Mari Kodama

Bruckner Piano Works

Anton Bruckner (1824-1896)

1	**Piano Sonata in G Minor, WAB 243: First movement (Entwurf)**	8. 57
2	**Klavierstück in E-Flat Major, WAB 119**	1. 25
3	**Fantasie in D Minor**	2. 31
4	**Stille Betrachtung an einem Herbstabend, WAB 123**	3. 11
5	**Minuet & Trio in G Major, WAB 220**	2. 05
6	**Etude in G Major, WAB 214**	1. 20
7	**Fantasie in G Major, WAB 118**	4. 29
8	**Theme and Variations No. 5, WAB 223**	8. 15
9	Waltz No. 2 in E-Flat Major (from **2 Waltzes, WAB 224**)	1. 36
10	**Polka in C Major, WAB 221**	1. 15
11	**Andante in E-Flat Major, WAB deest 3**	4. 27
12	**Chromatic Etude in F Major, WAB 212**	1. 01
13	**Mazurka in A Minor, WAB 218**	1. 05
14	**Steiermärker in G Major, WAB 122**	1. 40
15	Waltz No. 1, in C Major (from **2 Waltzes, WAB 224**)	1. 09
16	**Erinnerung, WAB 117**	4. 20
	4 Lancier Quadrille in C Major, WAB 120	
17	No. 1, Eingang	1. 24
18	No. 2, Allegro	1. 56
19	No. 3, Allegro	3. 27
20	No. 4, Allegro	4. 04
	Total playing time:	59. 48

Mari Kodama, piano

As an interpreter, one is often tempted to approach a piece of music through biographical evidence of the person who created it, in the hope of understanding the work better. This hope grows with the amount of material left behind beyond the music. But it can be deceptive. In the case of Anton Bruckner, I became very aware of this once again.
There is an interesting wealth of sources beyond his works, ranging from precise diary entries to impressive descriptions of his character traits by people who experienced him. He must have been a particular person. This was reported by many of his contemporaries, who sometimes referred to his appearance and behaviour. His supposed submissiveness is cited particularly often. There have been repeated attempts to interpret his personality. But he has probably never been properly understood. How do personality descriptions and character portraits fit with the grandeur and spiritual depth of his great symphonies, for which I am sure I am not the only one to admire him so much?

To be honest, I don't know. I believe that in his case, character attributions and music are not really connected.
I had a similar experience with Ludwig van Beethoven many years ago. Studying his biography and especially his personality did not necessarily bring me any closer to his music. Perhaps it was due to him that I changed my perspective: since then, I have not tried so hard to understand a composer's music through his biography, but have rather attempted to get to know the person better through his music.
As a pianist, I obviously concentrate chiefly on the original piano works.

In the case of Bruckner, there is an astonishing collection of miniatures that he wrote for piano. Fifty of these small works are in a sketchbook that was created in 1862 during Bruckner's apprenticeship with the German conductor and cellist Otto Kitzler.
Kitzler was conductor at the Theater of Linz, the city where Bruckner was engaged as organist at the cathedral.

Bruckner himself dismissed his sketches as "school work", as preliminary exercises for later works. Perhaps that is precisely what drew me into it so much:
the provisional nature of trying things out, the experiments with harmonies, which he was already able to change in breathtaking turns. When I played his sketches, I felt like I could walk a part of his path with him, could experience his meticulous preparation for his actual professional goal of becoming a composer. Even if he had long been a composer by then - although not yet in his own self-image. Because he had bigger things in mind.

Have I come any further?
Have I seen more of Bruckner than the existing material can convey to me?
Perhaps. At first I played Bruckner's miniatures with great amazement and then finally with enthusiasm.
I increasingly had the feeling that I was experiencing a different Brucker than the one who comes across to us in stories or in the concert halls through his monumental works. He wrote magical sketches, sometimes with delicate, sometimes with powerful strokes.
Their brevity alone makes them the opposite of his exuberant symphonies, in which he repeatedly opens up new spaces with spectacular waves of climaxes. For a different principle prevails in his piano pieces: that of condensation, the reduction of musical ideas to their essence. This essence manifests many things that I had not previously associated with Bruckner: a good dose of humour, the joy of playing with musical styles from Ludwig van Beethoven, whom Bruckner greatly admired, to Johannes Brahms.
In addition, I was given the striking impression of a freedom of intellectual

expression beyond all of intellectual expression beyond all conventions, which later so often plagued Bruckner in his symphonies, to the extent that he revised and adapted his almost revolutionary original versions several times. Last but not least, I was carried away by the experimental freshness, the great zest for life that is expressed in these very short pieces. He composed quadrilles, polkas, minuets, waltzes and, of course, Ländlers – a whole compendium of dances, the sheer number of which alone conveys some sense of yearning.

