



# ANTON BRUCKNER

## *Symphony No. 3 in D-Minor*

**Josef Anton Bruckner** was an Austrian composer and organist best known for his symphonies and sacred music, which includes Masses, Te Deum and motets. The symphonies are considered emblematic of the final stage of Austro-German Romanticism because of their rich harmonic language, strongly polyphonic character, and considerable length. Bruckner's compositions helped to define contemporary musical radicalism, owing to their dissonances, unprepared modulations, and roving harmonies. Unlike other musical radicals such as Richard Wagner and Hugo Wolf, Bruckner showed extreme humility before other musicians, Wagner in particular. This apparent dichotomy between Bruckner the man and Bruckner the composer hampers efforts to describe his life in a way that gives a straightforward context for his music. Hans von Bülow described him as "half genius, half simpleton". Bruckner was critical of his own work and often reworked his compositions. There are several versions of many of his works. His works, the symphonies in particular, had detractors, most notably the influential Austrian critic Eduard Hanslick and other supporters of Johannes Brahms, who pointed to their large size and use of repetition, as well as to Bruckner's propensity for revising many of his works, often with the assistance of colleagues, and his apparent indecision about which versions he preferred. On the other hand, Bruckner was greatly admired by subsequent composers, including his friend Gustav Mahler. Sometimes Bruckner's works are referred to by WAB numbers, from the *Werkverzeichnis Anton Bruckner*, a catalogue of Bruckner's works edited by Renate Grasberger.

The revision issue has generated controversy. A common explanation for the multiple versions is that Bruckner was willing to revise his work on the basis of harsh, uninformed criticism from his colleagues. "The result of such advice was to awaken immediately all the insecurity in the non-musical part of Bruckner's personality," musicologist Deryck Cooke writes. "Lacking all self-assurance in such matters, he felt obliged to bow to the opinions of his friends, 'the experts,' to permit ... revisions and even to help make them in some cases." This explanation was widely accepted when it was championed by Bruckner scholar Robert Haas, who was the chief editor of the first critical editions of Bruckner's works published by the International Bruckner Society; it continues to be found in the majority of program notes and biographical sketches concerning Bruckner. Haas's work was endorsed by the Nazis and so fell out of favour after the war as the Allies enforced denazification. Haas's rival Leopold Nowak was appointed to produce a whole new critical edition of Bruckner's works. He and others such as Benjamin Korstvedt [fr] and conductor Leon Botstein argued that Haas's explanation is at best idle speculation, at worst a shady justification of Haas's own editorial decisions. Also, it has been pointed out that Bruckner often started work on a symphony just days after finishing the one before. As Deryck Cooke writes, "In spite of continued opposition and criticism, and many well-meaning exhortations to caution from his friends, he looked neither to right nor left, but simply got down to work on the next symphony." The matter of Bruckner's authentic texts and the reasons for his changes to them remains politicised and uncomfortable.

Bruckner's **Symphony No. 3** in D minor, WAB 103, was dedicated to Richard Wagner and is sometimes known as his "Wagner Symphony". It was written in 1873, revised in 1877 and again in 1889. The work has been characterised as "difficult", and is regarded by some as Bruckner's artistic breakthrough. According to Rudolf Kloiber, the third symphony "opens the sequence of Bruckner's masterpieces, in which his creativity meets monumental ability of symphonic construction." The work is notorious as the most-revised of Bruckner's symphonies, and there exist no fewer than six versions, with three of them being widely performed today. The symphony has been described as "heroic" in nature. Bruckner's love for the grand and majestic is reflected especially in the first and last movements. Stark contrasts, cuts and forcefulness mark the signature of the entire composition. The signal-like trombone theme, heard at the beginning after the two crescendo waves, constitutes a motto for the whole symphony. Many typical elements of his later symphonies, such as the cyclical penetration of all movements and especially the apotheosis at the coda of the finale, which ends with the trombone theme, are heard in the Third for the first time. The original version has a quotation of *Rienzi* near the end of the recapitulation. Additionally, the earlier versions feature a "catalogue" of themes from previous movements, similar to the Finale of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, albeit near the end of the movement rather than the beginning. Eduard Hanslick, one of Bruckner's greatest critics, described the symphony as such: "Bruckner's poetic intentions were not clear to us – perhaps a vision of Beethoven's Ninth becoming friendly with Wagner's Valkyries and finishing up being trampled under their hooves." The catalogue was removed in the final version. As the symphony draws to a close, the main theme of the first movement is recalled, and in the final version, is actually used to bring about the final D major cadence.