

Symphony No. **2**
in C minor



**ANTON
BRUCKNER**

Orchestre de la Suisse Romande
Marek Janowski

Anton Bruckner 1824-1896

Symphony No. 2 in C minor (Version 1877)

William Carragan Edition

1 Moderato

17. 47

2 Adante

14. 21

3 Scherzo. Mässig schnell - Trio. Gleiches Tempo

8. 46

4 Finale. Mehr schnell

13. 58

Orchestre de la Suisse Romande

conducted by

Marek Janowski

Total playing time: 54.55

Recording venue : Victoria Hall, Geneva, Switzerland (10/2012)
Executive producer : Job Maarse
Recording producer : Job Maarse
Balance engineer : Erdo Groot
Recording engineer : Roger de Schot
Editing : lentje Mooij

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Symphonic “test-drilling”

To this day, Anton Bruckner's Symphony No. 2 in C minor is the least frequently performed of all his symphonies. Rather odd, as the composer described the work in a letter dated October 9, 1878 as “probably, first and foremost, the symphony that is easiest for the audience to understand”, and the first performance, given in Vienna on October 16, 1873 was a great success for the composer. How can one explain this peculiar contrast? On the one hand, considered objectively, the audience could easily follow the work; yet on the other hand, the public at large displayed a predominant lack of interest in the symphony. Is there more involved in this case to fully comprehend precisely this symphony, than simply an understanding of its very clear formal concept? Or had the Symphony No. 2 simply fallen between two creative stools, thanks to its direct symphonic predecessors and successors? Let us take a brief look at the works in its direct vicinity.

Bruckner's Symphony No. 1, the famous “saucy maid”, had been a symphonic début such as the world had not seen since Beethoven and Berlioz. A début full of radicalism and innovation, in which new ground was broken by Bruckner. However, his Symphony No. 3 is regarded as his (symphonic) problem child. Well-loved, yet not necessarily successful. In its first version, it is a gigantic, megalomaniac work. Well, the Symphony No. 2 is situated between these two extremes. Not as revolutionary as the first, nor as brutally out of hand as the third. In the musicological writings about the work, one comes across the description “retarding factor” (Manfred Wagner). A highly accurate formulation, however, one that requires a more in-depth explanation with regard to the further compositional development of the composer's personal concept of the symphony, which received a massive push forward in the second symphony. For the Symphony No. 2 is not a “step backwards”, as Dietmar Holland also stresses, but rather a highly independent “symphonic creature”, thanks to its characteristic “bulkiness” and the high level of complexity of its content.

Not only is the Symphony No. 2 the first of his symphonies to be composed in Vienna, it is also the first true manifestation of the ubiquitous problem of his multiple versions of one and the same work (though certainly not in its clearest expression). For a person like Bruckner, Vienna appears to have been a difficult place; the rapidly growing city was going through a phase of dramatic and radical changes (for instance, those brought about by various architectural feats). And Bruckner seems to have been “initially quite cowed” by the city of Vienna. In the years 1869 and 1871, he enjoyed great success as a virtuoso organist in France and England, but on his return to Vienna – a city rife with intrigue – he was immediately confronted with disciplinary proceedings of an almost

