



# London Philharmonic Orchestra

## BRUCKNER SYMPHONY NO. 5

STANISŁAW SKROWACZEWSKI *conductor*  
LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

## BRUCKNER

### SYMPHONY NO. 5

Anton Bruckner moved to Vienna in October 1868 at the age of 44. There must have been times during the next decade when he wondered if he hadn't made a colossal mistake. In his previous home, in the Upper Austrian capital, Linz, his church compositions and organ improvisations had been applauded and he had become something of a local celebrity. One critic, after hearing a performance of the Mass in D minor had predicted the symphony was to be Bruckner's true medium – a remark that the fervently Roman Catholic Bruckner read as a sign from Heaven. But it was also understood that Linz was too small, too provincial for a talent like Bruckner. He must go to Vienna, the city of Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven and Schubert. There, surely, he would find the encouragement, the inspiration, and the discerning appreciation he needed.

It all turned out very differently. Despite energetic championship by the conductor Johann Herbeck, Bruckner soon found musical Vienna either indifferent or contemptuous. He had difficulty even scraping a living – his salary as teacher at the Vienna Conservatory and organist at the Imperial Chapel was barely adequate. A moment of solid encouragement came in 1873, when Bruckner's idol Wagner saw the score of the Third Symphony, praised it extravagantly, and magnanimously accepted the dedication. But the Symphony's lavish inscription to Wagner probably

did Bruckner more harm than good. It certainly intensified anti-Bruckner feelings in the more reactionary corners of the Viennese press – notably the influential, acerbic critic Eduard Hanslick. Hanslick's review of the Third Symphony's disastrous premiere in 1877 must be one of the most humiliating public attacks ever endured by a composer of genius.

Surprisingly, this depressing decade was also one of Bruckner's most musically productive periods. During the years 1871–6 he wrote four monumental symphonies (Nos. 2 to 5), which show steadily increasing mastery and originality in his handling of large musical forms. Like the great cathedrals in which Bruckner worshipped and (as organist) played, these symphonies are based largely on the same architectural ground-plan, but in character they are quite different. In any case, the Fifth Symphony has important features which are not shared with Symphonies 2 to 4. The opening movement – unusually for Bruckner – begins with a slow introduction. At first, slow is very much the word. Above a quiet pizzicato walking bass, violins and violas move in simple, gravely eloquent polyphony, like a choir intoning a solemn motet. This comes to a pause – then, silence. What follows is stupendous but mystifying: an upward-thrusting figure for full orchestra in a remote key; more silence ... then a radiant brass chorale.

These last two gestures are repeated, at different pitches. Then again, silence. A crescendo, faster, seems to herald the start of the main movement; but at its height the chorale phrase returns, massively, on full orchestra. A hush (violins, tremolando), and now the Allegro begins with a lively, supple theme on violas and cellos. This Allegro seems much faster, but as the movement unfolds, one may sense that the background pulse is still slow – like the steady progress of a huge ship. When the Symphony's hushed opening music returns later on there is a feeling that its slow tread has been going on quietly somewhere, uninterrupted. There are other such moments later in the first movement: the slow 'background' pulse seems to break through the active 'surface' of the Allegro, assuring the listener that there are other processes at work than those which are immediately present to the ear – 'more things in heaven and earth', one might say. Perhaps in this we can sense something of Bruckner's enduring faith in a mysterious underlying Divine purpose, sometimes hidden, but revealed in the end. It was this faith that helped him endure ridicule and neglect in Vienna, and ultimately it was vindicated.

