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An Early Symphonic Prelude by Mahler?

PAUL BANKS

One of the confusing aspects of Gustav Mahler's career as a student at the Conservatorium of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Vienna in the years 1875–78 is the disparity between his frequent references in later years to prize-winning works and the relatively small number of competitions he is actually known to have entered. In fact there were only two relevant competitions each year at the Conservatory: the annual Composition Competition, which only students of the composition classes who had been successful in the annual examinations were eligible to enter, and the Zusner Song Competition.¹ Mahler entered the annual competition in 1876 and 1878 and won first prize on both occasions. Though eligible, he

withdrew from the 1877 event; he also seems to have competed unsuccessfully for the Zusner Prize on at least one occasion.² But the two prize-winning works by Mahler listed in the published Conservatory results³—the first movement of a [Piano?] Quintet and a Scherzo for Piano Quintet—do not correspond to the compositions mentioned by Mahler himself in conversations with Natalie Bauer-Lechner: a Violin Sonata and a Suite for Piano.⁴

The explanation may simply be that Mahler exaggerated the success of his youthful compositions. Or perhaps he confused works entered for the annual competition with those submitted to the annual examination. Unfortunately, neither the published records nor the

¹For details of the former, see the *Vollzugsvorschrift zum Statute der Grundverfassung des Conservatoriums der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien* (Vienna, 1876), p. 14ff; for the rules of the latter, see the appendix to the 1874–75 *Bericht des Conservatoriums der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde* (Vienna, 1875).

²It is to the latter event that Ludwig Karpath refers in *Begegnung mit dem Genius* (Vienna and Leipzig, 1934), p. 62.

³See the *Bericht des Conservatoriums 1875–76*, p. 87; and 1877–78, p. 77.

⁴See Natalie Bauer-Lechner, *Erinnerungen an Gustav Mahler* (Leipzig, Vienna, and Zürich, 1923), pp. 39 and 1.

archival material of the Conservatory currently available refer to works submitted for examination, and only one other source refers to an examination work by Mahler: one of Bruckner's favorite anecdotes, reported by Carl Hruby.

Mahler studied composition with Professor Krenn and completed a symphonic movement [*Symphoniesatz*] for the annual examination. Then, one day (!) before the examination there came from above (the administration) the instruction that it was desired that sonata movements rather than orchestral compositions should be submitted by the students. Mahler sat down and over-night (!) wrote a sonata movement (Andante) which, according to Professor Krenn's own opinion "was worthy to bear at its head the name of the greatest master."⁵

This seems merely to confuse the issue, simply adding two new items to an already long list of Mahler's lost or destroyed Conservatory works.

During his years as a student at the Conservatory, one of Mahler's closest friends was a fellow composition student and Bruckner supporter, Rudolf Krzyzanowski (1862–1911)⁶ who later made a rather undistinguished career as a conductor. The two young musicians may well have met as early as 19 September 1875, a few days after the beginning of Mahler's first term as a student, when they both (along with thirteen other composition students) signed a letter to Hans Richter requesting permission for admission to rehearsals of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra.⁷ Although he published nothing in later years, Krzyzanowski was active as a composer while at the Conservatory. Unfortunately, few of his works survive, and the Music Collection of the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek, Vienna, possesses only one autograph score, an undated set of five songs.⁸ However, the collection contains one other manuscript with Krzyzanowski connections that turns out to be of far greater importance. The title page reads:

Sinfonisches Praeludium / nach der Niederschrift des / Bruckner-Schülers / Rudolf Krzyzanowski aus / dem Jahre 1876 / angeblich von / Anton Bruckner / Klavierauszug nach der Partitur / von / Heinrich Tschuppik.⁹

Symphonic Prelude / from the copy of the Bruckner pupil / Rudolf Krzyzanowski from / the year 1876 / ostensibly by / Anton Bruckner / Piano arrangement of the score / by / Heinrich Tschuppik.

This is written in the hand (identifiable from other sources) of Heinrich Tschuppik, a relative of Krzyzanowski, who died in 1950.¹⁰ Underneath, a note in ball-point has been added by another, at present unidentified, hand:

Könnte das nicht eine Arbeit f. Prüfung von Gustav Mahler sein?? Krzyzanowski gab den Klavierauszug zur 3. S. Bruckners (2. Fassung) heraus mit Mahler zusammen.