My selection of pieces for this album reflects this diversity. I have recorded those sketches that I believe express the multiplicity of his musical ideas and thus his thinking and creativity.
The short pieces were certainly not written for the public. And yet I feel that they are an important part of Bruckner's work. They have been underestimated for too long. I am deeply convinced that they are worth hearing.

Mari Kodama

Bruckner: Music for Piano

The popular notion of Anton Bruckner (1824–96) as one of music's greatest late developers is largely based on the chronology of his symphonies, the earliest of which (the unnumbered F Minor *Studiensymphonie*) was composed in 1863 as he neared his fortieth birthday. But a glance at the works Bruckner had already written before then reveals a significant output of sacred music including small masterpieces such as the seven-part *Ave Maria* and the motet *Afferentur regi* (both 1861).
These show a composer with thoroughly distinctive musical fingerprints several years before he embarked on his career as a symphonist. During these formative years, Bruckner also produced a significant output of songs and piano music.

Having sung as a choirboy in the Abbey at St Florian, he returned there in 1845 to teach in the village school, and was appointed organist at the Abbey in 1848. He took full advantage of its extensive music library which was not only rich in sacred music but also in printed editions of Schubert, a composer who was to exert a lifelong influence. He also took private piano pupils including Aloisia Bogner, daughter of the school's headmaster.
It may be a surprise to find Bruckner in his mid-twenties composing dances such as the four *Lancier-Quadrille* (WAB 120) and the Ländler-like Steiermärker (WAB 122), both from about 1850. These were dedicated to (and presumably written for) Aloisia Bogner, and show that Bruckner was familiar with the dances composed by Schubert, among others. These charming, fluently-written miniatures barely hint at the mature Bruckner, but they do show a young composer with a natural gift for melody and for assimilating popular styles. Perhaps distant echoes of this more rustic language can occasionally be found even in his grandest masterpieces – not least in some of the Ländler-like passages in his symphonies.

Firmly established as a highly-regarded performer and improviser, Bruckner was appointed organist of Linz Cathedral in 1856, but he still felt that had much to learn about the craft of composition. In the 1850s he studied counterpoint with Simon Sechter (1788–1867) – a musician admired by Beethoven and Schubert. Their lessons were conducted mostly by correspondence with occasional face-to-face sessions. Still eager to learn more, and perhaps motivated by a lifelong sense of inferiority, from 1861 to 1863 Bruckner studied composition and orchestration with Otto Kitzler (1834–1914). Ten years younger than Bruckner, Kitzler was conductor of the theatre orchestra in Linz at the time. He provided Bruckner with a thorough grounding in instrumental forms and – crucially – introduced him to the music of Wagner. Kitzler later moved to Brno in Moravia where he went on to perform several of his most famous pupil's mature works.

During the course of his studies with Kitzler, Bruckner kept an extensive musical notebook known as the *Kitzler-Studienbuch*. The most important work in it is the String Quartet in C Minor (WAB 111), but many of the pieces are for solo piano. One of the most intriguing is a substantial exercise for the first movement of a Sonata in G Minor, dated 29 June 1862. It demonstrates one of Bruckner's earliest mature attempts at handling a large musical structure – in this case a rather Beethoven-like use of sonata form. Some of the piano writing is demanding – notably the use of rapid passagework in semiquavers (sixteenth-notes) – perhaps revealing

something of Bruckner's background as a virtuoso organist: it is certainly quite dramatic, but not particularly 'pianistic'. Even so, the musical ideas, have elements which were later to become familiar in his symphonies: persistent dotted rhythms (notably in the development section), unpredictable key changes, a clear distinction between the vigorous first subject and the overtly song-like second subject (first heard in F Major) and some imaginative chromatic harmonies, particularly approaching climactic moments.

