

# Reflections on Tempo in Bruckner's Symphonies

"100 nach Mälzel, aber nur bezüglich der ersten Takte,  
da das Gefühl auch sein eigenes Tempo hat und nicht durch diese Zahl ausgedrückt werden kann."  
(100 according to Mälzel, but only for the first bars,  
because the feeling also has its own tempo and cannot be expressed by this number.)<sup>1</sup>  
Ludwig van Beethoven, 1817  
Autograph score of his lied « Nord oder Süd » or « So oder so », WoO 148

Bruckner never left us any definitive metronomic tempo indications in his manuscripts except for the beginning of the Finale of the Eighth Symphony.<sup>2</sup> The conception of his symphonies, particularly with respect to their tempo, has developed considerably over the 20th century. Today it is common to hear his symphonies played at a moderate, slow or even static pace. Thanks to texts written by Bruckner's contemporaries, to his symphonies' first printed editions (neglected for so many decades) and to a couple of written testimonies and historical recordings, it appears legitimate to affirm that this essential aspect of tempo and its flexibility in Bruckner's work (and more particularly in his symphonic work) seems to be thoroughly misunderstood or simply ignored by a lot of interpreters.

## 1. Richard Wagner's Method of Conducting and what can be concluded from it.

By comparing a large range of recordings, we notice that during the second half of the 20th century the chosen tempi for Bruckner's symphonies have become ever slower and above all more stilted. At first sight, it seems that Bruckner has been assimilated to the 'Wagnerian' manner and the standard 'German solemnity', that implies a sound that is noble and grand but always within rather slow tempi. But the big mistake is that this usage is completely opposed to Wagner's own conception of conducting and of tempo.

This conception, inherited from Carl Maria von Weber<sup>3</sup>, is described by Wagner himself in his book *On Conducting* (1869), one of the most important 19th century books about the interpretation of the classic and romantic repertoires. It briefly summarizes tempo as consisting of constantly 'well-considered modifications' which are just as essential as 'the correct intonation of the notes themselves.' Richard Strauss's recording of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony is a good example of this method of conducting:

*Ludwig van Beethoven: Symphony No.5  
Berliner Staatsoper/ Richard Strauss (1928)*

### **Exposition**

- Motto is at 69~72 for the minim. Every reappearance of this motto is played slower.
- 1st theme is at 100~104.
- 2nd theme starts at 84 then accelerates to 108 during the crescendo.

### **Development**

- Between 96 and 104 with frequent *accelerandi* and *rallentandi*.

### **Recapitulation**

- 1st theme's tempo is similar to that of the exposition
- 2nd theme starts at 84 and accelerates to 112 during the *crescendo*.
- The last development on the 1st theme fluctuates between 108 and 112.
- The coda's tempo fluctuates between 80-84 (*piano*) and 112-116 (*forte*).

The remarkable elements of this recording are its vivacity and fluctuations of tempo, which characteristics are quite alien to the so-called Wagnerian tradition of using heavy and slow tempi. We also notice that these tempo fluctuations are in no way arbitrary, but that on the contrary they contribute to the entire movement's structure. There are clearly two tempi: one for each thematic group. This interpretation very probably continues Wagner's theories, especially if we compare them to the

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<sup>1</sup> Mälzel, 1772-1838, manufacturer and patentee of the portable metronome.

<sup>2</sup> On each manuscript we have of this Finale, Bruckner wrote 69 for the half-note for the first thematic group and 60 for the half-note for the second. It is interesting to notice that these indications are hardly ever followed: most of the time, the first thematic group is played too fast, and the second too slowly.

<sup>3</sup> Letter dated March 8<sup>th</sup> 1824 to the director of the Leipzig Opera, quoted by René Leibowitz in his book *Le compositeur et son double*. Gallimard, Paris, 1986

examples given in Wagner's treatise (the first movement of Beethoven's Third Symphony and Weber's Overture to *Der Freischütz* among others.)

Moreover, comparing Wagner's book to his scores annotated by either Felix Mottl or Heinrich Porges for rehearsals in Bayreuth, we see that Wagner himself when interpreting his own works was against tempi that were dragged out. Felix Weingartner in his book also entitled *On Conducting* (written from 1895 to 1913) outlines the drift into ever slower tempi as an imposed prerequisite made by Cosima Wagner in Bayreuth after the death of her husband.<sup>4</sup> This tendency to slowness was also openly criticised by Richard Strauss at Bayreuth in 1933 when conducting *Parsifal* and Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. All these elements lead us to think that a Wagnerian tradition of slow tempi is in all likelihood ... a myth.

