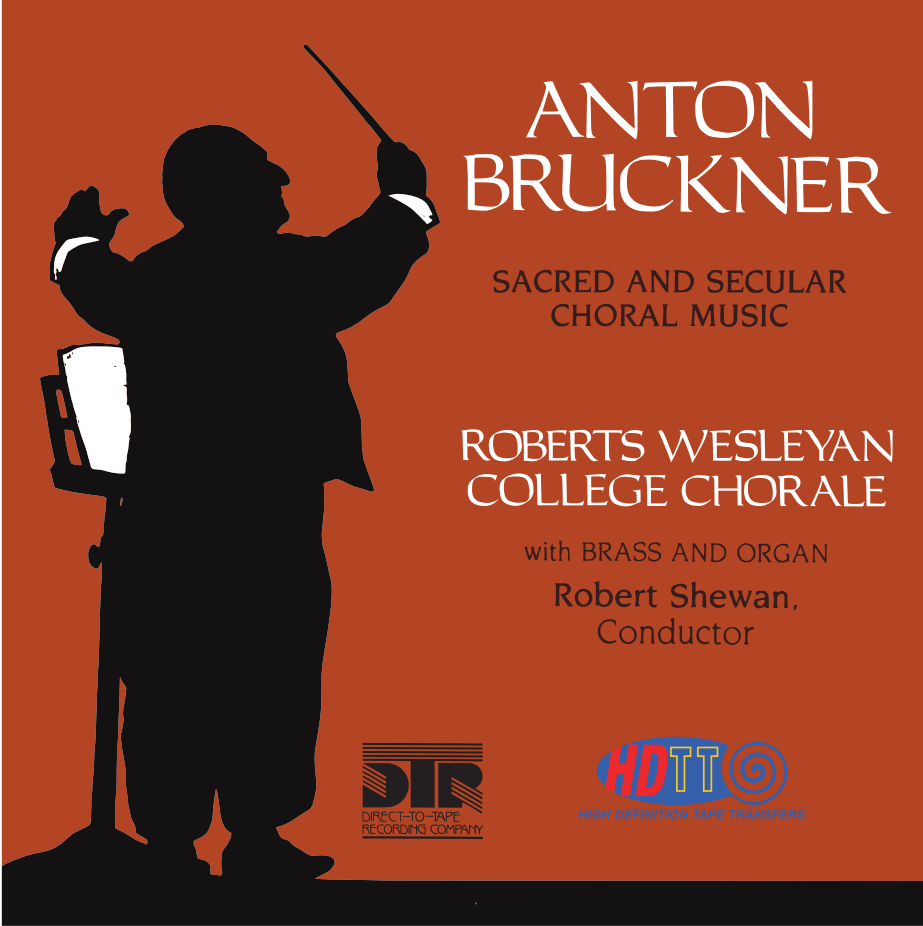


mirrors on a greatly reduced scale the brilliant use of contrasting orchestral choirs found in the slow introduction to the first movement of the Fifth Symphony. The String Quintet is the major work that falls between the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies, with the eight-part unaccompanied motet *Os justi meditabitur* being written in June 1879, the month of the Quintet's completion. Here Bruckner uses his polyphonic skill to austere effect, fashioning in strict Lydian mode a compact prelude-fugue-postlude form that stands comparison with the finest motets from the Church's golden age. The decade of the 1880's saw the completion of Bruckner's Sixth Symphony and later gave us the Seventh, *Te Deum*, Eighth, and the beginning of the Ninth. Between the *Te Deum* and the Eighth fall the two finest examples of Bruckner's small sacred choruses. The Good Friday motet *Christus factus est pro nobis* of 1884 represents the pinnacle of his writing for unaccompanied chorus, with every word and note set to telling effect. Written in his favorite key of d-minor, this work strains the bounds of choral writing, calling for whispered pianissimos and thundering fortissimos, as well as absolute surety in the ability of the chorus to handle Bruckner's extreme demands of almost orchestral writing for the human voice. Its dynamic and emotional range represents a distillation of Bruckner's genius. Of comparable power is the great *Ecce sacerdos magnus* of 1885, written to honor the 100th Anniversary Jubilee of the Roman Catholic diocese of Linz. In it Bruckner joins three trombones and organ to the 7-part chorus, producing a brilliant peroration which mirrors the sweeping grandeur of the Finale of the Eighth Symphony.

