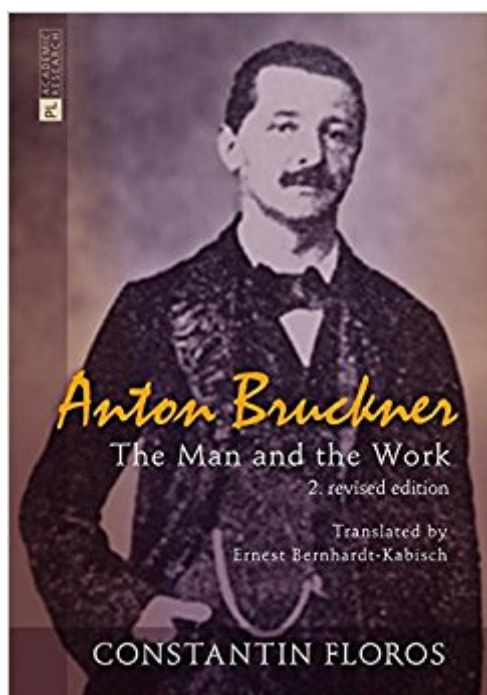


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Anton Bruckner: The Man And The Work



Synopsis

While unappreciated and controversial during most of his life, Anton Bruckner is today regarded as the greatest symphonist between Beethoven and Gustav Mahler – not only in terms of originality, boldness and monumentality of his music. The image of Bruckner the man, however, is still extreme instance of the tenacious power of prejudice. No less a figure than Gustav Mahler coined the aperçu about Bruckner being – «a simpleton – not half genius, half imbecile». The author is out to correct that misperception. His thesis in this study is that contrary to what has hitherto been asserted, there is an intimate relation between Bruckner's sacred music and his symphonies from multiple perspectives: biographical data, sources and influences, the psychology of creation, musical structure, contemporary testimony and reception history. Additional chapters assess important Bruckner recordings and interpreters and the progressiveness of his music.

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Customer Reviews

«A masterful achievement» (Sächsische Zeitung about the German edition of the book) «All in all, this is a thought-provoking book that helps to widen our understanding of Bruckner's multi-faced compositional style.» (Professor Crawford Howie)

Constantin Floros is professor emeritus of musicology at the University of Hamburg and a prolific

writer on diverse subjects. He is an honorary member of the Anton Bruckner Institute in Linz and of the Austrian Society for Music Research. Ernest Bernhardt-Kabisch is professor emeritus of English and Comparative Literature at Indiana University. A specialist in English and European Romanticism, he has worked as a translator since his retirement.

This is a good book but its brevity is a drawback. I realize Bruckner didn't lead a tumultuous life like, say, Wagner, but more biographical data would be interesting, as well as more analysis of why he lived as he did. The musical analysis is good and can be profitably supplemented with Simpson's book about the symphonies, but when Floros discusses the great Bruckner conductors, he seems to think that Jochum, Wand, and Celibidache are the most important, a dubious judgment, I think. Wand is clearly the best of the trio. Both his Bruckner symphony cycles are excellent, especially the Berlin, but I think Jochum is correctly considered second-rank, superb on some recordings (his first DG 9th is outstanding), not as consistently good in his Dresden cycle. Celibidache is the odd man out. You listen to his Stuttgart recordings on DG and you think he's more than doing justice to the music, even if his orchestra isn't the equal of his immense talent. Then you listen to the late Munich recordings and can barely believe what you're hearing. Supposedly Zen-inspired, these performances are so perversely self-indulgent, profoundly slower than any other Bruckner performances that I've heard. Some say this brings out the "transcendence" of the music, but that's a bit like arguing that Goodall's slow-motion way with Wagner brings out the "melos", when all it really does is irritate anyone who's heard the great Wagner conductors. (Goodall's Covent Garden PARSIFAL is the greatest waste of Jon Vickers incomparable talent as a Wagner singer, equaled only by Karajan's abuse of it in his studio TRISTAN.) I think Furtwaengler is a much better Bruckner conductor than Jochum, and his "subjective" readings enlighten the listener rather than alienate him as late Celibidache does. And what about Jascha Horenstein who works wonders in Bruckner with second-class orchestras? Even lazybones Knappertsbusch is better to hear than the perverse Rumanian. This book is worth reading, but we still need a definitive life-and-works of Bruckner in English. Given the inordinate length of de la Grange's multi-volume monstrosity on Mahler, even the 900+ pages of Fischer, surely 500 pages on Bruckner would be a proper measure for this great master of the symphony?

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