

# ANTON BRUCKNER (1824 - 1896)

\*SYMPHONISCHES PRAELUDIUM (*attrib.*) – MASS NO. 3 IN F MINOR

HOUSTON SYMPHONY CHORUS – MOORES SCHOOL SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

CYNTHIA CLAYTON, SOPRANO – MELANIE SONNENBERG, MEZZO-SOPRANO

JOSEPH EVANS, TENOR – TIMOTHY JONES, BASS-BARITONE – SIGURD ØGAARD, ORGAN

FRANZ ANTON KRAGER, CONDUCTOR

\*MICHELLE PERRIN BLAIR, CONDUCTOR

1	Symphonisches Praeludium	06:32
2	Kyrie	10:07
3	Gloria in excelsis Deo	02:57
4	Qui tollis peccata mundi	02:21
5	Miserere	01:42
6	Quoniam tu solus sanctus	01:39
7	FUGUE: In gloria Dei patris, Amen	03:08
8	Credo in unum Deum	02:45
9	Et incarnatus est	02:47
10	Crucifixus	02:35
11	Et resurrexit	02:53
12	Cuius regni	00:53
13	Et in spiritum sanctum	04:23
14	FUGUE: Et vitam venturi	02:54
15	OFFERTORIUM: Ave Maria III	04:25
16	Sanctus	02:20
17	Benedictus	08:55
18	Agnus Dei	08:38
19	Postludium – Organ Improvisation	06:26

TOTAL TIME, with pauses: **1:18:43**

Recorded in public concerts at Grace Presbyterian Church, Houston, 26-27 April 2013

Producer & recording engineer: John Proffitt

Cover image: *Anton Bruckner* by Lisa Elle Anders

For more information about the life and music of Bruckner, visit [www.abruckner.com](http://www.abruckner.com)

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## The Great Mass in F Minor by Anton Bruckner: the Church and Concert Hall United

Like some of the other iconic symphonic mass settings of the 19th century – Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis* and Verdi's *Requiem*, for example – the *Mass No. 3 in F Minor* (1867/68) by Bruckner seems well suited for the concert hall while perhaps uncomfortably robust when used in an actual Roman Catholic church service. This is not to say that all such large-scale choral-symphonic sacred works cannot “fit” into a sacred space and be well performed while remaining true to their original religious purpose – they certainly can! – but the logistics to make this possible can be daunting. A chorus of 150-plus singers, four soloists and an orchestra of 80-plus players obviously take up a lot of room and dominate the space – and the liturgical proceedings. Thus, from the beginning the option of taking these large religious works to the concert hall for performance was understandable and has now become common.

The performance of the *Mass* was augmented with two additional works, one definitely by Bruckner... and one a “maybe.” In liturgical use, a choral mass would normally be interspersed with other readings, anthems and prayers, and some of these might also be set to music. Bruckner wrote a number of shorter motets, or choral anthems, with this specific function in mind. In the case of this performance, we hear Bruckner's exquisite setting of the *Ave Maria* sung by bass-baritone Timothy Jones accompanied by organist Sigurd Øgaard. Although it was written a number of years after the *Mass*, this *Ave Maria* is both appropriate and effective at the traditional point in the Roman Catholic *Mass*, its F-major tonality working to perfection in context and forming a natural transition from the *fff* ending of the *Credo* into the *pp* beginning of the *Sanctus*.

The “maybe” refers to the other piece which augments the *Mass* and may (or may not) be by Bruckner – scholarly opinion is divided. The *Symphonic Prelude for Orchestra* functions much like the organ prelude that would herald the start of a festive liturgical service. Here it serves as a tuneful and exciting *Introit* to the dramatic lyricism of the *Mass in F Minor*.

The *Symphonisches Præludium in C minor* (1876) has a curious, and convoluted, history tied to the estate of Rudolf Krzyzanowski (1859 – 1911), who along with Gustav Mahler was a pupil of Bruckner at the Vienna Conservatory in the mid-1870s. After World War II, the manuscript we know as the *Symphonic Prelude* was found among the items belonging to the estate of Krzyzanowski. The manuscript is a handwritten orchestral score of 43 pages, bearing the inscription “Rudolf Krzyzanowski cop[ied]. 1876” on the first page, and on the last page, in large, blue letters, “von Anton Bruckner.” In 1948/49 copies of the work were given to leading Bruckner scholars for their examination. Some of these experts, such as Max Auer and Volkmar Andrae, viewed the attribution to Bruckner positively, and Andrae agreed to conduct the premiere with the Vienna Philharmonic. Unfortunately, the members of the orchestra, all of whom were very familiar with Bruckner's symphonies, voted their expert opinion as against Bruckner's authorship and refused the premiere. A third scholar, Leopold Nowak, the editor-in-chief of the official Complete Edition of the Works of Anton Bruckner, was asked to render his judgment. Although he never did express a clear “ja” or “nein,” he chose not to include it in the Complete Edition.