grotesque nature (which were later dropped) for the alleged sexual harassment of a student. Not the best conditions under which to liberate the mind for the composition of a symphony. In October 1871, Bruckner began work on his second symphony. He finished the first movement on July 8, 1872, completing the remainder of the score in just two months on September 11, 1872; and the following month, the first rehearsals with the Vienna Philharmonic took place. However, the conductor for the subscription concerts, Otto Dessoff, rejected the work rigorously as being unplayable. A year later, Bruckner made another attempt at staging the work. This time, he hired the Vienna Philharmonic and himself conducted the first performance on October 26, 1873 during the closing ceremony of the Vienna World Exhibition. This was a great success, not only with the audience, but also with the orchestra (!). The reviews of the première already make reference in words and style to the aesthetic dispute between the New German School and the conservatives, which would become an increasingly stressful topic for Bruckner from now on: with his followers lapsing into adulation, and his critics into taunts and mockery. Despite the mainly positive reception of the work, Bruckner followed the advice of his patron and benefactor, Johann Herbeck, and undertook a profound revision of his symphony, which consisted mainly of cuts. The work was subsequently performed in this form on February 20, 1876, again with the Vienna Philharmonic. Once again, with partially enthusiastic waves of applause from the Bruckner fans. In 1877, Bruckner again completed a revision of his second symphony, and in 1892 further adjustments were carried out under his guidance before the work went to print. Thus, one can speak of three versions of the work: 1871-1872, 1873-1877, and 1892. For many decades, the Symphony No. 2 – which was published in Robert Haas’ “Alte Gesamtausgabe” (= old complete edition) in 1938 – was presented as a mix of the different versions and referred to as the “ideal version”, or the “original version”. Not until a few years ago were the versions from 1872 and 1877 presented in two volumes as part of William Carragan’s “Neue Gesamtausgabe” (= new complete edition), and this recording is based on the latter. (For details concerning the versions, please refer to William Carragan’s preface to the NGA, referring to the 1877 version.)

Bruckner's core theme in his Symphony No. 2 is the continued testing, exploration, and expansion of the symphonic possibilities. One could regard this process of testing as a type of archaeological “test-drilling”, during which the researcher-composer penetrates deeper into strata never yet observed by man. With the significant difference that Bruckner is looking to the future, whereas the archaeologist is staring at the past. Bruckner's vision of the future of the symphony becomes more precise, sharper, and increasingly rounded as he completes each symphony. The

concept of “work in progress”, i.e. the reworking and refining of a concept can certainly be applied to the Symphony No. 2.

In addition to the pair of symphonies in D minor (the Symphony No. 0 and the Symphony No. 3), Bruckner created a second pair of symphonies, this time written in C minor (his Symphony No. 1 and Symphony No. 2). Both latter works mentioned in each pair (i.e. the second and third symphonies) seem to represent a kind of recourse to the earlier works (the zero and first symphonies) written in the same key; they are a more elaborate development of the first concepts. Albeit with varying results.

The first movement of the Symphony No. 2 is in sonata form; furthermore, as is usual with Bruckner, it establishes three groups of themes in the exposition, including transition. For the first time here, the tremolo beginning is heard in the high strings, providing a heavenly – as it were – basis for the thematic nucleus of the movement, which forms the main theme. Furthermore, this is a chromatic semitone figure in the cellos with the characteristics of a double leading tone. The subsequent ascending scale element in the woodwinds provides a first intensification, which is replaced by a third theme – a strange, seemingly extraterritorial trumpet fanfare in the “Bruckner rhythm” (2:3). Shades of Gustav Mahler... Wolfram Steinbeck has argued conclusively that “the development of the themes as such already includes within itself the process of the symphonic development”. The group of song-themes exhibits the peculiar concept of double themes, which is so specific to Bruckner: it is never clear exactly which voice has the leading theme. This is followed by the unison group of themes, which leads to a first climax, continually “pierced”, as it were, by the trumpet fanfare, until the climax comes to an abrupt halt. The epilogue with its intense oboe melody feels – in stark contrast to the Symphony No. 1, which uses a heroic trombone entrance in the same place – like a moment of silence, of contemplation, of pause, of resignation, before the development commences. In this section, a permanent compression of motivic and thematic elements takes place, caused partially by the combination of parts of different themes. Before the rather unsurprising recapitulation, one of those numerous general pauses occurs, due to which the second symphony has been saddled with the – one has to admit – unfair nickname of the *Symphony of Pauses*. For in no way do these pauses simply demarcate the borders between the structural elements characteristic of the genre: rather, they constitute an “energy buffer” in which the power of the music continues to throb inaudibly, and is recharged, as it were, with new energy. (In the 1877 version, these pauses are eliminated in various significant places.) The coda leads in two enormous, swelling waves towards its final *fff* destination, while chanting the fanfare motif from the main theme group.