Couldn't this be an examination work by Gustav Mahler? Krzyzanowski, together with Mahler, published the piano arrangement of Bruckner's Third Symphony (second version).

This manuscript was presumably one of the two donations referred to by Gertrud Staub-Schlaepfer¹¹ in a codicil on the autograph of Krzyzanowski's songs:

Von Herrn Tschuppik Geschenkt bekommen 2 weiter Geschenkt an die Musiksammlung der Oesterr. Nationalbibliothek. Zürich, 7. Sept. 1949. Gertrude Staub-Schlaepfer.

2 further presentations to the music collection of the Austrian National Library received from Mr Tschuppik's donation.

It seems probable that Tschuppik made his arrangement about 1949 for donation to the library, so Krzyzanowski's copy, now untraced, was presumably then still in existence.

The manuscript of Tschuppik's arrangement of the Symphonic Prelude consists of eight leaves, a bifolium enclosing six individ-

⁵Carl Hruby, *Meine Erinnerungen an Anton Bruckner* (Vienna, 1901), p. 13. The round parentheses are Hruby's, the square brackets mine.

⁶For a brief biographical study, see chapter 4 of the author's dissertation, *The Early Social and Musical Environment of Gustav Mahler* (Oxford University, 1979).

⁷See Christl Schönfeld, *Die Wiener Philharmoniker* (Vienna, 1956), p. 63.

⁸Mus. Hs. 28 208.

⁹Mus. Hs. 34 241, fol. 1^r.

¹⁰Information kindly supplied by Hofrat Dr. Franz Gruber. In another note on the manuscript of Krzyzanowski's songs, Tschuppik himself wrote that he was the nephew of Rudolf Krzyzanowski, but their relationship was probably more distant, for it was not Rudolf but his brother Heinrich (1855–after 1924) who married a Tschuppik, Augusta, in 1882. Mahler knew Augusta and her sister Clothilde. See *Gustav Mahler Briefe*, ed. Alma Maria Mahler (Berlin, Vienna, and Leipzig, 1924), p. 21.

¹¹No biographical information about Frau Staub-Schlaepfer is currently available.

ual sheets of sixteen-staff paper, of which the last three pages are blank. The arrangement is laid out on two or sometimes three staves and contains some indications of the original instrumentation. The work itself, with its moderate tempo and frequently slow harmonic rhythm, gives an impression of spaciousness, even grandeur, but is not long—a mere 292 measures. After the expansive opening this brevity is rather unexpected and is a result of

the abbreviation of both the development and the recapitulation. The piece is, despite some uncertainties, an impressive achievement, but because of its unconventional treatment of sonata form it creates the sense of incompleteness implied by the title: the movement's introductory nature is made explicit by the music itself.

The main theme of the work is presented quietly at the outset (ex. 1):

Mm. 1–8

Nicht zu rasch



Example 1

This is developed extensively (over a period of 73 mm.) to build up a climax of Brucknerian proportions. The transition that follows (32 mm.) employs, apart from ex. 1, two new,

linked ideas, the first of which plays an important part in the development section, whereas the second reappears unexpectedly in the unusually arranged recapitulation (exs. 2a and 2b):

Mm. 81–93

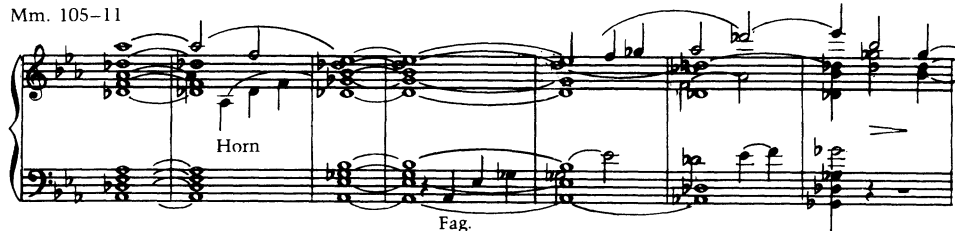


Example 2

The tonality, though firmly centered around C minor for the first subject, is unstable throughout the transition, and even when what ap-

pears to be the second subject arrives, the expected cadence in D \flat major is avoided, and G \flat major established instead (ex. 3):

Mm. 105–11



Example 3

This comparatively brief passage of only eighteen measures is interrupted by a strident new idea (ex. 4) which concludes the exposition and leads without a break into the central section of the movement.

