

Bruckner - Symphony No. 9 (arr. organ, Eberhard Klotz)

Thilo Muster - on the Mauritius Organ

The international organ concerts organized each year in the magnificent Baroque church of the monastery of Einsiedeln by Fr. Theo Flury have over the course of time become a real public attraction in the rich musical landscape of the region - far from Zürich. While in old Europe culture and spiritual education appear more and more to be in the grip of decline, this monastic place remains a centre for music, religion, education and spiritual concerns, which is a wonderful thing. The 5th of these organ concerts last Tuesday was dedicated to the Austrian late romantic Anton Bruckner (1824-1896).

It is known that this composer - apart from less important early works - composed very few and only short works for the organ. This would hardly fill a whole concert programme. The concert organist, Thilo Muster, who grew up in Germany and lives in Basel, completed his soloist diploma at the Music Academy in Basel with Guy Bovet, devoted himself in this concert not to those few Bruckner compositions but to a version for organ solo of Bruckner's 9th Symphony in D minor by the organist and composer Eberhard Klotz which was the central work of the evening.

After sung evening prayers by the monks in the choir there was silence in the audience of about 500, into which the beginning of the orchestral first movement sounded, quiet horn and trumpet interjections from the organ, and ushered the listener, after a visionary outbreak in C flat major, into the wonderful world of the Brucknerian post-Tristan harmony. Muster, expressively communicative, took the listener by the hand and showed by means of the highest detail of orchestral registration and nuanced artistic articulation, that the organ presentation of the work loses nothing in voltage and intensity, in comparison with the orchestral version. The second theme was positively sung by the performer, and you completely forgot that it was played here by organ registers and not soft violins. This long and serene second theme requires a high level of concentration and shaping of the extended overarching musical tension, which however Muster explored in its entire inner depths, drawing sometimes towards the profoundly meditative.

The agitated third theme then led the listener into the heaving sea of Bruckner's counterpoint. We marveled at how, on the organ, it is possible to avoid bringing the accentuation and the requisite flowing metric of the music to a standstill. This Muster achieved above all through his refined art of registration, as well as deliberate but not intrusive accents and a forward moving flowing tempo. The middle section in G flat wafted through the high dome of the nave on soft clouds of the sound of the flute and strings registers - and here the natural breathing and meaningfulness of Muster's organ playing proved itself once again. The development began with dark, painfully dissonant sounds: contrapuntal expansions and inversions of the horn motive of the beginning here constituted the musical material, the glassy brittleness of which the interpreter accomplished well. The development ends in a massive sound with an abrupt modulation of the seventh chord of B major to F minor. After that an apocalyptic collapse of the full organ sound: how such an orchestral drama could be recreated so convincingly remains Muster's secret. In the following transition, the most tender and subdued organ voices sounded as though sorrowful. The recapitulation Bruckner begins with the second, lyrical theme - only now no more in the treble, but as it were inverted in the old compositional technique of tenor cantus firmus. This tenor theme was distinctly and clearly emphasised above the other voices and one had the impression that an original organ piece from the 19th century could not have been better suited for the organ. After the third theme in the recapitulation and a build-up which sounded very modern, almost like Messiaen, there followed the coda. It was held by Muster in an almost eerie tension, in the softest and most delicate colours, before the massive closing build-up began. Chorale-like brass sounds from the Cavallé-Coll inspired Mauritius organ, filled the space before dissolving in the void of the sound's cessation - a musical view into the Universe. Here the organist has to deal with the most complex metrical proportions - and had you not heard it you would not have believed that a single player at the console could have mastered it.

