THE WIND AND WIND-CHORUS MUSIC OF ANTON BRUCKNER

Keith William Kinder

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Introduction

Musically, there are two Anton Bruckners. The life of this major nineteenth-century Austrian musician is bisected into two almost equal parts by a change of compositional style so dramatic and so total that it is unprecedented among major composers.[1] Had Bruckner not undergone this stylistic metamorphosis in the early 1860s, he would be remembered today as an excellent organist and a highly skilled church musician who composed a substantial amount of competent but undistinguished music. Few of his compositions would ever be performed. The musical repertoire would be without the eleven magnificent symphonies upon which much of his reputation rests today. Throughout the first half of his life, Bruckner immersed himself in a relentless quest to learn everything that could be taught to him about traditional musical principles—form, harmony, counterpoint, orchestration. During the last half of his life, he travelled on a harmonic journey that left tradition far behind, and ultimately took him to the fringes of nineteenth-century tonality.

Bruckner scholars have concentrated their efforts on the post-1860 works, which are, quite rightly, seen as the composer's major contribution to the musical literature. However, closer inspection of the early works, including those that employ wind instruments, reveals that many of the landmarks of his style were present from the very beginning. Many of these compositions illustrate a daring harmonic imagination, an ability to construct dramatic and expressive melodies, substantial contrapuntal invention, and, at least in the cases of the *Requiem* of 1848–49 and the *Missa solemnis* of 1854, an ability to conceive and realize large-scale works. While few of them approach the individuality or innovation that mark the later works, many are far more interesting than has generally been acknowledged.

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[1]The career of American composer George Rochberg in our own century might rival this contention.

Bruckner's works using wind instruments in non orchestral contexts appeared throughout his entire career, and vary widely in scope, scoring, and intent. They incorporate the best aspects of both of his styles, and, to a large degree, reflect the progress of his professional life. The earliest compositions are small-scale, as was dictated by the limited musical means at his disposal. As his situation improved, his wind works grew in breadth and complexity so that the latest pieces provide significant analytical challenges. Most of these works are liturgical in intent, and demonstrate a profound understanding of Roman Catholic doctrine. On the other hand, this repertoire includes several outstanding secular compositions that deserve much broader acknowledgment than they have been assigned thus far. Bruckner's contribution to the wind literature is substantial and important. The purpose of this study is to bring to his contribution the recognition it so richly deserves.

From the perspective of more than a century, it is difficult to imagine that until his thirty-first year, Anton Bruckner prepared himself for a career as a school teacher, not as a musician. His father (also Anton Bruckner) was the schoolmaster in the upper Austrian village of Ansfelden (Cooke/Nowak 1980, 352). When Anton Jr. was born in 1824, the elder Bruckner assumed that the boy would follow in his footsteps, and soon began laying the groundwork for his son's career. Since schoolmasters in Austrian villages were expected to assume responsibility for music in the church (Watson 1977, 6), this early training included a substantial amount of musical instruction. By age ten the young Bruckner was able to substitute for his father at the organ during church services (Cooke/Nowak 1980, 352).

Anton Bruckner Sr. recognized and encouraged his son's consuming interest in music, and quickly realized that he needed instruction beyond what was available in Ansfelden. Consequently, in the spring of 1835, the boy was sent to study with his godfather, Johann Baptist Weiss,[2] the schoolmaster and organist in Hörsching, a small town near Linz. Bruckner lived in Hörsching for approximately eighteen months, receiving his first formal instruction in organ playing and attempting his first compositions. Throughout his life he frequently expressed his gratitude to Weiss and remembered these days with fondness.

In December 1836 Bruckner was summoned back to Ansfelden. His father was seriously ill, and the young man was needed to deputize in the schoolhouse and the church (Cooke/Nowak 1980, 353). Six months later, in June 1837, Anton Bruckner Sr. died of consumption (Watson 1977, 4).