The second movement, a real slow movement this time, has similar moments of revelation. But here the emotional contrast is more extreme. The desolate oboe tune at the opening, with its skeletal *pizzicato* string accompaniment,

could well be a reflection of Bruckner's depression in those grimly unrewarding 1870s: 'My life has lost all its joy and enthusiasm', he wrote to a friend, 'and all for nothing'. But the music also allows visions of consolation, especially in the glorious, singing second theme, introduced by warm massed strings. Nevertheless, the final climax is strangely unfulfilled – no radiant brass hymns decorated with cascading strings (as so often in a Bruckner Adagio), but grinding dissonances, subsiding into a short, desolate coda. After this the Scherzo follows Bruckner's archetypal balanced Scherzo-Trio-Scherzo plan. Many of his familiar stylistic elements are here too: rapid, pounding dance figures, slower, more flavoursome Ländler (a kind of 'country cousin' to the sophisticated Viennese Waltz). But here the atmosphere is distinctly spooky and the contrast between the rapid opening idea (itself a speeded-up version of the Adagio theme) and the slower dance tune that keeps interposing itself can be disconcerting, as though the Scherzo can't make up its mind which is its 'main' tempo.

Bruckner himself once referred to this symphony as his 'Fantastic'. Was he thinking particularly of this movement? The central Trio has more of the daylight about it, though even here a strange, slightly impish humour repeatedly creeps in at unexpected moments.

It's sometimes said that Bruckner lacked a sense of humour – at least in his music. That claim is rendered absurd by the introduction to the final movement. Here, like Beethoven in his Ninth Symphony, Bruckner brings back memories of themes from earlier movements before starting out on his grand finale. Bruckner, however, dismisses these themes, not (like Beethoven) with a powerful orchestral recitative, but with a deliberately cheeky figure for solo clarinet – it's as though Bruckner were affectionately teasing himself for daring to tread in Beethoven's giant footsteps. Then cellos and basses seize on the clarinet's mocking figure and turn it into a striking fugue subject. This is soon moving along nicely – but again, as so often in Bruckner, this turns out to be a foretaste rather than the real thing. The promised monumental fugue is to come later, after second and third themes, both extensively worked out, and after a magnificent chorale for brass with hushed responses from strings. It is only then that Bruckner begins to flex his contrapuntal muscles, in a superb double fugue, based on both the cello-bass motif and the opening phrase of the chorale. Chorales are recurring features of Bruckner's symphonic style. But it is worth remembering that the chorale is a Protestant, specifically a Lutheran form: chorales were not normally used in 19th-century Austrian Catholic worship.

To hear one sung by a congregation, Bruckner had to sneak into the Lutheran church in Linz where a friend was organist (with his hat pulled down over his eyes in case anybody recognized him!).

Perhaps Bruckner was also deliberately invoking aspects of his Germanic musical heritage: the chorales and fugues of Bach, the use of the chorale *Ein feste Burg* ('A safe stronghold') in Mendelssohn's *Reformation Symphony*, firmly placing himself in the Great German Tradition. Whatever his thinking, the eventual outcome is one of the most magnificently affirmative endings in the romantic symphonic literature. After a long, exciting crescendo, the chorale thunders in on full brass through surging strings. Finally fanfare-like echoes of the first movement's *Allegro* theme set the seal: the huge ship has reached harbour to a triumphant reception.

*Programme notes © Stephen Johnson*

# STANISŁAW SKROWACZEWSKI

*conductor*



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Stanisław Skrowaczewski commands a rare position within the international musical scene, being both a renowned conductor and a highly regarded composer. He has conducted all of the top orchestras during his long and distinguished career and is currently the world's oldest

working major conductor.

Born in 1923 in Lwów, Poland, Skrowaczewski began piano and violin studies aged four, composed his first symphonic work at seven, gave his first public piano recital at 11, and two years later played and conducted Beethoven's Third Piano Concerto. His home was bombed during the War and he sustained a hand injury effectively ending his keyboard career, after which he concentrated on composing and conducting. He spent the immediate post-war years in Paris, studying with Nadia Boulanger and in 1948 he conducted the Paris premiere of Shostakovich's Fifth Symphony with L'Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France.

From 1984 to 1991 Skrowaczewski was Principal Conductor of The Hallé and in 2007 he was appointed Principal Conductor

of the Yomiuri Nippon Symphony Orchestra for three highly successful seasons and with whom he now holds the title of Honorary Conductor Laureate.

Engagements continue to take Skrowaczewski across North and South America, Europe and Japan. Highlights of recent seasons include concerts with the Bruckner Orchester Linz with whom he conducted a historical performance of Bruckner Symphony No. 8 in St Florian Cathedral in July 2015 and a memorable return to the Cleveland Orchestra in August 2015.