### **A few Words about Weingartner's Book: Is it against Wagner's Prescriptions?**

In contrast to what could be thought or written about the subject, Weingartner's book was not written against Wagnerian principles about tempo and its fluctuations; on the contrary it is in favour of these conceptions. Actually Weingartner's aim is rather to condemn the abuses that after Wagner's death often led to exaggerations that included delirium or even the total deformation of these works, notably by Hans von Bülow<sup>5</sup> and his imitators, Arthur Nikisch, Gustav Mahler and Richard Strauss,<sup>6</sup> four of the most renowned conductors of this period. Their method of conducting comprised of absurd *rallentandi*, *accelerandi*<sup>7</sup> as well as excessive and distortive *rubati* all of which Weingartner, urging a return to Wagner's own principles, wholly challenged.<sup>8</sup>

These pseudo-Wagnerian heavily static tempi that we have just denounced can also be found in the interpretation of Bruckner's symphonies. Today it is common or even conventional to hear what could be called 'misinterpretations' of the tempo indications in the case of some movements. For example the indication of 1st movement of the Sixth Symphony headed 'Majestoso' in 2/2 seems to be misunderstood by most interpreters. They transform the majestic two-beat measure required by the composer into a broad 4-beat measure. This four-beat modifies the character of the movement to the extent that the binary/ternary rhythmical overlays lose their naturalness and their fluidity to become turgid and not so easy to understand:<sup>9</sup>



Reduction, bars 1 to 6

<sup>4</sup> The conductor Hartmut Haenchen, in his recent interviews when in Paris to conduct *Parsifal*, explains this slowness citing political reasons after Siegfried Wagner's death in 1930.

<sup>5</sup> Hans von Bülow was Wagner's closest disciple and was considered his successor. The recordings which might be the closest to von Bülow's conducting are those of Arthur Nikisch of Beethoven's 5th Symphony, Hans Pfitzner of the Eroica Symphony and Walter Damrosch of Brahms's 2nd Symphony. Certainly, the conductor, Willem Mengelberg should ideally be listened to if one wants to have a taste of von Bülow's style of conducting. Nowadays, a conductor like Mikhail Pletnev seems to tend, consciously or not, towards this conducting style (see his recent recordings of the Beethoven symphonies).

<sup>6</sup> It is common knowledge that Richard Strauss in his youth was an ardent proponent of both Hans von Bülow and his conducting style but in his later years changed *radically*. Strauss' 1928 recording discussed above of Beethoven's 5th belongs to his late period and is not to be understood as a documentation of von Bülow's own style.

<sup>7</sup> Weingartner gives as an example the beginning of Beethoven's Coriolan Overture, which von Bülow conducted rather extravagantly: 'But Bülow began it almost *andante* and then increased the tempo until the pause in the seventh bar, to begin again *andante* and accelerate the sequence in such a way.'

<sup>8</sup> This is confirmed by his book *On the Performance of Beethoven's Symphonies* (2004 Mineola, NY: Dover Publications) as well as most of the available recordings of Weingartner: for example his recording of Beethoven's Eroica with the Vienna Philharmonic.

<sup>9</sup> They are two different videos (available on Youtube) documenting this: one of Sir Georg Solti conducting (clearly in 4) the Chicago Symphony (sounding very much like a caricature), and one of Sergiu Celibidache conducting the Munich Philharmonic (mixing beatings in 2 and in 4, but because of the slow tempo, the impression is that it seems to be thought as and beaten in 4).

Further pertinent examples are the Eighth Symphony's Finale, already referred to, the Fifth Symphony's two adagios both in 2/2, the first being the first movement's introduction:



Reduction, bars 1 to 6

the second adagio that is the second movement itself:



Strings in pizzicato, bars 1 to 4

or the first movements of the Third and Seventh Symphonies (this last case, we will discuss later). But the second aspect that interests us - tempo flexibility - is even more important than the first because it concerns the entire Brucknerian symphonic work.

## 2. Implementation of the Wagner theories on Bruckner's Symphonies

### *An example: Furtwängler's recording of the Finale of the Sixth Symphony*

The conductor, Wilhelm Furtwängler, is the most famous of those who incarnate the legacy of Wagner the conductor. Furtwängler's wife Elizabeth in her *Memoires* remembers that he regretted never having seen Wagner conduct. In 1918, Furtwängler wrote in an essay on Beethoven that Wagner had been the first to recommend the 'constant modification of the tempo, which is the only method capable of turning a stilted piece of classical music, played so to say from what is printed to what it really properly speaking is: an origin and a development, a living process ...'

