

Gabriel Venegas*¹*University of Arizona, United States of America / Johannes Gutenberg-Universität, Deutschland /
Universidad de Costa Rica, Costa Rica¹gabovenegas@email.arizona.edu

Anton Bruckner's Slow Movements: Dialogical Perspectives

ABSTRACT

Background

This paper traces the various stages of formal experimentation in Anton Bruckner's early slow movements, with an emphasis on the gradual gestation of his mature symphonic adagios' formal features.

Bruckner's treatment of form and the textual idiosyncrasies of his symphonies loom large in his music's reception history. Because the idea of a 'Bruckner symphony' — which often comprises an unusual number of authorial realizations and multiple (heavily edited, sometimes recomposed) published scores — is hard to match with traditional notions of authenticity and authorship, Bruckner scholarship has tended to operate under philological and text-critical premises that result in implicit pejorative discourses and, most importantly, fail to acknowledge textual multiplicity as a basic trait of Bruckner symphonies. Moreover, in addressing traditional and innovative formal aspects of Bruckner's music, critics have tended to overemphasize one side or the other; some judging his symphonies as formless, others considering them excessively predictable and overly reliant on classical models. Paradoxically, for each claim that Bruckner is overdoing something, there is an opposing claim that he is not doing enough of that same thing.

It thus seems that a new approach to the challenges posed by Bruckner's music requires an epistemological change of gears. Towards that aim, this paper presents an analysis-based method that embraces the particularities of Bruckner's music as its foremost potential.

Aims and Repertoire Studied

In order to provide an analytical framework from which to reappraise Bruckner's formal procedures and the textual features of his works, this paper discusses formal organization in his slow movements composed between 1862 and 1873, a period of marked experimentation during which Bruckner established the bases of his middle- and late-period conception of instrumental adagio form. The core repertoire of the study then comprises the slow movements of Bruckner's String Quartet WAB 111; Three Orchestral Pieces WAB 97; Symphony in F minor WAB 99; Symphony No. 1 WAB 101; Symphony in D minor WAB 100; Symphony No. 2 WAB 102; and Symphony No. 3 WAB 103.

Method

The paper builds primarily on Hepokoski and Darcy's Sonata Theory (Hepokoski and Darcy 2006), with much emphasis on the theory's underlying dialogic approach and Hepokoski's concept of sonata deformation (Hepokoski 2002 and 2009; Darcy 1997). The paper also draws on the

form-functional approach of William Caplin (Caplin 1998) and the methodological eclecticism of Julian Horton (Horton 2004). I supplement these formal perspectives with a Schenkerian approach to tonal structure.

The paper is divided into two parts. The first part begins with an overview of the repertoire under investigation and the many formal schemes that Bruckner deploys within it. Then, I present a more detailed formal analysis of each movement, emphasizing the potential rationales for the formal types attained at each stage of experimentation. I close the first part with an evaluation of the role played by the formal schemes deployed between 1862 and 1873 in Bruckner's handling of slow-movement form from his Fourth Symphony on.

The second part is divided in two sections (theory and analysis). In the first section I present the three basic components of my proposed two-dimensional dialogic approach: 1) an *outward dialogue*, characterized by the interplay between a given version of a Bruckner symphony and its implied genre (in this case, sonata form); 2) an *inward dialogue* characterized by the interplay among the various individualized realizations of a single Bruckner symphony; 3) a *region of dialogical play* characterized by the interaction of outward and inward dialogues. Following the theoretical exposition, in the second section I exemplify the proposed analytical method through a detailed consideration of each of the surviving realizations of the slow movement of Bruckner's Symphony No. 3 WAB 103. In addition to suggesting individual expressive interpretations of the inward and outward forms of this movement, I conclude the paper by considering a heightened dramatic trajectory resulting from the dialogical synergy of the movement's inward and outward interpretations.

Implications

This paper presents an analytical method that aims at capturing, from a formal perspective, the dialogic synergies between different versions of a single Bruckner movement and a larger established repertoire. The method has the advantage of both accounting for Bruckner's formal idiosyncrasies and turning his music's textual multiplicity — the so-called 'Bruckner Problem' (Cooke 1969) — into the 'Bruckner Potential': in attempting to show that influential lines of criticism in the reception history of Bruckner's music, although significant from a historical perspective, find little substantiation in the repertoire, the proposed method provides an analytical/theoretical framework that clears the way for a more nuanced and sympathetic understanding of Bruckner's music.

Keywords

Form, Bruckner's Symphonies, Bruckner Problem, Sonata Theory, Slow Movement.

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