Mm. 123–28

Lebhafter

Trptn Hörner

Example 4

Of particular interest is the way in which the moment of recapitulation is handled. The purposeful development of material derived exclusively from exs. 1 and 2a moves from a darkly-colored opening in E minor to a well-contrived climax on a dominant pedal in C minor (73 mm.), but the expectations so carefully built up are only partially fulfilled by the recapitulation that follows. Tonal expectations are certainly satisfied by a clear return to the tonic, but the appearance of ex. 2b as the subject of a rather routine fugal exposition is quite unexpected. Although its execution is marred by dull polyphony, this maneuver has two advantages: it prevents the over-exposure of ex. 1, which dominates the early parts of the movement, and it enables the composer to create a second and much more striking recapitulatory effect when, at the climax of the fugue, C minor reappears and a simultaneous presentation of exs. 2b and 1 is thundered out by the whole orchestra. The recapitulation of exs. 3 and 4 is omitted entirely and the movement swiftly concluded with a peroration of considerable power.

It would be interesting to know what lead Tschuppik to suggest Bruckner as the composer of the work. The idea of delaying the resolution of structural tension to a point late in a sonata form movement, and indeed the means employed—the splitting of thematic and tonal recapitulations—are explored in some of Bruckner's symphonic finales from the first version of the Fourth Symphony (1874) onwards. But despite these broad similarities, the

technique used in the Symphonic Prelude is the opposite of that employed by Bruckner. When delaying the moment of resolution in his finales the latter invariably does so by marking the beginning of the third section of the movement with a thematic recapitulation in a tonally unstable environment; the tonal recapitulation is postponed until the coda. The clear implication is that the Symphonic Prelude is not the work of Bruckner himself but of a composer familiar with Bruckner's innovation in finale structures, yet independent enough to adopt a different and perhaps more easily handled solution. Similarly, the opening accompaniment figure, with its distant resemblance to that at the opening of Bruckner's *Te Deum*, and the power of the crescendo in the opening pages seem to support the work's attribution to Bruckner—it was probably these features that were noticed by Tschuppik—until it is realized that Bruckner would never commence a movement of this type abruptly with an appearance of the main theme. What follows in the rest of the exposition fails to exhibit any further Brucknerian features, being redolent rather of ill-digested Wagner. In any case, there is no record of a lost symphonic movement in C minor in the Bruckner literature.

What the work does look like is the product of a composer with Brucknerian and Wagnerian sympathies, while the occasional uncertainties seem to betray the hand of a talented youngster rather than that of an established figure dabbling in a new style. This, and the

fact that Krzyzanowski prepared a copy of the score, suggests that the search for the composer of the prelude ought to be concentrated on the circle of young Viennese musicians who surrounded Bruckner in the 1870s.

In 1876 this circle was not large, and its most talented members were Krzyzanowski, Hans Rott (1858–84), and Mahler. Hugo Wolf may be excluded from consideration for, although a Bruckner supporter and a musician of genius, he was never a Bruckner pupil, never showed the influence of Bruckner, and in 1876 was composing in a style, based on early nineteenth-century models, far removed from that of the Symphonic Prelude. This is swiftly illustrated by a comparison of that work and Wolf's charming but unfortunately incomplete symphony of 1876. It is possible that the composer of the prelude was a less well-known member of the group, but some acquaintance with music by other pupils of Bruckner such as Mathilde von Kralik (1857–1944) and Alfred Stross (?–ca. 1885) suggests that this is very unlikely.