Many of the recordings we have of him, especially those taken during the Second World War are extremely impressive concerning the fluctuation of tempo.<sup>10</sup> For example, listen to his incredible recording of Schubert's Great Symphony.<sup>11</sup> Furtwängler's various recordings of Bruckner's symphonies also exemplify the Wagnerian method of conducting.

In the recording of the Sixth Symphony (unfortunately incomplete because the first movement is missing), Furtwängler starts the Finale in a relatively restrained tempo and progressively accelerates to reach the main tempo (*Bewegt, doch nicht zu schnell* – 'agitated, but not too fast' – which is, basically, not a slow tempo): this seems to be typical of the Wagnerian approach, above all if we refer to Hans Von Bülow's sentence about Beethoven's Leonore Overture No. 3: 'Alla Wagner! *Poco a poco accelerando*, without putting your foot right away in the step towards *presto*!'<sup>12</sup> Furtwängler's reasoning about tempo fluctuation seems to be similar to the fluctuations in Strauss' recording mentioned above: indeed, Furtwängler conducts the 2nd thematic group much calmer but returns back

<sup>10</sup> But they have nothing to do with von Bülow's aberrations described in Weingartner's book (cf. above).

<sup>11</sup> This interpretation is not, as some people could imagine, an idiosyncratic one: we just have to listen to the live recording of the same symphony during the 1950s by the old Leo Blech (1871-1958) to be convinced of it...

<sup>12</sup> Quoted by Fritz Busch in his book *Der Dirigent* (1940) Zurich 1961

to a more agitated tempo for the 3rd thematic group. The pulse fluctuates throughout the movement, following the different appearances of the themes, their respective moods and affects to conclude the movement at a faster tempo than the basic one.

Naturally it could be objected that most of the tempo fluctuations made by Furtwängler are not written in the edited score corresponding to Bruckner's manuscript (the official edition contains only a few indications). The result obtained by Furtwängler never gives the impression of being forced or artificial: the music flows away and develops naturally. If we look at the first printed edition prepared by Bruckner's former pupil Cyrill Hynais,<sup>13</sup> we can see that this one includes *many* tempo indications: the 2nd thematic group is indicated '*Gemäßigtes Hauptzeitmass*' (moderate main tempo), the coda (after an '*A Tempo*' opening) is indicated '*Beschleunigtes Hauptzeitmass*' (accelerated main tempo) and throughout the score we find indications such as '*etwas gedehnt*' (a bit stretched), '*Schnell*' (quick), '*Wieder ruhiger*' (calmer again) etc. This article is not the place for making a list of all these indications and their pertinence, but we can note that Furtwängler, consciously or not, 'followed' most of these indications, even if he does conduct the Haas edition for this performance.

### 3. Tempo Markings and Rubato Indications in the First Printed Editions and Their Pertinence

The indications in the first printed editions of Bruckner's symphonies, if not directly Bruckner's own<sup>14</sup>, give us written proof of what we noticed in the recordings documenting the Wagnerian method of conducting (please remember that all the conductors who premiered Bruckner's symphonies were Wagnerian: Hermann Levi, Hans Richter, Felix Mottl and of course Bruckner himself) and more particularly of the link between formal articulation and rubato.

#### Exposition of the Seventh Symphony's first movement:

1st theme: Allegro moderato (MM=58 for the minim):



*Cellos, bars 3 to 11*

2nd theme: Ruhig (MM=108 for the crotchet):



*First oboe, letter B*

<sup>13</sup> Maybe with Bruckner himself in 1894 but as the publication was delayed in 1899, there is a reasonable doubt about it.

<sup>14</sup> We have tempo markings for the Fourth and Seventh Symphonies. Scholars do not agree about these markings. For Paul Hawkshaw, they are more than suspect. But for William Carragan, the markings in the Seventh Symphony 'definitely do come from Bruckner', and for Benjamin Korstvedt the markings in the Fourth Symphony 'were added in rehearsal in a different handwriting, possibly Hans Richter's.'

