IN APPROACHING the music of Bruckner for the first time (as we hope many will with this first high fidelity long play recording of one of his greatest symphonies), we must recall George Bernard Shaw's apology for his blindness to the value of Brahms' music, during the time that he was a music critic under the nom de plume of *Corno di Bassetto:* "In every composer's work there are passages that are part of the common stock of the music of his time; and when a new genius arises, and his idiom is still unfamiliar and therefore even disagreeable, it is easy for a critic who knows that stock to recognize its contributions to the new work and fail to take in the original complexion put upon it."

Possibly the first thing that strikes the uninitiated listener is the usage of the common stock in a highly idiosyncratic manner—the tremolos, pauses, sonorous pizzicati, pedal points, Wagnerian orchestra and harmonies, sudden fortissimo outbursts without apparent preparation, climaxes leading apparently to nowhere and movements of excessive length. Unlike so much nineteenth century music that makes an impressive appeal on first listening, but which wears out its welcome rapidly on repeated hearing, Bruckner is least impressive on first listening. All sorts of "wrong" features are "obvious." The number of "wrong" features decreases with repeated listening, until one finds oneself trying another Bruckner symphony, and having to repeat the process over again.

Because of Bruckner's worship of Wagner and the way in which he was regarded, however unwittingly on his part, as leader of the Wagnerites after the death of Wagner, much has been made of the Wagnerisms in Bruckner's music. The most obvious of these are the enlargement of the brass section and the use of Wagnerian harmonies. Bruckner's melodies, however, are usually diatonic. Certainly Bruckner's music is devoid of theatricality, and the strong cadential endings of many of Bruckner's themes as well as the frequent general pauses are in sharp contrast to the continuous web of sound characteristic of Wagner's mature style. Bruckner's study of Wagner's music taught him modern orchestration and liberated him from some of his academically-acquired inhibitions.

In addition to a total of eleven symphonies, Bruckner wrote a great amount of church music, much of it not yet widely recognized. Probably due to the exigencies of the sacred test, it has a conciseness and intensity of religious power that are inescapable. However, there is no doubt that the Symphonies No. 1 to No. 9 were, in Bruckner's own estimation, his major musical testament.

The basic form of the Bruckner symphony is that of the Beethoven symphony with certain important stylistic and formal modifications. The most important formal modification is the addition of an extensive third theme group (or "closing group") to the first movement "sonata" form. Another modification is the extensive treatment of the themes in the exposition section. These two modifications succeed in enlarging the length of the "sonata form" movements. With the *finale* generally in this same form, with the slow movement comparable in length to Beethoven's longest *adagios,* and with a *scherzo* modelled after the *scherzo* of Beethoven's *Ninth,* the typical Bruckner symphony becomes over an hour in duration, not by a process of diffuseness or elephantitis, but by formal procedures as valid an evolutionary step beyond the Beethoven form as Beethoven's expansion of the symphony is a valid evolutionary step beyond the Haydn-Mozart form.

The most important stylistic modification is the introduction of chorale-like themes. With Bruckner the chorale becomes a significant feature of the symphonic style, and it is one of Mahler's most important borrowings from the Bruckner symphonies. Such familiar features as inversion and augmentation are used to such an extent by Bruckner that they appear as idiosyncracies, although they had been legitimized by centuries of use. One wonders whether Bruckner ever conceived of a theme without immediately conceiving of its inversion! Another favorite Bruckner procedure is to reduce a theme to its salient rhythmic feature, and to work this up with considerable excitement.

Finally, one of the most controversial features of Bruckner's style is the general rest. The usual procedure in a symphony is to join important sections within a movement by means of a bridge passage which accomplishes in an artistic manner the transition to a different key, pace, or

character. In the primitive symphonic forms of the early symphonies of the Mannheim School, such transitions are frequently lacking. Also, Haydn and Mozart sometimes will introduce a new theme without any more preparation than a rest. The use of general rests in the Bruckner symphonies was as necessary as it was daring. The extended structures require the contrasts that are provided by the frequent elimination of bridge passages. "You must take a new breath when you intend to say something important," Bruckner told Nikisch. Thus, the pauses that so disconcert many who listen to a Bruckner symphony for the first time perform an important architectural function.