The Andante – which in the 1871-72 version still occupied the place

of the third movement as the Adagio – strikes up the sacral tone that would from now onwards more or less determine all slow movements in Bruckner's symphonies. Not only does Bruckner create a mystical tension by means of the “tritone suspense” of the second theme (which is structured as a double theme, as are the song-themes of the other movements), he also – and mainly – refers to a quasi-religious tone in this movement by means of quotes from the Benedictus (taken from the Mass in F minor, which was premièred in 1872) placed at the transition points before the beginning of the reprise and the coda. Even if one does not understand or recognize the almost literal borrowing of music from the mass as “quotes”, the desired chorale-like and sacred character of the music is defined by precisely these sounds. But Bruckner also incorporated the structural layout of this slow movement in the symphonies following his Symphony No. 2 (with the exception of the sixth), thus dictating their form: with two themes in the exposition, the middle section as a kind of development, and a recapitulation excluding the main theme plus coda. Despite its traditional concepts, this is really no longer a sonata form: yet neither is it a pure A-B-A form. Rather, it is a form that applies itself primarily to intensification, with a climax in the recapitulation, followed by a calm and contemplative ending to the movement.

The Scherzo extracts its thematic content from the stamp-bump rhythm of the unison main theme (two quavers on the first beat of the following crotchet impulses), which makes use diastematically of the minor second interval from the main motif of the first movement. Here, the music is wild and aggressive; the rhythmic theme incessantly works its way through the movement; the trio is a *Ländler* with phases dominated by the woodwind. Bruckner shortened his 1877 version mainly by eliminating the internal repeats. The general pause following the repetition of the Scherzo has a simply surprising and overwhelming effect, when the coda abruptly bursts in and the theme undergoes a final intensification.

Tremendous cuts were made in the finale of the 1877 version, with a mere 613 bars remaining of the original 806. Bruckner also eliminated a few general pauses at various transition points in the symphony, as well as 55 bars in the development (which he replaced by a “new section” [Bruckner]); furthermore, the “Eleison” quote disappeared with the transition to the coda, “as well as the entire first characteristic intensification, including the quotes from the first movement and the finale; so that in the second version, only the final intensification remains, without the intrinsically typical interruption” (Steinbeck). The final movement begins with an intensification, at the end of which the main theme breaks through for the first time in *ff*, and unison in the orchestra. A quaver-triplet is heard on the first beat, followed by “stamping crotchet notes”.

A second attempt is also broken off and makes place for the, once again, double-themed song-theme, written in the mediant key of A major, which is again replaced by a kind of fake unison theme, which is merely a variation of the main theme. This presses onward in three attempts to further outbreaks, until a quote from the *Kyrie* of the Mass in F minor finally resolves the accumulated tension and creates a deep sense of peace. After an extended development and the recapitulation, written in accordance with the rules, Bruckner dedicates himself to the heart of the composition in the coda. Here, he provides the solution not only for the movement, but for the work as a whole: the main themes of the finale and the first movement (with the fanfare-Bruckner-rhythm, which earlier felt strangely out of context in the opening movement) are combined and are brought to a final superlative ending. Bruckner did not consider this work complete without the addition of essential elements from the beginning – namely the main theme and fanfare rhythm from the first movement. And the same was valid for all his following symphonies. The beginning and the end are intermeshed. They are mutually dependent. They fulfil one another; here, in the radiant key of C major. This symphony does not fall between the creative stools – rather, it occupies its own.

