

A Pairing of Bruckner And Glass Makes a Test

It takes only a moment's reflection to recognize the musical appropriateness of juxtaposing works by Philip Glass and Anton Bruckner. Both composers trade

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in large-scale, sometimes numbingly repetitive explorations of rudimentary harmonies. Both tend to work in big structural blocks, often shifting abruptly from one to another.

The practical wisdom of the pairing is something else. You had to wonder, as Dennis Russell Davies conducted the Bruckner Orchestra Linz in Mr. Glass's Violin Concerto and Bruckner's Fourth Symphony at Avery Fisher Hall on Monday evening, how many string players' bowing arms were developing cramps under the strain of Bruckner's notoriously relentless tremolos, coming after Mr. Glass's insistent arpeggios.

And the players' labors are just beginning. Mr. Davies and the orchestra now look toward three performances of Mr. Glass's opera "Kepler" in its American premiere, a "concert staging" at the Brooklyn Academy of Music on Nov. 18, 20 and 21.

The Bruckner Fourth Symphony — the "Romantic," as the composer called it — was the main order of business on Monday, the more so because it was being performed in its original version, from 1874. Not published until a century later, that edition has been recorded by Mr. Davies and

An Austrian orchestra tackles two challenging works.

the Bruckner Orchestra (based in Bruckner's hometown, Linz, Austria) among others, but it remains a rarity in the concert hall.

Not without reason. Compared with various later versions — and with those versions more or less firmly rutted in the mind, comparisons are inevitable — the original is rife with asymmetries, digressions and irrelevancies, like the deep, dark, isolated episode at the beginning of the first movement development section. Bruckner ultimately scrapped the halting scherzo, with its repeated quizzical solo horn call, in favor of an altogether superior, more assertive proclamation.

Listening to this version is at times — especially in the rambling finale — like listening to the hapless original versions of Sibelius's Fifth Symphony and Violin Concerto. The difference is that Sibelius somehow found his own way from those inchoate efforts to towering masterpieces, and we simply accept them for what they are.

With Bruckner we have to wonder. He had help with the later versions, or as we like to say today, "help." In an age that puts a premium on the composer's wishes and original intentions (as if those could ever be pinned



JUDITH LEVITT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

Dennis Russell Davies leading the Bruckner Orchestra Linz and the soloist Renaud Capuçon in Philip Glass's Violin Concerto.

Bruckner Orchestra Linz Avery Fisher Hall

down), Bruckner's helpers — his students and disciples Franz and Josef Schalk and Ferdinand Löwe, in particular — are held in bad odor, routinely damned with, at best, the faint praise of being

"well meaning." But the more you hear of this early version, the more you suspect that they may have been very good students indeed and, to a considerable extent, wise counselors.

As hard as it is for listeners to set aside the familiar versions of the symphony and approach the original with an open ear, it must be at least as hard for the musi-

cians. But Mr. Davies and the Bruckner Orchestra showed a good comfort level and — perhaps overleisurely tempos and some struggles in the horns aside — they generally made the best possible case for the edition, while leaving at least one listener unconverted.

Mr. Davies, a longtime champion of Mr. Glass's work, led an

incisive account of the concerto (soon to be known as the Violin Concerto No. 1 because a second, "The American Four Seasons," is to appear in December in Toronto). Renaud Capuçon, the violin soloist, captured the full range of the piece, the virtuosic churning and skitterings and the ardent yearning of the long lines, with consistent aplomb.