The distinguishing features of the *Fifth Symphony* are its tremendous dynamic contrasts, its cyclical style, its remarkable contrapuntal construction and its length. In the later symphonies the emotional message deepened as Bruckner progressed from the *Siegfried*-like *Fourth* to the *Parsifal*-like *Ninth*. Possibly the *Fifth* may be likened—to continue this far-fetched analogy—to *Die Meistersinger* in its fugal style, its looking backwards to an earlier age, its radiant power.

The superb development in the first movement, the finale, which combines the fugue and sonata forms, and the successfully managed thematic integration of the symphony make it the most ambitious in form and impressive in science of Bruckner's symphonies, if not, indeed, of all symphonies. The clarity with which the contrapuntal lines are delineated in the orchestration seems all the more remarkable when one realizes that Bruckner never heard a performance of the symphony!

Despite its length and apparent wealth and variety of its resources, the symphony displays to the listener a unity which surpasses the unifying devices that are readily audible. Careful study of the score reveals that the introduction to the first movement presents three motives, labeled *A, B* and *C* in the examples below, to which a large amount of the thematic material of the symphony is related.

The symphony is scored for 2 flutes, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, 1 bass tuba, a pair of kettledrums and the conventional five string parts. With the exception that Bruckner does not use the piccolo and limits the percussion to the kettledrums, this is the same orchestra as is used in the *Prelude* to *Die Meistersinger* and the *Overture* to *Tannhaeuser*.

FIRST MOVEMENT

Introduction opens *(adagio)* in a mood of meditation with the slow "Bruckner" pizzicato in cellos and basses (ex. 1) followed by suspensions in the higher strings. The music undergoes a series of modulations to F major. Then suddenly the orchestra in full force plays a clarion call on the chord of G flat (ex. 2), followed by a motive in A (ex. 3) played by the brass section, and reminiscent of the baroque era chorales for brass instruments. Note the bottom line, played by the fourth horn, bass trombone and tuba. The clarion call is repeated, this time in B flat, followed again by the brass motive (in E). The dotted rhythm figure in the bottom line (motive C) is of extreme importance in the first and last movements.

The tempo now shifts to *allegro* and Bruckner works up some excitement with the rhythm from motive C; volume crescendos from *ppp* to *ff*. This crescendo culminates in an *adagio* with full statement of motive in brass, tremolo in strings, and with the final chord, *diminuendo,* we have arrived at the exposition.

Exposition: Opens with violins in tremolo making the transition from the A at the end of the introduction via D to the B flat with which the first theme, ex. 4, enters.

The second theme, ushered in by a pizzicato with a curiously hesitating rhythm, returns us to the magic spell of the slow movement of the *Fourth Symphony*. This is presented extensively, ending in a syncopated phrase in the violins which comes to a close with the characteristic pause.

The final group is in three important sections. First is an upwards sweeping phrase in the woodwinds accompanied by a syncopated rhythm in the strings, ex. 5, which provides an unusual

propulsive force. This evolves into another dotted rhythm figure played with the full force of the orchestra. Meanwhile, the syncopated rhythm continues in the violins and under it there develops a staccato rushing rhythm in the cellos and basses which is finally taken up by the full force of the orchestra. The tremendous momentum that has gathered is brought to a stop with augmentation of the rhythm in the horns, ex. 6, a device frequently employed by Bruckner. Calls from afar in the flutes, oboes and horn with tremolos in the strings conclude the exposition.

Development: The main accomplishment of the development section is the treatment of the clarion call from the introduction (ex. 2) and the first theme of the exposition (ex. 4) by juxtaposition, contrapuntal combinations, both normal and inverted, and by distillation into their fundamental rhythmic kernel. This section is followed by the charming effect of alternating the second theme of the exposition with the brass motive from the introduction. The theme from the *allegro* section of the introduction (motive C), worked up with the full force of the orchestra, concludes the development.

