

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

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

“There are no pious platitudes or calming lullabies here, but rather vivid, ecstatic, awe-inspiring, mystical drama of the highest order...”

Like some of the other iconic symphonic mass settings of the 19th century – Beethoven’s *Missa Solemnis*, Schubert’s *Mass in E-flat*, 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 90-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.

It is important to note that this Mass is, whether in Church or Concert Hall, a prime example of High Romantic, Roman Catholic musical expression, consumed with the passionate depiction of the central tenets of the Christian faith. There are no pious platitudes or calming lullabies here, but rather vivid, ecstatic, awe-inspiring, mystical drama of the highest order, with brilliant music depicting humanity’s universal plea for Mercy and Forgiveness (Kyrie); the Exultation of the Birth of the Savior (Gloria in excelsis); the Crucifixion and Agony of Christ, his Glorious Ascension, and the terror of the Final Judgment (Credo). This section of the Credo, by the way, falls roughly at the midpoint of the Mass and is in many ways the emotional climax of the entire Mass in Bruckner’s setting: “He will come, with glory, to judge the living and the dead!” set to some of the most violent, harrowing music imaginable for the period.



Combined musical forces for Mass in F-Minor, at Grace Presbyterian Church, Houston

The Gloria and Credo are presented *attacca* on the CD, a segue which I first encountered on the DG LP of the Mass as conducted by Eugen Jochum and which seems both musically and dramatically appropriate and is indeed a bit of *coup de théâtre*. Thus with the Gloria+Credo in Franz Krager's interpretation, we have a unified half-hour of mainly *forte-fortissimo* symphonic choral singing, exhilarating to hear as it is physically taxing for the musicians to sing. Both Gloria and Credo conclude with jubilant, major-key fugues, crowned with trumpets and timpani, both ending in a blazing *fff* underpinned by the roar of the full organ!

The manuscript score for the Mass has no independent organ part, but it is known that Bruckner himself improvised organ accompaniment during presentations of this Mass. Furthermore, in a letter to Siegfried Ochs of 14 April 1895, the composer expressed his opinion and desires directly:

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"Der Bruckner wird alt und möchte doch so gern noch die F-Moll '[Messe]' hören! Bitte, bitte! Das wäre der Höhepunkt meines Lebens. Aber dann manches anders als die Partitur! Bei Des-Dur im Credo: 'Deum vero de Deo' bitte 'Organo pleno'! Nicht Register sparen!"

Translation: "Bruckner is growing old and would very much like to live to hear the F minor [Mass]! Please, please! That would be the high point of my life. But then much is to be different from the score! In the D \flat major of the Credo, Deum verum de Deo, please, Organo Pleno! Don't spare the registers!"

The producer and conductor of this performance in Grace Presbyterian Church, Houston, decided to take Bruckner at his word, with implied approval of adding organ accompaniment to the written score at certain key moments, especially the *organo pleno* (full organ) at major climaxes. The Church's massive Schantz Pipe Organ provided the thrilling gravitas, while Norwegian organist Sigurd

Øgaard provided the improvised parts during the Mass and an improvised solo Postludium, based on the main theme of the Benedictus.

In the 1890s Bruckner was still revising the work, but there were very few changes made to the vocal parts after 1868. At a November 1893 performance of this Mass, Johannes Brahms "applauded ... so enthusiastically ... that Bruckner personally thanked him."



Silhouette by Hans Schließmann, Bruckner at the Organ

In the course of all this, the listener may discern the heritage of Beethoven's *Missa Solemnis*, Schubert's two late Masses, and Berlioz's *Requiem* (all of which Bruckner knew). Beyond that, the high drama and musical tone-painting spring from an ethos common to the roughly contemporary Verdi *Requiem* and Brahms German Requiem: emotions deeply personal to the composer translated into music both uninhibited and public in its expression. In the midst of all the high drama, two moments of serenity and repose should be mentioned: the tenor solo *Et incarnatus est*, sung with sensitivity by Joseph Evans, and the lovely Benedictus, one of the most Romantic movements from Bruckner's works, the main theme of which would be reused a few years later in the Adagio of Symphony 2.



Conductor Franz Anton Krager

This performance is 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 *Ave Maria* sung by bass-baritone Timothy Jones accompanied by organist Sigurd Øgaard. 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 soaring, 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. Although it was written a number of years after the Mass - in the same period as Symphony 7, in 1882 - 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 Präludium* 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 in C Minor 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 Andreae, viewed the attribution to Bruckner positively, and Andreae agreed to conduct the premiere with the Vienna Philharmonic.



Conductor Michelle Perrin Blair

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 Präludium* 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.

~ John Proffitt, Member, Board of Directors of the Bruckner Society of America



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 expecto resurrectionem*." The entire crucifixion and resurrection passage is introduced with the unaccompanied chorus on the repeated word "passus." And 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.*"



Sunset over the Stift St Florian

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!" (*Bruckner would later use the theme of the Benedictus in the slow-movement Adagio of his Symphony 2.)

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Music on his Mind, by Lisa Elle Anders