3rd theme: Ruhig (MM=96 for the crotchet):

*Reduction, Letter E*

If we follow scrupulously the tempo indications of the Gutmann edition of 1885, the 1st theme must be clearly conducted in a moderate 2-beat measure, however the 2nd theme must be *slower* and the 3rd still slower and both in 4-beat measure: these are the proportions found, for example, in Oswald Kabasta's recording of the symphony.<sup>15</sup>

But most of the time we hear the complete opposite: the 1st theme is clearly conducted in a moderate 4-beat (so it sounds like a broad '*Adagio*' introduction), the 2nd theme is faster and the 3rd theme even faster. This conception of tempo corresponds more to an overindulgent interpretation of the violoncellos' opening theme, attractive of course in some ways (especially in the movement's flight to different levels), but in the context of the overall conception it is *artificial* and indeed incoherent in its reversal of the tempo relations and of the respective characters that the composer wanted for the different themes.

This is one of the frequent misinterpretations discussed above that is typical of the equation Bruckner = Wagner = 'German' = Slowness and Solemnity.<sup>16</sup> Conductors therefore very often assimilate the indication *moderato* into a kind of *feierlich* (solemn) whereas the tempo should be based on the principal indication which is '*Allegro*.' And have they noticed that in fact the only '*Sehr feierlich*' indication in this 1st movement is at letter W (bar 391 out of 443), that is to say at the beginning of the coda, not at bar 1?

Of course, these indications in the first printed editions can be considered 'suspect' because they are perhaps not directly from Bruckner's hand. But it is always possible that Bruckner could have asked one of his pupils or the conductor to write on the score some indications that he had given orally. This is confirmed by Josef von Wöss's statement that seems to be important since Wöss was employed as a proofreader by Eberle and Universal in the 1890s and was involved in the publication of Bruckner's symphonies. Wöss was approached by Furtwängler in an open letter published in the *Neue Zürcher Nachrichten* on 23 June 1936, an excerpt of which is reproduced in Christa Brüstle's book *Bruckner und die Nachwelt*.<sup>17</sup> Wöss's response unfortunately relies solely on his own memory and his contribution has certainly been too easily dismissed. In his response, Wöss gives information about the publication since 1890 of Bruckner's works. He establishes that the *Stich-Vorlagen* of Bruckner's scores, with the exception of the First Symphony's Scherzo, were handwritten copies made by Josef Schalk, Löwe, Franz Schalk and Cyril Hynais. Wöss continues:

After correction, all *Abzüge* [proofs] together with the *Vorlagen* [manuscript copies] were always given to Maestro Bruckner and, after he had looked them through, were sent back by him with the note 'ready for printing.' Thus he was presented with all his works (with the exception of the Ninth) before they were printed. I can no more say today whether he made the last amendments himself or had them partly made by his pupils; still, I think I can remember – certainly I couldn't swear to it after more than 40 years – having seen notes

<sup>15</sup> We can also find similar proportions in the recordings of Volkmar Andreae with the Vienna Symphonic, those of Otto Klemperer with the Berlin Philharmonic and later with the Philharmonia, and the recording of Nikolaus Harnoncourt with the Vienna Philharmonic.

<sup>16</sup> Sir Roger Norrington has recently given (26/09/2008) an interpretation of this movement that can be understood as a reaction to the usual tendency of solemnity but that is also, alas, a caricature because of its great speed. He too does not take precise account of the tempo indications in the Gutmann edition, being too quick from the beginning (69/72 for the half-note) on the one hand and keeping almost inflexibly the same tempo for the whole exposition on the other.

<sup>17</sup> Christa Brüstle: *Anton Bruckner Und Die Nachwelt: Zur Rezeptionsgeschichte Des Komponisten in Der Ersten Hälfte Des 20. Jahrhunderts*, M & P Verlag für Wissenschaft und Forschung, 1998

here and there in Bruckner's hand in the *Vorlag-Partituren* [score manuscripts] as well as in the *Druckabzüge* [checked proofs].<sup>18</sup>

Comparing all these editions, it can be noted that they are similar in their use of tempo indications and their flexibility, despite the fact that they might have been 'revised' by different pupils close to Bruckner. Not being able seriously to imagine a coordinated conspiracy hatched between all Bruckner's students and editors for distorting the symphonies so that they fall completely apart, we can therefore both conclude that they correspond overall to a choice made in collaboration with the composer and that they must be taken seriously into consideration.