Still an active composer, his Concerto for Orchestra (1985) and Passacaglia Immaginaria (1995) were both nominated for the Pulitzer Prize. Recordings of Skrowaczewski's music are found on Oehms Classics, Reference Recordings, Albany Records and Innova.

The recipient of numerous accolades, Skrowaczewski was recently awarded the Knight's Cross of Polonia Restituta, one of Poland's highest decorations. His interpretations of Bruckner have earned him the Bruckner Society of America's Kilenyi Medal of Honor and the Gold Medal of the Mahler-Bruckner Society.

Of particular note within his extensive discography are

Skrowaczewski's complete recordings of Bruckner's and Beethoven's symphonies with the Saarbrücken Radio Symphony Orchestra (now Deutsche Radio Philharmonie) for Arte Nova Classics (now Oehms Classics), which received enormous critical acclaim. The Bruckner set won the 2002 Cannes Classical Award in the 'Orchestral 18/19 Century' category and was also included in BBC Music Magazine's 'Top Ten Discs of the Decade'.

Published in 2011, *Seeking the Infinite: The Musical Life of Stanisław Skrowaczewski* by Frederick Harris Jr is a comprehensive account of Skrowaczewski's life and work. Currently two documentary films about Skrowaczewski are in progress in Poland and the United States.

*When I was seven, something extraordinary happened ... I heard orchestral music coming from an open window. It had a cataclysmic effect on me – I was paralysed, struck dumb, I almost lost consciousness. It was music of a power and beauty I had never experienced ... doctors were called: nothing could be done and the next day I was still in shock. I had heard Bruckner's Seventh Symphony.*

**Stanisław Skrowaczewski, taken from an interview with Helen Wallace for BBC Music Magazine, October 2015**

# LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

The London Philharmonic Orchestra is one of the world's finest orchestras, balancing a long and distinguished history with its present-day position as one of the most dynamic and forward-looking ensembles in the UK. This reputation has been secured by the Orchestra's performances in the concert hall and opera house, its many award-winning recordings, trail-blazing international tours and wide-ranging educational work.

Founded by Sir Thomas Beecham in 1932, the Orchestra has since been headed by many of the world's greatest conductors, including Sir Adrian Boult, Bernard Haitink, Sir Georg Solti, Klaus Tennstedt and Kurt Masur. Vladimir Jurowski was appointed the Orchestra's Principal Guest Conductor in March 2003, and became Principal Conductor in September 2007.

The Orchestra is based at Southbank Centre's Royal Festival Hall in London, where it has been Resident Orchestra since 1992, giving around 30 concerts a season. Each summer it takes up its annual residency at Glyndebourne Festival Opera where it has been Resident Symphony Orchestra for over 50 years. The Orchestra performs at venues around the UK and has made numerous international tours, performing to sell-out audiences in America, Europe, Asia and Australasia.

The London Philharmonic Orchestra made its first recordings on 10 October 1932, just three days after its first public performance. It has recorded and broadcast regularly ever since, and in 2005 established its own record label. These recordings are taken mainly from live concerts given by conductors including LPO Principal Conductors from Beecham and Boult, through Haitink, Solti and Tennstedt, to Masur and Jurowski. [lpo.org.uk](http://lpo.org.uk)



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**ANTON BRUCKNER (1824–96)**

**78:14 Symphony No. 5 in B flat major**

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|----|-------|--|
| 01 | 21:27 | Adagio - Allegro                                 |
| 02 | 18:09 | Adagio: Sehr langsam                             |
| 03 | 13:16 | Scherzo: Molto vivace<br>Trio: Im gleichen Tempo |
| 04 | 25:22 | Adagio - Allegro moderato                        |

**STANISŁAW SKROWACZEWSKI** *conductor*

**LONDON PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA**

**Pieter Schoeman** *leader*

*Recorded live at* **SOUTHBANK CENTRE'S ROYAL FESTIVAL HALL**