Although scholars to this day disagree about the likelihood that some or all of the music of this *Symphonisches Præludium* originates with



Bruckner, what we do have is a performing edition of a symphonic work of somewhat mysterious origins that seems to have originated in the circle of Bruckner's students in the 1870s. In fact, much of its interest derives from the mystery of who might have composed it.

The *Offertory Motet Ave Maria* dates from February, 1882, while Bruckner was working on his *Symphony No. 7*. It is Bruckner's third setting of this text, all three of which are in F major. Written for solo low voice and organ (or harmonium), this was an occasional piece for a young lady, one Fräulein Luise Hochleitner. Apparently, she had 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*. That this late *Ave Maria* is the only mature specimen of *geistliche Lieder* from Bruckner's pen is cause enough to regret his lack of interest in song writing. As a crafter of melodies and sound-painter of words, Bruckner's talent was of the highest order; yet with few exceptions his temperament lay with absolute music.

John Gladney Proffitt

Member, Board of Directors, the Bruckner Society of America

Member, the Houston Symphony Chorus

### Anton Bruckner – Mass No. 3 in F Minor

The 1860s was a decisive decade for Anton Bruckner. In 1860, the year he turned thirty-six, he was working in Linz as Cathedral Organist, nearing the end of a six-year correspondence course in harmony and counterpoint with the Viennese theorist Simon Sechter, during which time Bruckner did not compose any significant original music. By 1870 he was Professor of Harmony, Counterpoint and Organ at the Vienna Conservatory (succeeding Sechter who died in 1867), had begun his long period of service as the Hofkapelle organist, and was just beginning his difficult and ultimately triumphant career as a pioneering composer of modern symphonies in the Imperial Capital. In the intervening decade he had spent two years studying form and instrumentation with the Linz cellist and Kapellmeister Otto Kitzler, made the deeply significant discovery of Wagner's music, composed his three great *Masses*, as well as three early symphonies and a number of smaller choral works, made a tour to Paris and Nancy as organ virtuoso, and spent three months in 1867 undergoing a cold-water cure at Bad Kreuzen during the passage of a profound existential crisis.

The *Mass in F minor* was begun in 1867, shortly after both Bruckner's departure from Bad Kreuzen and his receipt of the news of Sechter's death. The score was completed in August of the following year, just before the composer permanently relocated to Vienna. The *F minor Mass*, the last of Bruckner's five complete *Mass* settings, achieves an even greater depth of expressive and musical elaboration than do its two great predecessors, the *Masses in D minor* (1864) and *E minor* (1866).

This grand work is scored for four vocal soloists, chorus, full orchestra and organ and is set in the standard six-movement scheme: *Kyrie*, *Gloria*, *Credo*, *Sanctus*, *Benedictus* and *Agnus Dei*. The *Kyrie* is a movement of grave beauty that moves from the quietly reverential opening pages through the more impassioned “*Christe*” with solo contributions from soprano, bass and violin to a concluding “*Kyrie*” that dies away to a near whisper.



The Gloria and Credo are both expansive movements that encompass deeply reflective passages – notably the “Qui tollis” in the Gloria and the “Et incarnatus est” in the Credo – within a structure framed by powerful, declarative passages. The Gloria ends with a dazzlingly intense double fugue on “Amen” that glorifies God by reveling in a counterpoint of sublime complexity and intense chromaticism. The Credo, which lasts some twenty minutes in performance, is structured symphonically: about two-thirds of the way through, the music that opened the movement is recapitulated and the music of the “et resurrexit” is pointedly recalled a few pages later on the text “et exspecto resurrectionem.” The entire crucifixion and resurrection passage the unaccompanied chorus on the words “passus.” Following a hushed silence, a sudden and uncannily illuminated E-major crescendo quickly surges to the cry of “et resurrexit.” Like the Gloria, the Credo concludes with a magnificent, intricate double fugue.

The three subsequent movements are less imposing. The Benedictus, with its hushed introduction and its lyrical interplay between the soloists and chorus, contains some of the most purely romantic music Bruckner ever composed.\* The Agnus Dei returns to the deep F-minor mood that began the Kyrie, especially effective are its implorations of “miserere” and the turn to the tonic major for the final prayer, “Dona nobis pacem.”

The history of the F minor Mass reflects the often uneasy initial reception of Bruckner’s music by its early interpreters. After two preparatory rehearsals in the winter of 1868/69, the conductor Johann Herbeck set the work aside as “too long and unsingable.” Again in 1872 Herbeck found it unmanageable and Bruckner was left to prepare and conduct the Mass’s highly successful premiere in that year. Only after hearing the work was Herbeck convinced; he declared, “I know only two Masses – this one and Beethoven’s Solemnis!”

Benjamin M. Korstvedt, Ph.D

Professor of Music at Clark University

President, Bruckner Society of America; and Contributor to the International Bruckner-Gesellschaft (IBG) Complete Edition of the Works of Anton Bruckner.

\*NB. Bruckner would later quote the Benedictus theme in the Adagio of his Symphony No. 2, completed some four years after the Mass.

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