Of the three candidates, Krzyzanowski's claim may be most speedily dismissed on the ground that Tschuppik is clear in his statement that his source was a copy by Krzyzanowski. The fact that he sought to attribute the prelude to Bruckner reinforces the impression that he must have felt certain that the work was not by his relative. The latter's five songs, which cannot have been composed before the Symphonic Prelude—they are dedicated to Rudolf's fiancée and can therefore hardly date from before the early 1880s—show no stylistic parallels with that work and no glimmering of the creative fire that pervades the orchestral piece. In any case it is improbable that at thirteen or fourteen years of age Krzyzanowski was capable of writing such a composition.

Hans Rott, however, certainly did possess the creative energy to have written a work of comparable stature, and by 1876 was composing substantial orchestral works,¹² one of which

is entitled *Präludium für Orchester* (C# minor–E major; Nowak no. 32, dated 7.xi.1876). But while it is true that Rott occasionally shows the influence of Bruckner in his orchestral music, it does not appear in his known orchestral works of 1876 and was, rather, a later stylistic acquisition. The thematic material of the Symphonic Prelude is more broadly conceived than is usual in Rott's music—his ideas tend to fall all too readily into four-measure phrases—while, paradoxically, the form of the prelude is too concise to be considered typical of his work. Nevertheless, it must be admitted that in the opening movements of two works, the Symphony for Strings (1874–75[?]; Nowak no. 37) and the Symphony in E Major (1877[?–80; Nowak no. 35), the recapitulations are abbreviated by the omission of the second subject as in the prelude. Rott was an outstanding young musician, but the counterpoint in his early works is of inconsistent quality. In part this probably resulted from his ambivalent approach to contrapuntual writing, which is reminiscent of Bruckner's harmonically oriented approach and, elsewhere, of the more linear writing developed by Mahler in his maturity. But it must also be said that Rott's inventive powers did not always rise to the demands he made of them. So it might be argued that Rott could have written the most inspired and the most sterile of the polyphonic writing found in the Tschuppik score. On the other hand, the harmony does not sound like him; Rott avoided the sort of harmonic asstringency found in ex. 4. A final significant piece of evidence is the absence of any material that might be associated with the prelude in the extensive Rott *Nachlass*. Although Rott is reported to have destroyed some of his manuscripts during his confinement as a lunatic (1880–84), only one work, a string sextet, is definitely known to have suffered this fate, and even this work is represented in the *Nachlass* by a sheet of sketches (Nowak no. 42). If Rott were the composer of the Symphonic Prelude, some trace of the work might therefore be expected to survive in the *Nachlass*.

So, could the music be by Mahler? It appears distinctly un-Mahlerian until it is recalled that the Movement for Piano Quartet (usually dated 1876, but probably slightly later) and *Waldmärchen*, the first part of *Das*

¹²See Leopold Nowak, "Die Kompositionen und Skizzen von Hans Rott in der Musiksammlung der Oesterreichischen Nationalbibliothek," in *Beiträge zur Musikdocumentation, Franz Grasberger zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Günter Brosche (Tutzing, 1975), p. 273ff.

klagende Lied (ca. 1878) are the only contemporaneous works in Mahler's *œuvre* to have survived. The scantiness of this record of Mahler's early development is unfortunate, but the two existing works do provide useful pointers.

The commencement and conclusion of the prelude constitute contradictory evidence relating to Mahler's claim to the work. The opening would not be typical of Mahler at any stage

of his career, for, like Bruckner, he prefers to begin large-scale works before the entry of the first theme (and the exceptions—the Third, Fifth, and Tenth Symphonies and *Das Lied von der Erde*—are all products of the composer's maturity). On the other hand, Mahler did not mind abrupt endings along the lines of ex. 5 (see part II of *Das klagende Lied*, and the First, Second, and Eighth Symphonies):



Example 5

However, it should also be noted that this abrupt concluding progression is reminiscent of the striking ending of the scherzo of Rott's E-Major Symphony (ex. 6), which in turn brings

