

Bruckner was at work on his seventh symphony from September 1881 to September 1883. During that period he also composed the preliminary draft of his *Te Deum*, the chorale-tune of which is quoted in the symphony's *Adagio*. His letters repeatedly underline that this *Adagio* was conceived as an elegy, occasioned by Richard Wagner's death in Venice on 13th February 1883. However, since the *Adagio*'s first sketch was completed three weeks before that date, its coda (from bar 190 on), which has always been specially associated with Bruckner's mourning for Wagner, must have been added as an afterthought to the whole movement which was only finished in full score on 21st April 1883. The symphony was accepted for performance in Leipzig by Arthur Nikisch in March 1884, but — owing to several postponements — that memorable first performance did not take place until 30th December 1884. Its reception was rather doubtful and only after Hermann Levi conducted an enthusiastically received performance in Munich on 10th March 1885 did the symphony's future success seem assured. It was published in the same year, but only after Bruckner had revised his autograph score. That autograph was used by the printers of the first edition, an isolated fact in the history of Bruckner's published symphonies. Hence the discrepancies between the symphony's original draft and the published score are of minor importance. In general, they refer to altered tempo-indications, to octave doublings and to some change in expression-marks. In a single instance the recently published scores of the original version (edited by Robert Haas in 1944, and by Leopold Nowak in 1954) differ materially from the score authorized by the composer for publication in 1885, principally, in the matter of the notorious cymbal clash in the *Adagio* (bar 177). It is a fact that this clash was omitted in the autograph, but that it was inserted early in 1885 (*i.e.* after the first performance) on the recommendation of Franz Schalk and Ferdinand Löwe and with Nikisch's special support. Whether its subsequent cancellation in the autograph score (as discovered by R. Haas who published a facsimile of the relevant page in his edition of 1944) was due to Bruckner or to somebody else, is difficult to establish. The cymbal clash, marking the *Adagio*'s emotional climax is convincing and effective, and very similar to the one in the *Adagio* of symphony No. 8, the authenticity of which has never been in doubt. Conductors will continue to use their own discretion when deciding on the merits of its inclusion until a universally acknowledged performing edition of Bruckner has been arrived at.

Symphony No. 7 shares some features of style with its successors, Nos. 8 and 9, composed during the last decade of Bruckner's life. It requires a larger orchestra than the earlier symphonies, with Wagner's quartet of tubas (plus a Contrabass tuba) added to it in the *Adagio* and finale only. The *Adagio* (here the second movement, in contradistinction to the two later symphonies where

it is preceded by the Scherzo) becomes the psychological apex and the longest movement of the whole work. Also, the finale's first subject is a deliberate offshoot of the first movement's first subject.

The first movement progresses in ecstatic serenity, floating on the waves of the powerfully ascending first subject in the Cello whose continuation (bar 12 ff.) re-echoes Bruckner's early Mass in D minor (1864). That motif becomes the principal agent for the solemn preroration, based on a 22-bar pedal point on E which prepares for the movement's coda. The first movement's contrasting section (bar 51 ff) is easily recognizable by its Wagnerian turn. Its seraphic gentleness is in telling contrast to the ferocious peasant-like unison of the concluding passage (bar 123 ff). The division into several almost incompatible emotional strata determines not only the first movement, but even more so the *Adagio*. This begins as a funeral lament, intoning the dirge-like first subject on the Tubas and lower strings. But that opening is contradicted by the middle section in 3/4 Ländler-rhythm, in which the violins give out a bewitching tune of unmistakably Viennese lilt. Both groups are subjected to alternate variational treatment, modelled on the *Adagio* from Beethoven's Choral Symphony. The climax is reached when the initial dirge returns in the tubas (against a tapestry of repetitive quintuplets in the violins) only to close with a quotation of the chorale from Bruckner's *Te Deum*, entrusted here to the trombones.

The chorale ascends inexorably through the circle of rising mediants to the dizzy heights of C major (fff, bar 177). It is in that very moment that cymbals and triangle together with the roar of the brass create the sensation of the sun bursting through clouds and vapour. In the coda the incandescence is gradually fading while the horns enunciate the grief-stricken Farewell message, prompted by the news of Wagner's death.

The Scherzo — with its lusty cock-row motif in the trumpet; its obstinately repetitive four-note unison figure in the strings and its insistent dactylic rhythm — is as earth-bound as any Bruckner Scherzo; the lyrical Trio, however, one of his greatest melodic inspirations, gazes longingly beyond the confines of this pastoral world. It is music of a nostalgia for the lost golden age. The finale sums up the emotional content of the preceding movements. Its dramatic first subject is thrown into relief by the Schubertian chorale-tune in the strings (bar 35 ff) and all but obliterated by the mammoth trend of the unison brass of the concluding passage (bar 93 ff). A prolonged coda, with fierce chorale-enclaves, ultimately achieves a fusion of the elements of the two flanking movements in the solemnity of a final 25 bar-pedal point on the tonic of E — culminating in the ceremonial shout of reiterated trumpet fanfares, proclaiming irresistibly Bruckner's child-like faith — a faith that may move mountains.

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