Franz Steiger

English translation: Fiona J. Stroker-Gale

Marek Janowski

Marek Janowski has been Artistic Director of the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin since 2002 and in 2005 he was also appointed Musical Director of the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande in Geneva (2005-2012). He is in demand as a guest conductor throughout the world, working on a regular basis in the USA with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra (where he holds the Otto Klemperer Guest Conducting Chair), the Boston and San Francisco Symphony Orchestras, the Philadelphia Orchestra, and in Europe with the Orchestre de Paris, the Orchester der Tonhalle Zürich, the Danish National Symphony Orchestra in Copenhagen and the NDR-Sinfonieorchester Hamburg. Born in 1939 in Warsaw and educated in Germany, Marek Janowski's artistic path led him from Assistant positions in Aachen, Cologne, Düsseldorf and Hamburg to his appointment as General Music Director in Freiburg im Breisgau (1973-75) and Dortmund (1975-79). Whilst in Dortmund, his reputation grew rapidly and he became greatly involved in the international opera scene. There is not one world-renowned opera house where he has not been a regular guest since the late '70s, from the Metropolitan Opera New York to the Bayerischer

Staatsoper Munich; from Chicago and San Francisco to Hamburg; from Vienna and Berlin to Paris. Marek Janowski stepped back from the opera scene in the 1990's in order to concentrate on orchestral work and was thus able to continue the great German conducting tradition in the symphonic repertoire. He now enjoys an outstanding reputation amongst the great orchestras of Europe and North America. He is recognised for his ability to create orchestras of international standing as well as for his innovative programmes and for bringing a fresh and individual interpretation to familiar repertoire. Between 1984 and 2000, as Musical Director of the Orchestre Philharmonique as Musical Director of the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France

Orchestre de la Suisse Romande

The Orchestre de la Suisse Romande is an internationally renowned symphonic ensemble founded in 1918. Its history is intimately linked to Ernest Ansermet. Over the years, it has built its reputation on the basis of its historic recordings and its interpretation of French and Russian music of the 20th century.

A former math teacher, Ernest Ansermet, launched the OSR during his collaboration with the Ballets Russes of Sergei Diaghilev. Initially comprised of 62 musicians contracted for six months per year, the OSR performed in Geneva, Lausanne and in other cities in the French-speaking part of Switzerland. It survived the Great Depression of 1929 and, in 1934, the unexpected (and fortunately temporary) withdrawal of support by the Société suisse de radiodiffusion. In 1937, while scouting a summer home for the OSR, Ansermet became the instigator of the Lucerne Festival. He single-handedly held the reins of his ensemble for almost 50 years. Amongst his successors, we can cite Armin Jordan, who was perceived as his spiritual heir, and Marek Janowski.

The OSR's collaboration with the Radio Suisse Romande, which began in the 1930s, helped it to become known quickly, as did its recordings with the Decca label starting in the 1940s, a collaboration that would produce more than 100 albums under its founder. At a rate of 5 to 6 vinyl records per year, these recordings were often made at night immediately after concert or opera performances. Ever since, the OSR has collaborated with numerous labels, most recently with PentaTone for the complete symphonies of Anton Bruckner. Also of note is the new collaboration with Chandos.

The OSR's tours have contributed to increasing its renown ever since they began in the 1940s (Edinburgh Festival in 1949). The OSR initially travelled within Europe and then on the West Coast of the United States in 1966, the Universal Exposition in Montréal and New York in 1967, and finally Asia in 1968.

From its earliest days, the OSR has promoted contemporary music. The list of the names of composers whose works it has premiered is long and impressive: Benjamin Britten, Claude Debussy, Arthur Honegger, Frank Martin, Darius Milhaud, Igor Stravinsky and then later William Blank, Michael Jarrell, Heinz Holliger and Peter Eötvös.

Today, the OSR comprises 113 full-time musicians. It appears regularly around the world, continuously making debut appearances in new venues (for example, the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam in 2006, the Teatro alla Scala in Milan in 2010, the Philharmonic in St. Petersburg in 2012). In addition to its symphonic activities, the OSR has also traditionally participated in opera performances at the Grand Théâtre de Geneva, and organizes an entire program for young audiences.

The arrival of Neeme Järvi is the beginning of a new chapter in its history. It shall be defined by the Estonian master's personality, his legendary musical flair, and his wide-ranging taste for repertoire.