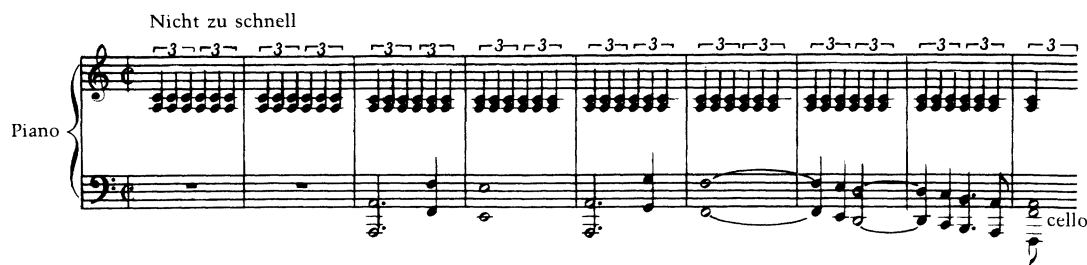
to mind the conclusion of Mahler's Seventh Symphony—a chain of associations that leaves the rival claims of Rott and Mahler evenly balanced.



Example 6

However, the somber character of ex. 1, with its unbroken melodic arc, is strikingly Mahlerian but not characteristic of Rott, and it is akin to the opening theme of the Movement for Piano Quartet. As in its counterpart in that work, the submediant plays a prominent role during and at the termination of the phrase (see ex. 7). The Symphonic Prelude and the Piano

Quartet share certain other features: a) the extensive use of repeated notes and tremolos to provide harmonic support; b) the sequential development of the opening theme to create the first climax; c) a tendency to overwork the main theme; d) comparatively brief second subject (see mm. 54–63 of the Piano Quartet); e) the use of a meandering eighth-note counter-



Example 7

(a) Mm. 236–38 Vln.
cl. Trmpt.

(b) Mm. 42–44 Entschlossen

Example 8

point within a polyphonic texture spun over a tonic pedal (exs. 8a and 8b). Conversely, it is in *Waldmärchen* that the lush lyricism of ex. 3 and the harmonic asperity of ex. 4 find significant echoes (see mm. 428ff and 7ff of the cantata). A tendency to overwork the main theme, incidentally, is also to be detected in *Waldmärchen* and in Rott's music, and may simply be a symptom of a conservatory training. At least the prelude has an independent second subject, which the Piano Quartet does not.

We might well wish that more than just these two early works by Mahler were available for comparison. But notwithstanding this limitation, stylistic parallels between the authentic Mahler pieces and the prelude are readily discernable. Un-Mahlerian it may be in terms of the composer's maturity, but the Symphonic Prelude shares a common musical vocabulary with the Piano Quartet and the first part of the cantata.

The possibility that the Symphonic Prelude was the work of a composer not consid-

ered in the foregoing account, though unlikely, cannot be overlooked, but of the three young musicians identified here as potential authors of the piece, Krzyzanowski's claims may be discounted while those of Rott and Mahler deserve serious attention. Both were talented composers capable of writing such an extended work in 1876, both were drawn to the music of Bruckner and Wagner, and both knew Rudolf Krzyzanowski, the copyist of the score. An examination of their early works and of the prelude itself reveals that the balance of probability is weighted in Mahler's favor, for the connections between Rott's *œuvre* and the prelude seem merely incidental compared to the pervasive stylistic parallels between the work Krzyzanowski copied and Mahler's two earliest surviving compositions. But it is perhaps the treatment of the recapitulation in the prelude that is the decisive factor. For although the effectiveness of the passage is undermined by the undistinguished counterpoint of the fugue, the underlying idea shows an awareness of the dynamics of musical structure beyond the grasp of Rott, whose treatment of large-scale form, particularly in the early works such as the overtures to *Hamlet* (1876; Nowak no. 39) and *Julius Caesar* (1877; Nowak no. 40) is highly schematic. Even Rott's more unusual structures, such as the finale of the Symphony in E Major, often give the impression of stemming more from a tinkering with abstract form than from a deep perception of the structural processes implied by the musical material itself. Mahler, on the other hand, was certainly well aware of the dynamic and dramatic potentialities of form by the time he composed the First Symphony, and it is not surprising that in the 1870s he already possessed more than a glimmering of such knowledge. For of course there is substantial evidence that Mahler's ability as a composer was then already outstanding. Early in September 1875 it was Mahler's composition and not his piano-playing which most impressed Julius Epstein at his first meeting with his future pupil.¹³ In later

years Robert Fuchs, who taught Mahler harmony for a year, told Alma Mahler that "there was nothing [Mahler] couldn't do"¹⁴ and even Krenn, the last person, it might be thought, to appreciate his wayward pupil's efforts, was fulsome in his praise of the sonata movement mentioned by Bruckner in the anecdote quoted above.