The beginning of the Scherzo was ghostly and wan, in a measured, somewhat sedate tempo appropriate to the space and the vast acoustic, with clearly drawn musical lines. The massive tutti outbreak, which probably depicts an almost grotesque grimace, or a caricature of the waltz as "Dance of the Machines", you seemed to feel physically the pounding of the pedals of the organ. Some darker tones in the overall sound would probably not have gone amiss here. The rest of the Scherzo is dominated by very fast virtuosic runs which Muster interpreted almost plastically with great musical intelligence in its sometimes crystal-clear compositional lightness. The Trio, in F sharp major, scurried past, fairy-like and fleeting. He showed during the rapid

passages of flute patterns that there are for him no technical limits and that he belongs amongst Europe's leading concert organists.

The first theme of the Adagio, with its plaintive minor ninth, began in a broadly conceived tempo, the movement which Bruckner himself called his farewell to life. Deep ecclesiastical-religious sounds filled the space. A broad build-up led to the Gregorian gloria motive of the trumpets: like fanfares it echoed from the organ loft. After that - pianissimo music of spheres. Here Bruckner opens a wide door into the harmony of the 20th century. The song-like second theme was played with delicate ethereal sound-mixtures counterpointed by expressive solo registers, such as the oboe. In the continuation, light, lively dancing passages alternated with weighty accumulations of sound and contrapuntal artistry. A long dramatic build-up leads to a chord of extreme dissonance. This build-up was so spaciouly structured that when the listener had the feeling that now it could go no further, yet another dynamic increase was added. The ensuing swan song was then of great poignancy, interpreted with richly elaborated registration and intense musicality.

After the final sounding of the "tubas" in E major there was a long-held silence, and thereafter enthusiastic applause. That such a work could even be recreated at all on the organ, and that one could have the impression right from the beginning that it had been actually composed for this instrument, probably only those who have heard it themselves at the concert would believe. The organ version by Eberhard Klotz, conceived in the style of the late 19th century organ symphony, was musically convincing in every respect, and interpreted in an appropriately like-minded manner by Thilo Muster: a very successful concert which will remain long in the memory of the appreciative audience. *Joachim Scherrer.*

## **Why nowadays make organ transcriptions of great symphonic works? Thoughts on my version for organ of Bruckner's Ninth Symphony.**

Eberhard Klotz

**S**ince my childhood I have devoted myself almost every day to the musical works of the Austrian composer Anton Bruckner. The ways in which a young person discovers music and perhaps later may even make a career of music are manifold and differentiated. Sometimes it is a slow and hesitant process and development, sometimes there is some accidental event behind it or an external push, something from parents or friends, but sometimes it is a unique and crucial experience which says in the young person, "I must become a musician!". With me, this last was the case: after a performance of the 7th Symphony in E major by Anton Bruckner in the Garrison Church of Ludwigsburger I decided, at the age of 12, to devote myself unceasingly to music. Because Bruckner was an organist, I began to interest myself in the organ; because Bruckner concerned himself intensively with music theory, so I also sought to enter ever further into this subject; because Bruckner was a composer, so I began to compose. One thing led to another until during my organ studies in Basel with Guy Bovet I made the decision to arrange Bruckner symphonies for the organ. By doing this I wished to get as near as possible to Bruckner's epoch and to his musical thinking, and to create organ symphonies in the style of the late 19th century.

Currently organ versions of the Sixth Symphony in A major (2015) and the Ninth Symphony in D minor (2014) are available, published by Merseburger Verlag, Kassel. The Fifth Symphony in organ version is planned to appear in 2015. I am working at present on the organ version of the Fourth Symphony. The version of the Ninth Symphony has already been successfully performed in many organ recitals: Basel, Genf, Zürich, Nürtigen, Nagold, Magdeburg, Karlsruhe, Klosterkirche Einsiedeln are some of the places. The Basel concert organist, Thilo Muster, has especially excelled in this, performing the version at many European venues, and he has many further performances planned for the future in international organ concert series. He also wishes to record the present versions of symphonies 5, 6 and 9 for CD in the foreseeable future, for which I am extremely grateful. Just as the great Bruckner conductor Günter Wand once said, Bruckner had changed his life, so can I without reservation say the same of my life.