In the time remaining to Bruckner, he would write two additional unaccompanied choruses, both dedicated to his beloved spiritual home, St. Florian. The first of these, written for the church's Feast of the Annunciation in 1885, was the dramatic motet *Virga Jesse floruit*, which captures perfectly Bruckner's special feeling of religious ecstasy in its powerful concluding ejaculations on the word *Alleluia*. The second was the Good Friday hymn *Vexilla regis prodeunt* of 1892, a simple four-part setting that creates a mood of quiet, mystic contemplation appropriate to that solemn day.

As his work on the Ninth Symphony continued through 1892, Bruckner had time to complete two additional occasional pieces that year, the Psalm 150 for soprano, chorus and orchestra and the curious *Deutsches Lied* for men's chorus and brass ensemble. As in the earlier *Trösterin Musik*, Bruckner is here once again saddled with an inadequate text, in this case a pseudo-cultural "call to arms" couched in terms of German nationalism. The music, however, is some of Bruckner's best, comprising as it does a powerful parallel to his concurrent symphonic thought. Writing in the characteristic style of the spare, primitive-sounding open d-minor harmony of the Ninth Symphony, Bruckner quotes directly from the incomplete Finale of that work in the pounding rhythm of the brass ensemble. *Das deutsche Lied*, as the last but one of Bruckner's short choral works, is an excellent example of how the composer was able to express himself successfully in short, compact forms, while at the same time retaining the symphonic character for which he is most well known.

Notes by John M. Proffitt



ANTON BRUCKNER

SACRED AND SECULAR
CHORAL MUSIC

ROBERTS WESLEYAN
COLLEGE CHORALE

with BRASS AND ORGAN

Robert Shewan,
Conductor

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Anton Bruckner (1824-1896) is today recognized as a leading symphonic composer of the Viennese school, in the direct lineage of Beethoven and Schubert. Nine of his eleven symphonies are mainstays of the late Romantic orchestral repertory, with the three mature masses and *Te Deum* representing the final flowering of the Austrian symphonic choral tradition as exemplified by the festive mass-oratorios of Haydn and Schubert. A less familiar side of Bruckner's work is found in his many smaller, occasional pieces for choir, some with instrumental accompaniment; all of which, in dramatic contrast to the symphonies, take only a few minutes in performance. The short choral works, both sacred and secular, date from all periods of Bruckner's creative life, which is to say from his first known work (as a child of eleven!), a *Pange Lingua* of 1835, to the last completed opus, *Helgoland* of 1893. In most cases, the motets and choruses demonstrate a development of Bruckner's skill and imagination which parallels that seen in his better-known symphonies. The most remarkable of these minor masterpieces, such as the *Ecce sacerdos magnus* or *Das deutsche Lied*, contain a microcosm of Bruckner's expansive yet potent symphonic technique, and in performance can overwhelm both performer and listener alike with a sense of trenchant power straining to burst the bounds of compact form. An important influence peculiar to this area of Bruckner's creation is that of the golden age of Catholic church music as represented by Palestrina and other Renaissance masters, whose use of counterpoint is translated by Bruckner into the harmonic language of the late nineteenth century, producing a musical hybrid of austere beauty, archaic yet forward looking. Throughout his life, Bruckner never failed to keep close contact with his Upper Austrian Catholic roots. As a child, he received his first musical training as a choirboy at the Augustinian monastery of St Florian, near Linz and his birthplace in the hamlet of Ansfelden. As a young man, he served as organist for the *Stiftsbasilika*, famous to this day for its magnificent specimen of the late eighteenth-century organ-builder's art. Through tours to Paris and London, Bruckner rose to international fame as an improviser without peer on the instrument. As a mature composer of symphonies, he held in his mind's ear the resonance of organ and choir within the vaulted marble arches of the *Stiftsbasilika* as a sound ideal that would permeate his orchestral writing to the very end, lending a sense of infinite vistas and mystic communion with the Almighty to the unfolding of the uniquely Brucknerian symphonic argument. In a real sense, he never left the spiritual embrace of St. Florian, even though more than half of his 72 years was spent in the cosmopolitan centers of Linz and Vienna. During those times of personal crisis and self-doubt that plagued Bruckner throughout his career, he would return to St. Florian for days of rest, retreat and renewal at the fount of his

abiding Christian faith. Upon his death in Vienna in 1896, in accordance with his last wish, Bruckner's earthly remains were returned to St. Florian for interment beneath the by then aptly-named Bruckner Organ.