Recapitulation: Due to the extensive treatment of the first theme in the development section, it is only briefly stated in the recapitulation. The second theme is recapitulated at length, the closing section is shortened by omission of its middle part (treatment of the dotted rhythmic figure). Coda: The first theme dominates the coda.

SECOND MOVEMENT—Sehr langsam—*D Minor.*

The simplicity of the second movement is in contrast to the formal complexity of the other movements of this symphony. It is in ABABA form.

The movement opens with a slow pizzicato figure in triplets in the strings, from which is derived (see notes marked *S,* ex. 7) the mournful melody which enters in the oboe (ex. 8). The ensuing two against three in this slow tempo creates an unusual effect.

The second theme surges upwards in the violins after a general rest.

At the second entry of the first theme a figure in sextuplets in the violins gains prominence, and in the final section, in 4/4, the pizzicato triplets are forgotten, the theme this time being accompanied entirely by the sextuplet figure. "The trombones join in and spread majestic solemnity. The weighty and heavy colossus moves slowly on. It is the archetype of gigantic Bruckner music." (Werner Wolff: *Anton Bruckner—Rustic Genius.*)

THIRD MOVEMENT Scherzo—Trio—Scherzo.

Although in the conventional tripartite form, each of the three main sections of this movement is in a sonata type form. Note that the scherzo opens with the same pizzicato figure as the second movement, and that in the trio allusions are made to Ex. 1 and motive C.

FOURTH MOVEMENT

In its combination of fugal and sonata form, this movement calls to mind the finale of Mozart's *Jupiter Symphony.* In both cases the finale is the climax of the work. Mozart achieved this fusion of forms with the perfection and apparent ease that only he could achieve. The miraculous counterpoint of Mozart's *coda* still remains unequalled. The finale of Bruckner's *Fifth* is more climactic in

effect due to the cyclical style of the symphony. Here, rather than perfection and ease, there is a sense of titanic struggle. Everything is on a gigantic scale (the movement is almost as long as the entire *Jupiter Symphony*), the melodic lines are rough hewn, the rhythms craggy, the final chorale thrilling and jubilant.

Introduction: The finale opens in a manner reminiscent of the finale of Beethoven's *Ninth,* in which quotations from the preceding movements are cast aside by a recitative. Bruckner interrupts quotations from the first and second movements by anticipatory announcements of the opening phrase of the fugal subject of the exposition.

Exposition: The first part of the exposition consists of a lengthy fugal statement of the theme that has been foreshadowed in the introduction. The downwards octave leap of its opening and the dotted rhythmic figure recall motives B and C.

After a general rest, the second thematic section is presented. The middle part is one of those two-voiced themes that is one of Bruckner's most unusual idiosyncracies. Ex. 9 shows its first entry, in second violins and violas. At the end of the first measure, the first violins and cellos start the same two measure theme, thus producing an extremely complex effect. With an increase in the tempo, the material of the first portion of this section returns.

After a general rest, the concluding section bursts forth in the full force of the orchestra with the opening downwards octave leap and the rhythm – augmented – of the first theme. This section concludes quietly in a general rest.

Development: The development begins with the enunciation, with the full force of the brass section, of a new theme (ex. 10). This is worked up into an extensive double fugue, in which the first theme of the exposition is the second subject.

The recapitulation consists of a return in full of the second thematic section of the exposition.

Coda: When the closing theme returns, instead of going down to its conclusion on an ocatve leap from the B flat, it goes up to D flat and reveals the B flat as the first note of the first theme of the first movement (ex. 11), and we find that we are in the coda. The major portion of the coda is devoted to a contrapuntal development of these two themes and fragments from them. The introduction in the brass of the theme first presented in the beginning of the development, ex. 10 (at this point an augmented brass section is frequently employed) leads, with its firm affirmation, to the forceful conclusion.