### An example: the 2<sup>nd</sup> thematic group of the Finale of the Fourth Symphony

Below is a comparison between the indications contained in the 1880 and 1888 editions:

**Table 1**

		1880	1888	Propositions
From B (bar 93) bar 103	Ila	Noch langsamer (4/4) Ritard.	Die Viertel wie vorher die Halben. (4/4) Ein wenig zurückhaltend.	Noch langsamer (4/4) Ein wenig zurückhaltend.
From C (bar 105)	Ilb	A tempo	Belebter	Belebter
From bar 109 bar 124	Ilc		Noch etwas belebter.	Noch etwas belebter. Rit.
From D (bar 125)	Ilb1+Ilb2			A tempo
From bar 129 From bar 131	Ilc		Etwas gemächlich. Nach und nach etwas belebend	Etwas gemächlich. Nach und nach etwas belebend
From bar 139 bar 142	Ilb		A tempo. Rit.	A tempo. Rit.
From bar 143 bar 153	Ilc		A tempo. Rit.	A tempo. Rit.

The indications of the 1880 version show that this group must be played quasi "*a tempo sempre*", with only two bars of *ritardando* at the end of the first phrase: this seems to us musically very poor. However, when one follows the indications of the 1888 version, the same music must be played with different tempos, embellished with several accelerations and *ritardando*. Moreover, in this version, the changing of tempo for each part creates different moods for each one of them (for example, the "*quasi-scherzando*" nature of the phrase Ilc which was absent from the 1880 version is here increased). All these indications seem to us pertinent.

Tables 2 & 3 compare a large range of recordings:

**Table 2** "Historical" interpretations:

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<b>B</b>	MM= 92	76	80	66	100	92-100	80	88-92	84	80
<b>C</b>	100	96	92	84	108	100	88-92	108	92	88
<b>From bar. 109</b>	104/ 116	100 to 116	104 to 120	100 to 120	116 to 132	116 to 120	96 to 104	116 to 120	96 to 104	92 to 100
<b>D</b>	104	92	100	96	108	116	96	104	92	92
<b>From bar. 129 to 138</b>	104 to 116	96 to 108	104 to 116	96 to 116	100 to 112	116 to 120	96 to 108	104 to 116	92 to 100	92 to 108
<b>139</b>	104	92	108	104	96	112	96	112	88	108
<b>142</b>	Rit.	Rit.	Rit.	Rit.	Rit.			Rit.		
<b>143</b>	100-96	100	108 to 112	108	112	116	100	112	88	108

1. Jochum/ Staatsphilharmonie Hamburg -1939
2. Kabasta/ Münchner Philharmoniker -1943
3. Abendroth/ Rundfunk SO Leipzig -1949
4. Furtwängler/ Wiener Philharmoniker -1951
5. Andrae/ Wiener Symphoniker -1953
6. Knappertsbusch/ Wiener Philharmoniker -1955
7. Heger/ « Berlin Festival Orchestra » -19??
8. Jochum/ Berliner Philharmoniker -1965
9. Klemperer/ SOBR -1966
10. Leinsdorf/ BSO -1966

<sup>18</sup> 'Nach erledigter Korrektur wurden sämtliche Abzüge mit den Vorlagen stets Meister Bruckner zugestellt und von ihm nach Durchsicht seinerseits mit der Bezeichnung 'Druckreif' zurückgesandt. Er hat also (mit der Ausnahme der 9.) alle seine Werke vor dem Druck vorgelegt erhalten. Ob er die Schlusskollationierung selbst vorgenommen oder teilweise von seinen Schülern hat besorgen lassen, kann ich heute nicht mehr sagen; doch glaube ich mich erinnern zu können – freilich vermöchte ich auch dies nach mehr als 40 Jahren nicht zu beenden – Eintragungen von der Hand Bruckners sowohl in den Vorlags-Partituren als in den Druckabzügen hie und da gesehen zu haben.'