Faced with the dissolution of her household, Bruckner's mother proved herself to be far-sighted and resourceful. Refusing to allow her eldest child to forgo his education because of the death of her husband, she appealed to Michael Arneth, the

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[2]"Cousin Weiss" was an accomplished musician who composed a number of sacred works, including a *Requiem* in E-flat major published by Lanninger in 1892. In 1850, some years after Bruckner's tuition had abruptly ended, Weiss was duped into accepting responsibility for a church fund from which a large sum had been embezzled. When the police arrived to question him, he fled into the graveyard and committed suicide (Watson 1977, 4, 10–11).

prior of the monastery at nearby St. Florian, asking that the boy be accepted into the abbey's choir school (Cooke/Nowak 1980, 353). Arneth was interested in music and made a place at St. Florian for the young man. Bruckner lived at the abbey until 1840, studying music until his voice broke, then deciding to prepare for a career in teaching. By the summer of 1841, he had completed the basic teacher training course and was a qualified assistant teacher (Watson 1977, 139).

Bruckner's initial years at St. Florian had an enormous impact on the rest of his life. For the first time he received instruction in educational basics—reading, writing, arithmetic—and had lessons on organ, violin, and in musical theory. However, perhaps the most lasting impact was in areas that had little to do with music or education. The great Baroque monastery with its magnificent organ be-came his spiritual home—a home to which he returned again and again for solace and spiritual refreshment. He also gained a powerful ally in Michael Arneth. Arneth had apparently recognized Bruckner's musical talents, and saw to it that he received appointments that permitted both his education and his career to develop.

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Chapter 1

The First Small Steps of a Master 1841–45

In October 1841 Anton Bruckner was assigned to the position of assistant schoolmaster in Windhaag, a small town near the Bohemian border (Watson 1977, 7). As assistant, the young man was in complete servitude to his superior, Franz Fuchs. In addition to his duties in the schoolhouse and the church, he was saddled with a multitude of menial tasks that included ringing the morning bell at 4:00 A.M., the evening bell at 9:00 P.M., and working in his supervisor's fields. Eventually Bruckner refused to accept such lowly assignments, and Fuchs complained to St. Florian (Doernberg 1960, 33). When Arneth arrived for an inspection, the schoolmaster expressed his displeasure with Bruckner and apparently was particularly upset by his preoccupation with music (Watson 1977, 7–8). Bruckner was promptly transferred to the even smaller village of Kronstorf.

While ostensibly a punishment, this transfer proved that Arneth was indeed looking out for Bruckner's best interests. Kronstorf was situated between the culturally active towns of Steyr and Enns, and was within walking distance of St. Florian. Bruckner arrived in January 1843 and quickly established relationships in all four communities that permitted the continuous development of his musical education. He was, however, still preparing for a career in teaching, not in music, and to this end he passed the final exam for assistant teachers in May 1845 (Watson 1977, 9). He was now ready to accept the much better position that was about to present itself.

Bruckner's compositions[1] from these formative years consist of small-scale liturgical works, organ pieces, and a few unaccompanied male choruses. Most are undistinguished and derivative, drawing heavily on the music he was studying at the

[1]Most of the earliest pieces are, in fact, composition exercises. The four organ preludes of 1837 display the usual awkward voice leading of many first compositions, but they also have some remarkable enharmonic modulations that are clear portents of the future.

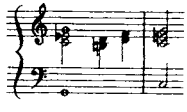
time. One work of this period employs wind instruments and therefore is of particular interest to this study.

CHORALMESSE IN C-DUR (WINDHAAGER)—WAB 25

Bruckner's first Mass was written at Windhaag, probably sometime during 1842 (Schulze 1986, 3). The musical resources of the village were limited, so the work was conceived on a small scale and in a simple style. Scored for solo alto, two horns, and organ, it employs a text compressed to the absolute minimum and is exclusively homophonic in texture.[2] It was written for Maria Jobst, daughter of a local resident, and the alto soloist in the church choir (Göllerich/Auer 1974, I: 170). Bruckner's designation of his composition as a "Chorale Mass" referred to its simple, hymnlike style and did not imply the use of specific liturgical melodies.[3] Such masses were frequently performed in country churches, especially during Advent and Lent (Schulze 1986, 3).

