



Ressort: Kunst, Kultur und Musik

## A Triumph of Symphonic Artistry

Grafenegg, 05.09.2024 [ENA]

The recent performance in the majestic garden of the castle of Grafenegg by the Wiener Philharmoniker under the masterful direction of Christian Thielemann, featuring Robert Schumann's Symphony No. 1 in B-flat major, Op. 38, the renowned Frühlingssymphonie, and Anton Bruckner's Symphony No. 1 in C minor (Vienna version), was a breathtaking event that captured the very essence of symphonic grandeur.

Thielemann, a conductor who has long established himself as one of the foremost interpreters of both Schumann and Bruckner, guided the orchestra with impeccable insight, sensitivity, and power, delivering a performance that was both emotionally moving and technically superb. The program itself was an inspired pairing of works. Schumann's Frühlingssymphonie—a work brimming with the joy and vitality of spring, written during one of the happiest periods of his life—contrasted poignantly with Bruckner's First Symphony, a composition that, while composed early in Bruckner's career, contains all the depth and monumentality that would come to define his later symphonic writing.

From the very first bars of Schumann's Symphony No. 1, it was clear that Thielemann had a deep understanding of the composer's intent. The Frühlingssymphonie, written shortly after Schumann's marriage to Clara Wieck, bursts with optimism, love, and the freshness of new beginnings. Thielemann and the Wiener Philharmoniker captured this sense of renewal with breathtaking precision. The first movement (Andante un poco maestoso — Allegro molto vivace) opened with a majestic brass fanfare, heralding the arrival of spring. The orchestra's brass section, in particular, was stunning, delivering the opening theme with brilliance and clarity.

Thielemann's tempo choices were judicious—never rushed, but always forward-moving—allowing the music to breathe and unfold naturally. The strings, with their famously warm and lush tone, responded with a shimmering energy, while the woodwinds added a playful, almost pastoral character to the movement. The second movement (Larghetto), often described as a love song, was interpreted with great tenderness. Thielemann allowed the melody to sing, with the strings playing with a warmth and intimacy that brought to mind Schumann's deep affection for his wife. The phrasing was exquisitely shaped, and there was a sense of lyrical flow that was both emotionally rich and technically refined.

The third movement (Scherzo: Molto vivace) was a delightful dance, full of rhythmic vitality. The lightness of the strings and the precision of the woodwinds gave the scherzo an almost playful character, while the

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trio section provided a brief, lyrical respite. Thielemann's attention to detail was evident here, as he carefully balanced the different layers of the orchestration, allowing each instrument group to shine without overwhelming the overall texture.

The finale (*Allegro animato e grazioso*) was a triumphant conclusion to Schumann's symphonic celebration of spring. The orchestra played with infectious energy, and Thielemann drove the music forward with a sense of joyful exuberance. The balance between the sections was superb, and the brass and percussion added a sense of grandeur to the final climactic moments. The audience was left with a feeling of exhilaration, as if they too had been swept up in Schumann's vision of spring's renewal.

After the intermission, the program took a dramatic turn with Anton Bruckner's Symphony No. 1, performed in its Vienna version, which the composer revised some 25 years after its initial composition. Known affectionately by Bruckner as his "keckes Beserl" (cheeky wench), this symphony is an intriguing blend of youthful boldness and the monumental structures that would come to characterize his later works. Thielemann, an undisputed Bruckner specialist, brought out the full range of this symphony's emotional and architectural depth.

The first movement (*Allegro*) opened with a hushed tension, the quiet strings setting the stage for the powerful, driving theme that followed. Thielemann carefully built the tension, allowing the music to swell organically before unleashing the full force of the orchestra. The brass section once again proved its mettle, delivering Bruckner's towering brass chorales with authority and precision. The strings played with an intense focus, creating a sense of underlying energy and momentum that propelled the movement forward. The architecture of the music, with its massive climaxes and moments of repose, was laid out clearly by Thielemann, who seemed to have an innate understanding of Bruckner's complex symphonic design.

The second movement (*Adagio*) was a masterclass in control and lyricism. Thielemann allowed the slow, majestic themes to unfold with a sense of inevitability, the orchestra playing with a warmth and depth of tone that was truly remarkable. The string section, in particular, was luminous, their sound both rich and expressive. The woodwinds added delicate touches of color, and the horns, with their hauntingly beautiful solos, created a sense of mystery and transcendence.

The Scherzo was bold and robust, with Thielemann bringing out the rhythmic drive that propels this movement forward. The brass and timpani were particularly striking here, giving the scherzo a sense of urgency and power. The trio section, by contrast, was lighter and more graceful, offering a moment of respite before the music surged forward again. The final movement (*Finale*) was a tour de force, both for the orchestra and for Thielemann. Bruckner's symphonic language, with its massive climaxes and sweeping themes, can be a challenge to interpret, but Thielemann handled it with remarkable skill. He balanced the

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grandeur of the brass and percussion with the lyricism of the strings, creating a sense of unity and coherence.

This concert was nothing short of extraordinary. Christian Thielemann, with his profound understanding of both Schumann and Bruckner, drew from the Wiener Philharmoniker performances of remarkable depth, passion, and precision. The musicians responded to his leadership with playing that was technically impeccable and emotionally compelling, bringing to life the contrasting worlds of Schumann's joyful Frühlings-symphonie and Bruckner's monumental First Symphony.

The evening was a celebration of symphonic art at its highest level, and it is performances like this that remind us of the enduring power of great music. The audience was left in awe, not only of the virtuosity of the Wiener Philharmoniker but of the deep emotional and intellectual engagement that Thielemann and his musicians brought to these two masterworks. This was a performance that will be remembered for years to come.

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