Elsewhere in the *Kitzler–Studienbuch*, Bruckner has sketched several ideas for variations – for piano and for string quartet. The Theme and Variations in G Major presents a gentle triple-time theme which is then subjected to five variations which demonstrate the composer's use of techniques familiar from variations by Viennese classical masters, particularly Haydn and Mozart: the second variation uses syncopation, the third involves imitation, and the fourth is in the minor key. The final variation is the most animated. Another notable exercise is the short *Chromatic étude* in which first the right hand, then the left hand, are given rapid chromatic passages over (then under) implacable chords. A much more poetic aspect of Bruckner's nature can be heard in the noble and expansive *Andante* in E-Flat Major, memorable for its long-breathed lyricism. This remarkable collection of composition exercises also includes a number of short dance-like piano pieces: marches, waltzes, minuets, polkas and a mazurka – as well as several rondos and sketches for sonata movements

The *Klavierstück* in E-Flat Major (WAB 119) was traditionally dated to around 1856 but more recent research by Paul Hawkshaw has suggested a date of 1862–3, basing this conclusion on the work's similarities with some of the pieces

sketched in the *Kitzler-Studienbuch*. It's very short, but far more idiomatic than the sonata movement. Gentle and graceful in mood, it has strong echoes of Mendelssohn, particularly the *Song without Words*, Op. 53, No. 4. There are more Mendelssohn connections with *Stille Betrachtung an einem Herbstabend* (Quiet Contemplation on an Autumn evening) which has parallels with the 'Venetianisches Gondellied' from the Op. 30 set of *Songs without Words*: both are in F-Sharp Minor and feature a quietly rocking left-hand accompaniment. The autograph manuscript, dated 10 October 1863, reveals that Bruckner dedicated it to his pupil Emma Thaner.

Partly due to Bruckner's faulty memory in old age, *Erinnerung* (WAB 117) was thought to date from around 1860. The Bruckner scholar Crawford Howie has argued convincingly that its style and harmonic texture suggest a slightly later date, around 1868, at the end of Bruckner's Linz period. It's a strikingly lovely piece which was unearthed by Bruckner's pupil, the virtuoso pianist August Stradal (1860–1930) during a visit to the composer, as he recalled in a preface to the first edition, published in 1900:

When I visited Anton Bruckner once, I was helping the master to look for something among his music and we chanced upon this little piano composition … I was very interested in it and asked the master to give me the manuscript, which he did, and asked when it was composed. However, Bruckner could only remember that it was written at the beginning of his stay in Linz; he could not give the year. Stradal detected the influence of Chopin's nocturnes in this piece, but also pre-echoes of Bruckner's later music:

This little work also hints at the symphonist; you can almost hear the instrumentation: in the middle section

the harps... then horns ... trumpets and trombones... and after a great crescendo the music fades away softly, like a lovely memory.

Dated 10 September 1868 on the manuscript, the *Fantasie* in G Major (WAB 118) is dedicated to Bruckner's pupil Alexandrine Soika. Like *Erinnerung*, it was composed near the end of Bruckner's time in Linz, so it is contemporary with works such as the F Minor Mass and the motet *Locus iste*. It is in two sections, the first is marked *Langsam und mit Gefühl* and the second is an *Allegro* which seems to evoke the spirit of Haydn. In the broad opening section, a melody unfolds over richly inventive chromatic harmonies to memorable effect, and it seems to give us a glimpse of the mature Bruckner in miniature. He had already completed the Linz version of the First Symphony and the E Minor Mass; the D Minor Symphony ('Die Nullte') was to follow the next year in 1869; and it was only five years later, in 1873, that Bruckner achieved symphonic mastery with the original version of the Third Symphony. These piano works are not only fascinating curios and harbingers of what was to come, but the best of them also reveal an aspect of Bruckner's creative personality that deserves to be more widely appreciated.

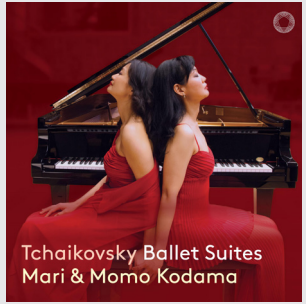
Nigel Simeone

Also available on PENTATONE

PTC5186976

PTC5186841

PTC5187202



PTC5187207

Acknowledgements

PRODUCTION TEAM

Executive producer **Renaud Loranger**
A&R coordinator **Kasper van Kooten**
Recording producer, balance engineer & editor **Erdo Groot** (Polyhymnia International B.V.)
Musical assistant **Ientje Mooij**
Piano technician **Shunsuke Yokoyama**

Concert piano CFX2022PE provided by Yamaha Music Europe

Liner notes **Nigel Simeone**
Photography of Mari Kodama **Lyodoh Kaneko**
Cover design **Marjolein Coenrady**
Product management & Design **Karolina Szymanik & Kasper van Kooten**

This album was recorded at Studio 5, Muziekcentrum van de Omroep, Hilversum, the Netherlands, in April 2024.

PENTATONE TEAM

Vice President A&R **Renaud Loranger** | Managing Director **Sean Hickey**
Director Marketing & Business Development **Silvia Pietrosanti**
Director Catalogue & Product **Kasper van Kooten**

Sit back and enjoy