Tonally this work follows conventional harmonic patterns, but, as Bruckner was to do throughout his life, it also contains frequent modulations (often to rather distant keys) without the use of pivot chords. For example, in the *Kyrie* the opening phrase establishes the tonic—C major—but the subsequent phrase modulates very abruptly to A-flat major. Similar unprepared changes of key occur in all movements. The manuscript consists of a set of parts without a full score. For the most part, the organ music is sparingly figured (Schulze 1986, 3) allowing for considerable variety in its realization.[4] At bar 15 of the *Kyrie*, Bruckner specifies the necessary realization, which produces an interesting juxtaposition of C minor and C major.

Example 1.1:
***Windhaager Mass*—*Kyrie*—bars 15–16**



Elisabeth Maier has connected the opening phrase of the *Kyrie* to the plainchant *Kyrie Deus sempiterne* (Maier 1988, 119), and while the relationship is

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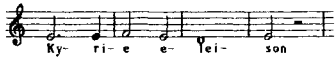
[2]This work is apparently an Austrian *Landmesse* or *missa brevis*. In such pieces the text, particularly the *Credo*, was abbreviated in order to shorten the duration of the work as a whole (Redlich 1955, 66).

[3]It is, however, important to observe that plainchant influenced much of the melodic construction.

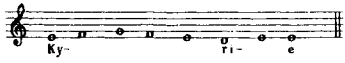
[4]The lack of specifics regarding the figuration accounts for the considerable differences in the realization of this score in its first publication—Göllerich/Auer 1974, I: 173–89—and the recent performing edition published by Carus-Verlag.

not exact, it is clearly audible.

Example 1.2A:
***Windhaager Mass*—*Kyrie*—bars 1–4**



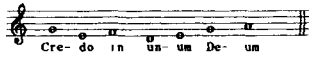
Example 1.2B:
***Kyrie Deus sempiterne*—*Liber Usualis*—p. 22**



In the *Gloria* the nineteenth-century principle of third relationships is much in evidence. The first two phrases cadence on an E major chord, the third reestablishes the tonic, C major, then subsequent phrases explore A minor, F major, and D minor. The concluding section of the movement returns to the tonic via A minor and F major. This emphasis on third relationships is surprising, since Bruckner's musical education had focused on pre-nineteenth-century models. This movement also incorporates a number of descending octave skips in the melodic line. Such melodic construction became a Bruckner fingerprint in ensuing years.[5]

The *Credo*, like the *Gloria*, employs only a portion of the extensive text usually associated with these sections of the Mass. It also continues the emphasis on harmonic third relationships. Many writers have noted that the opening and closing phrases of this movement are based on the Gregorian *Credo in unum Deum.* Bruckner's use of this well-known plainchant comes as no surprise considering that his familiarity with the Roman Catholic liturgy was grounded in active involvement with church music from a very early age.

Example 1.3A:
Liber Usualis*—*Credo I, II, IV



[5]Another interesting detail about this movement was noted by Leopold Nowak. At measures 49–50, the words "*Cum Sancto Spiritu*" are set to the unison motive, *doh-sol-lah-mi*, which Wagner was to employ as the "bell motive" in *Parsifal* some years later (Nowak 1988, 88–89). Manfred Wagner sees the appearance of this motive as a deliberate poetic gesture on Bruckner's part—a church bell calling down or announcing the arrival on earth of the Holy Spirit (Wagner 1996, 23). Interestingly, the same motive, also in unison, appears at bars 40–41 of the *Credo* (Gruber 1988, 132). Since the words are "*Et resurrexit tertia ...*," it would appear that another poetic image was being projected—church bells announcing the resurrection of Christ.