neue Orgeln von Moser, in der Stadtpfarre, und bei den Minoriten, wo ich das Pedal durchaus nicht spielen kann, da obiger letzter Fall eintritt, während bei der Stadtpfarrorgel keine solche Kalamität sich mir biethet. In der Hofkapelle in Wien und bei den Piaristen trifft sich gleichfalls der Übelstand für mich nicht; es ist so eingerichtet, daß das F mit dem früheren (alten) F in gleiche Richtung kommt. Etwa so: [followed by the diagram of the pedal keys] so in Hofkapelle etc und bei uns in Stadtpfarrorgel. / Wo aber das neue Pedal nicht weiter links herausgerückt ist, kann ich nicht spielen. Sei so gut, und inspizire alles das genau. Ferner ist es mir jetzt nicht mehr möglich fremde Compositionen zu studiren, auch müßte ich zu dem Zwecke längere Zeit unten sein; ich müßte mich nur auf eigenen Fantasien und improvisirte Fugen beschränken. Übrigens fremde Compositionen abzuspielen, gibts ja auch in Wien genug Leute; ich glaube mich würde nur meine eigene Art charakterisiren. Wärest Du nicht derselben Meinung?'

41 Several years after Bruckner's departure to Linz and Vienna, the organ in the abbey church was rebuilt by Matthäus Mauracher (senior) in 1873 and was subsequently equipped with a 'modern' pedalboard (Kreuzhuber 1996, 93).

42 Horn 1996, quoting Gruber 1929, 18.

This seems rather to contradict the general admiration for Bruckner's pedal performance. In addition, we have a remark by one of his students that 'Bruckner demonstrated, when requested by his students, his famous pedal trills several times.'⁴³

[§111] We can conclude that 'standard' organ playing was not his thing; he concentrated on improvising, and in this field he must have been superior to many if not all. Clearly it was his improvising that led to his being described as Austria's leading organ virtuoso. Johann Herbeck, eager to arrange for Bruckner to obtain a position at the Imperial Chapel in addition to his position at the Conservatory in Vienna, wrote in an official letter to the Imperial Court: 'As an organ virtuoso, Bruckner has nothing to fear from any rival in the Empire.'⁴⁴

[§112] The other detail which should not pass unnoticed is that Bruckner admitted to requiring the resources of a large instrument for his particular manner of improvisation - many stops, various colours, dynamics, mystery, thunder and awe. There are countless remarks about the variety and the effectiveness of his registrations, whether manipulated by himself or by an assistant. Compared with the musical diet to which the average church-goer was accustomed - a stream (or should we say a trickle) of improvisations, mostly in the average pious andante, all a smooth mezzo piano, never interrupted by a sforzato -, Bruckner's extemporisations must have sounded like magic to the untrained ear.

Bruckner's improvisations

[§113] When Bruckner played in England, one critic wrote: 'He played an outstanding ex-tempore-fantasy which, while not very original in motifs and design, showed ample dexterity, and this was furthermore noticeable for the canonic development and for mastering considerable technical difficulties in the pedal passages. One cannot improvise on the Austrian national anthem and even less on Handel's Hallelujah chorus; also, we do not believe that effectful improvisations could be made on Bach's Toccata or Mendelssohn's Sonatas. Great composers exhaust their theme. Nothing can be added to the Hallelujah chorus and nothing to Bach's Toccata.'⁴⁵

⁴³ Auer 1932, 236.

⁴⁴ August 8, 1868. Quoted after Maier 1996, 345.

Three improvisation styles

[§114] As far as we can deduce from commentaries, Anton Bruckner improvised - according to Erwin Horn - in three distinct improvisation styles: contrapuntal (on themes by Bach and Mendelssohn), which probably dissolved in many cases into paraphrases rather than improvisations; a 'symphonic' style which would show the 'original' Bruckner; and a style of variations which he used for songs, hymn tunes, national anthems or folksongs.⁴⁶ Thomas Schmögner speculates: 'When he did perform a written composition occasionally, it was hardly with the intention to render a historically correct reproduction. The works of Bach, Mendelssohn or Liszt served for him merely as a basis for improvisation; after a few bars he would depart from the original and extend it according to his own inventions. It is not unimportant to note that similar practices were known to Cesar Franck and Franz Liszt.'⁴⁷ The critics were aware of the unusual nature of the programmes before they even heard the first note; the announcement of his concert at the Royal Albert Hall on Wednesday, August 2nd, reads: 'Mr. Bruckner's strong points are Classical Improvisations on the Works of Handel, Bach and Mendelssohn.'

[§115] The triumphs in Nancy, Paris and England added considerably to Bruckner's image as 'Austria's greatest organ virtuoso'. When the new organ in the Great Hall of the Musikverein was inaugurated in 1872, Anton Bruckner was one of the organists invited to play. Johannes Brahms conducted the choir, and another organist, Carl August Fischer, played works by Bach, Liszt, Mendelssohn and others. Bruckner improvised for 20 minutes. The leading musical magazine *Urania* emphasises Fischer as 'the far more versatile specialist' and criticises the obvious 'aphoristic character' of Bruckner's improvisations. 'His developments deal with ornaments rather than with themes. After roaming about for a long time in strictly homophonic stock phrases - to label it contrapuntal would be possible only in the widest meaning of the terminology -, the Austrian Anthem finally emerged in a quite defective shape like an oasis, only to be shoved aside by

⁴⁵ Horn 1996, quoted after Göllerich-Auer.

⁴⁶ Horn 1996.