Mahler's first year at the Conservatory was no doubt a hectic one, and he composed during the early months of 1876 at least two other works, the lost (piano?) quintet movement which won first prize at the Composition Competition on 1 July 1876, and the Violin Sonata, first performed on 31 July 1876 at Iglau. If the Symphonic Prelude is by Mahler, it is tempting to identify it with the symphonic movement to which Bruckner referred. And if so, it must have been completed by early June 1876. (The exact dates of the annual examinations at the Conservatory are at present unknown.) This in turn would indicate that Mahler had absorbed a fair amount of Brucknerian influence within a few months of his arrival in Vienna, but considering his self-confessedly insatiable appetite for music¹⁵ and the assimilative powers of youth, the implication is hardly remarkable. The first performance of Bruckner's Second Symphony in C Minor, which took place at a Gesellschaft concert on 20 February 1876, would have helped to fuel Mahler's interest in Bruckner, though it is true that the Symphonic Prelude's Brucknerian references, particularly the handling of the recapitulation, are more akin to the later symphonies. In 1876 none of the existing Bruckner symphonies was in print, but there is evidence that Bruckner allowed some of his students and supporters to examine his unpublished scores: Mahler's Piano Quartet employs a melodic idea from the first movement of the Fourth Symphony, and there remains in the Rott *Nachlass* a bifolium¹⁶ containing a short-score copy on

¹³See the account of Gustav Schwarz, who was present, quoted in Kurt Blaukopf, *Mahler: A Documentary Study* (London, 1976), p. 151.

¹⁴Alma Mahler, *Gustav Mahler, Memories and Letters* (London, 1973), p. 8.

¹⁵See Henry-Louis de La Grange, *Mahler*, vol. I (London, 1974), p. 17.

¹⁶Mus. Hs. 28 409. It bears no date, but was presumably prepared before Rott's mental breakdown in 1880.

six staves, in Rott's hand, of the last thirty-four measures of the Andante of the same symphony. It is therefore quite possible that Mahler had access to Bruckner's scores while composing the Symphonic Prelude.

By using the prelude to date Bruckner's anecdote, illumination may be unexpectedly cast on the genesis of the Violin Sonata. This work was apparently the only sonata Mahler composed during his student years and though now lost, certainly existed. Might not the Andante sonata movement hurriedly composed by Mahler to replace his redundant orchestral work be part of this same Violin Sonata? If this hypothetical reconstruction is correct, Mahler's memory was not completely at fault: his sonata did not win a prize, but a movement from it gained him first grade in Krenn's composition class in 1876. Moreover, this dating of Bruckner's story helps to provide an explanation for one of its more curious passages:

Then one day (!) before the examination there came from above (the administration) the instruction that it was desired that sonata movements rather than orchestral compositions should be submitted by the students.

In this form it is hardly credible, but it does have some factual basis, for in the summer of

1876 Mahler was completing the first year of his composition course, the curriculum of which did not include the study of orchestral composition.¹⁷ Presumably it was pointed out to him shortly before the date on which the examination works were to be submitted that his orchestral work would be inadmissible.

The attribution of the Symphonic Prelude to Mahler proposed here implies no radical reappraisal of the composer's early career; but it does provide some concrete and agreeable evidence to account for the high esteem shown towards the young composition student by his fellow students and teachers. As a forerunner of the mature symphonies, the chief interest of the prelude would be, in a sense, negative. Together with the Piano Quartet the prelude shows that for all his youthful ability, Mahler's highly individual style was not innate and that the emergence of his characteristic mode of expression in the late 1870s and early 1880s involved a rejection of some of the Brucknerian and Wagnerian features of his very earliest music. Nevertheless, to have composed such a work at fifteen, perhaps less than a year after entering the Vienna Conservatory, would be no mean achievement: if not of Mendelssohnian precocity, at least an example of youthful creativity unparalleled in late nineteenth-century Vienna.

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¹⁷*Lehrplan für das Schuljahr 1875–1876* (Vienna, 1875), p. 10.