The earliest example of Bruckner's work on this album is the first of three settings of the *Ave Maria*, a prayer close to the heart of all devout Catholics. The *Ave Maria* of 1856 was written as a farewell to St. Florian, which Bruckner had left the previous year to take up his new job as cathedral organist in Linz. This setting is pleasing in its simplicity, sounding much more like a work by Michael Haydn or Schubert than the more familiar later Bruckner. The second *Ave Maria* comes from 1861 and is the first unqualified masterpiece from Bruckner's pen, showing as it does the complete command of counterpoint and advanced use of harmony characteristic of his later works. This remains one of the most often performed of Bruckner's works in churches everywhere. The brief *Afferentur regi*, for chorus and three trombo d Seventh Symphonies, as an occasional piece for a young lady, one *Fräulein Luise Hochleitner*. She had, apparently, a beautiful contralto voice of exceptional range and had impressed the composer with her youthful charm. The work is notable for its main theme, a glorious, octave-spanning melody that captures a sublimity of mood similar to that of the opening of the Seventh Symphony, then being written. Although the composition of the three *Ave Maria*'s spanned 26 years, Bruckner chose to retain the same key (F-major) and the characteristic treatment of the word *Jesus* (thrice repeated in a rising, sustained phrase) in all three settings.

The decade of the 1870's produced three choral works heard on this album. *Trösterin Musik* of 1877 is an example of those occasional pieces set to secular texts Bruckner wrote for the many men's glee clubs (*Liedertafeln*) that performed throughout Austria and Bavaria. Although the poetry seems sentimental by current standards, the use Bruckner makes of the four-part men's chorus with organ results in a euphonious Romantic atmosphere more commonly associated with Schumann or Weber. No hint of the contemporaneous Fifth Symphony can be found in this piece. No greater contrast can be found than with the *Tota pulchra es Maria* of the following year, dedicated to Bruckner's friend and mentor, Bishop Franz Rudigier of Linz. This imposing work takes the form of an antiphon scored for tenor solo, choir and organ and is a fine example of Bruckner's marriage of older Renaissance style with the Romantic sensibilities of his own age. With its contrasting sound-masses of solo tenor against choir and organ, this small musical jewel

(continued on back panel)

ANTON BRUCKNER

SACRED AND SECULAR CHORAL MUSIC

ROBERTS WESLEYAN COLLEGE CHORALE

Robert Shewan, Conductor

BARBARA HARBACH, ORGANIST

WITH CHRISTOPHER JONES, TENOR (IN TOTA PULCHRA ES MARIA)

MATTHEW LAU, BARITONE, IN AVE MARIA (1882)

01-Ecce sacerdos magnus (1885)

02-Das deutsche Lied (1892)

03-Tota pulchra es Maria (1878)

04-Ave Maria (1856)

05-Trösterin Musik (1877)

06-Afferentur regi (1861)

07-Ave Maria (1882)

08-Christus factus est pro nobis(1884)

09-Os justi meditabitur (1879)

10-Virga Jesse floruit (1885)

11-Vexilla regis prodeunt (1892)

12-Ave maria (1861)

The Roberts Wesleyan College Chorale / Robert Shewan, conductor / Barbara Harbach, organist with Christopher Jones, tenor (in Tota pulchra es Maria) and Matthew Lau, baritone (in Ave Maria III)

Recording Info: Analogue master recording 15 i.p.s with dbx-I encoding Producer and Engineer: John Proffitt

Date of Recording: 1983 Venue: Asbury First United Methodist Church, Rochester, NY; Organ by Austin



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