⁴⁷ Schmögner 1998, 79-84.

more of the dead weight of idle commonplaces.’ The Viennese reviewer of the *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* admits that he had expected more from ‘the power and beauty of Bruckner’s inventions’.⁴⁸

[§116] Once more Bruckner was invited to take part in an important organ dedication. The new organ in St. Stephan’s Cathedral in Vienna was built by the leading German organ company of Walcker. With 90 stops it was the largest organ in Austria, comparable to the organ in Merseburg for which Franz Liszt had written his important organ works. Unfortunately we have only a short poetic description of the sound of the new instrument and no detailed reference to any of the performances is made.

Bruckner’s routine

[§117] How did Bruckner set about his improvisations? We have his own detailed account of his examination in Vienna’s Piaristenkirche in 1861: ‘After that, the subject was shown to me and I was asked whether I would accept it. When I said yes, they ushered me to the organ where the bellows were already full. When I didn’t begin immediately, there was some chuckling in the committee because they assumed I was frightened of it. After I had put together the necessary material in my mind, I started with an introduction using the elements of the subject.’⁴⁹

[118] On July 31, 1890, the Imperial family staged the wedding of Archduchess Marie Valerie and Archduke Franz Salvator in Bad Ischl. Anton Bruckner was invited to play the organ, an instrument he knew from previous occasions. When built in 1880 by Matthäus Mauracher, it was one of most advanced organs in Austria and the first with tubular-pneumatic action.⁵⁰ For the postlude, Bruckner had to submit a plan of his intended improvisations to the Oberhofmeister who consulted Johann Hellmesberger (Master of Court Music). This is the only detailed sketch of an improvisation by Bruckner we have (example 1 [a and b]).

48 Miller 2010, 128. Quotes: *Urania* 30 (1873), 15 and *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* 7 (1872), column 771.

49 Auer 1932, 126.

50 Sonnleitner 1993.

Example 1a: improvisation sketch Bruckner, first page

play stop

were almost fixed and were probably ‘performed’ many times. Erwin Horn comments: ‘In order to facilitate their easy combination, Bruckner chose themes with elementary structures. Once a theme’s structural possibilities and harmonic and contrapuntal potential had been explored, and tested in practice, it was inevitable that, after a time, a certain matrix would be formed which would be used again and again.

[§121] In addition, there are themes which can be considered the offspring of a certain ‘mother subject’; there are variants but all share a harmonic and tonal core that is essential for their contrapuntal potential (example 2 [a-e]).

[§122] It is very likely that Bruckner referenced, or directly used, a theme from this old noble family of fugue subjects on many occasions in his improvisations. We know that he was given such a theme in 1869 at La Trinité in Paris by Charles-Alexis Chauvet:⁵²

Example 3: theme given to Bruckner by Chauvet

play

stop



[§123] Bruckner often used themes from Wagner operas as well as hymn tunes and subjects derived from Gregorian chant. Two themes were used more often than others, namely the Austrian national anthem and Handel’s Hallelujah chorus, and there is no doubt that the contrapuntal and harmonic possibilities inherent in these themes were engraved in Bruckner’s mind and hands as it were.

52 Tittel 1968, 160.

Example 2: an example of a classical ‘mother-subject’

2a: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart: Requiem / Kyrië



2b: Mozart: Vespe de confessore / Laudate pueri



2c: Michael Haydn, Requiem / Cum sanctis tuis



2d: Carl Czerny / Fugue for organ (opus 603/6)



2e: Franz Schubert / Fugue d minor, Neues Deutsch Verzeichnis 24C



[§124] On the other hand, as we have already seen, he is known to have preferred 'not to prepare anything in advance but just have the themes given.' Long before he undertook his various studies, - above all those with Simon Sechter -, Bruckner seemed to have logged thousands of hours at the organ, thus gaining an enormous amount of motorical and structural experience as well as undertaking countless experiments with chordal progressions and species counterpoint. We know he practised for five to ten hours each day. (One wonders once again about the availability - and the cost - of the people who pumped the bellows.)

Conclusion

[§ 125] One can hypothesise that, as far as his compositions are concerned, our master was not the most spontaneous of creators. He was often insecure and timid about what he had drafted or even finished; his self-doubting manifested itself frequently and he was all too ready to delete, edit and change bars, lines or pages in his manuscripts.⁵³

[§ 126] Ultimately, therefore, we are left with a less-than-clear picture. For the average audience in Austria, and even more so for his friends and 'fans', Bruckner was surely a giant in a flat musical landscape. Comments made outside his homeland were sometimes less enthusiastic. Nevertheless it seems that, notwithstanding all critical evaluation, an imagination of significant power and drive was at work; what ultimately came across was something that could not be measured solely in terms of rules either followed or ignored. Bruckner's symphonies, with their countless layers, offer ample opportunity to study what the genius could produce in the context of a long process. If one could hear his improvisations, it would surely be a different story told in a different musical language which we would encounter.

[§127] To put it simply, Bruckner had a great gift for improvisation regardless of his many studies and exams, but his improvisation art is still shrouded in enough mystery to render a definitive explanation of it elusive.

⁵³ Nowak 1985, 34-37. Cf. Hans Haselböck, ed., *Anton Bruckner / Orgelwerke*. Wenen/München: Doblinger (D. 13.562), 1970.

[§128] *The author would like to thank Erwin Horn for his permission to reproduce his copy of Anton Bruckner's sketches for the improvisation at the end of the Imperial wedding in Bad Ischl.*

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