Anton Bruckner is a sort of erratic boulder in the landscape of the 19th century. His symphonies came to being in the last three decades of his life. They combine old contrapuntal techniques with the achievements of the new harmony of the 19th century and the voluptuousness of late Romanticism. Even in the Ninth Symphony the influence of Wagner's opera *Tristan und Isolde* is palpable. In their compositional and formal systems Bruckner's symphonies are like sounding Gothic cathedrals from the Middle Ages. His unfinished Ninth Symphony with its three movements remains a fragment, but attains in this form a completeness and mystical depth which is unparalleled in symphonic literature. The Bruckner biographer, Max Auer, designated the last movement - the Adagio - as "music wafting out into the primal dissolution." [eine in die Urauflösung hinauswehende Musik]

*In grandeur and consecration the Ninth surpasses all its predecessors. When Arthur Schopenhauer referred to art as the image of an idea, but music as the idea itself, so Bruckner's swan song - his Ninth Symphony - is the idea of the Beyond, of divinity itself. Right from the beginning of the richly structured first movement one feels oneself immersed in the dim light of a Gothic cathedral - a mood that transports us from the weight and weariness of the material world towards the Beyond. Max Auer*

In the 19th century and well into the 20th century, organ transcriptions served in the first place to make a large (mostly new) orchestral work known to a broad musically-interested public. Sound recordings did not exist at first, and later they were rare, expensive and often of bad quality. As well as that, smaller towns did not have their own symphony concerts or orchestra. Here it was the town organist from one of the main churches who first gave the musically interested access to the works on the organ. Both in the French and English speaking world, including America, where the organ was traditionally seen less as part of the sacred and liturgical tradition than as a free concert instrument of the growing bourgeoisie, such performances had considerable popularity.

Today it could be objected that the orchestral works are present in their original versions by the best orchestras, and are easily available in good recordings; in addition there are today many orchestral performances even in the small towns - or the interested public can easily travel to the specified performance venue. Concerts of organ transcriptions of great orchestral works thus have today a totally different significance than they used. Above all they revive again the great tradition of the organ concerts of the 19th century in which transcriptions of orchestral works played an important part, and in this way do not allow an important European and American tradition to be lost, that risks disappearance due to the mechanisation and rationalisation of the world. In addition, organ transcriptions allow the hearers to have a new view, a new interpretation of the work and mediate to them a novel different perspective - an aspect which appears to me important above all with repertory works already repeated endlessly in their original form. The listener gains new avenues into the work, through only one interpreter the atmosphere is uniquely more intimate and more communicative than is the case in symphony concerts in full orchestration. Perhaps for this reason Arnold Schoenberg transcribed compositions of Gustav Mahler for much reduced scoring - to 'force' the listener, so to speak, to concentrate anew beyond the overwhelming large sound to the valuable thing, the pure musical substance.

My organ version of Bruckner's Ninth Symphony is to be understood in this way: it is not intended to be a substitute for the orchestral version or a sort of piano reduction for organ, but rather an organ symphony in the style of the late 19th century, written for the organ and its tonal capabilities; it aims to convey the music, performed anew and alive for today's public.

In addition such a performance is, of course, a pure virtuoso experience: how can one organist present a whole symphony, that otherwise would be played by over a hundred musicians, on the Queen of Instruments, the instrument that Bruckner especially loved and on which above all his symphonies were conceived? So Bruckner's music remains in the context in which it was composed and leads us closer to the original process of its creation, opens as it were a new visionary spiritual expanse.

Forthcoming performances by Thilo Muster of Eberhard Klotz's organ version of Bruckner's Ninth Symphony  
07.05.2016 18:00 Hannover Marktkirche  
09.08.2016 20:00 Bern, Abendmusik im Münster  
20.08.2016, 18:30 Görlitz «Sonnenorgel» of the ev. Stadtkirche St. Peter und Paul  
25.09.2016 11:00 Stuttgart-Zuffenhausen, Stuttgarter Orgel-Matinée Pauluskirche