**Table 3** More ‘recent’ interpretations:

	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27
<b>B</b>	92	76	100/96	80/84	84	100	76/84	66/69	92	76	80/76	66	88/92	80/76	88	88	84
<b>C</b>	88	92	96	88	88	100	92	72	100	80	80	92	92	92	92	92	92
<b>From bar 109</b>	88-84	100 to 108	92 to 100	88 to 100	92 to 96	104 to 120	96 to 104	84 to 92	104	84 to 92	80 to 84	96 to 100	96-92	96 to 100	96 to 104	104 to 112	100 to 104
<b>D</b>	80	96	92	88	92	96	96	76	96	88	80	96	88	92	92	100	100
<b>Bar 129 to 138</b>	80 to 76	96 to 88	96 to 88	88 to 80/84	96 to 88	96 to 120	96 to 100	80 to 84	96 to 104	92	88 to 92	96 to 88	96 to 92	92 to 100	96 to 104	96 to 100	100
<b>139</b>	76	96	96	84	92	108	92	72	100	88	88	92	88	88	92	96	96
<b>142</b>			Rit.	Rit.					Rit.						Rit.	Rit.	
<b>143</b>	80	104	92-88	88	88	112	92	84	100	92	88	96-100	92	100	96	104	100

- 11. Karajan/ Berliner Philharmoniker -1970
- 12. Kempe/ Münchner Philharmoniker -1972
- 13. Böhm/ Wiener Philharmoniker -1973
- 14. Karl Richter/ DSO Berlin -1977
- 15. Haitink/ Wiener Philharmoniker -1985
- 16. Rögner/ RSO Berlin -1987
- 17. Sinopoli/ Staatskapelle Dresden -1987
- 18. Celibidache/ Münchner Philharmoniker -1988
- 19. Tennstedt/ London Philharmonic -1989

- 20. Abbado/ Wiener Philharmoniker -1990
- 21. Asahina/ Osaka Philharmonic -1993
- 22. Salonen/ LAPO -1997
- 23. Wand/ Berliner Philharmoniker -1998
- 24. Rattle/ Rotterdam Philharmonic -2000
- 25. Harnoncourt/ Wiener Philharmoniker -2003
- 26. Naito/ Tokyo New Symphony Orchestra -2005
- 27. Herreweghe/ Orchestre des Champs-Élysées -2007

Leaving personal taste and judgment aside, from these two tables we can draw the following conclusions:

1. The ‘historic’ conductors play this passage with an overall faster tempo than the ‘contemporary.’ Among these latter, Rögner (no 16) seems to be an exception, and Naito is apart because he conducts the 1888 version.<sup>19</sup>

2. More precisely and significantly, the ‘historic’ conductors use a greater latitude in tempi than the ‘contemporary’ and they do not at all hold back when in an *accelerando* (for example Furtwängler who uses it has the greatest latitude: from 66 to 120, a difference of almost 50 %). The majority of the ‘contemporary’ conductors do the opposite: most do not have almost any range, the strictest being Haitink (no. 15).

3. The biggest differences are observable in the ‘Ilc’ phrase: this passage headed ‘*Nach und nach etwas belebend*’ in the 1888 version is based on the repetition of the same motive over ten bars. We can notice that *all* the conductors in the first grid do this acceleration very clearly but that *most* conductors in the second do not, some even going as far as slowing down. Instead of a *scherzando*-like, joyful and elastic sequence, we now have a music that tends to pull and be mechanically repetitive ...

4. Almost all the ‘contemporary’ conductors follow the 1880 score with its absence of tempo indications ... All the ‘historic’ conductors, whatever the edition they use (1880 for Andrae, Jochum, Kabasta, Leinsdorf, Klemperer and Abendroth, 1888 for Furtwängler and Knappertsbusch), follow the indications of the 1888 version.<sup>20</sup> Of course one could object that they follow musical intentions which are perhaps not directly sanctioned by Bruckner; but do we have to conclude that they are *altogether* ‘musicologically’ wrong?

<sup>19</sup> We were particularly surprised to discover recently the recording of the 1888 version conducted by Jean-Philippe Tremblay: in this interpretation the conductor never follows the metronome markings of this edition! The sole question which comes to mind is: “What for, then?”

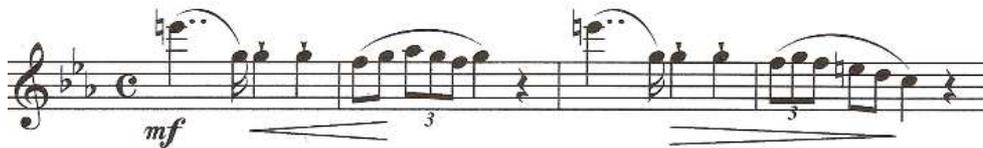
<sup>20</sup> Please pay attention to the version of Volkmar Andrae (no.5): it is the only version in which the conductor follows scrupulously the indications of the 1888 edition while conducting the 1878/80 version, and this is true for the complete movement.

One last remark: a look at the original version of this movement (1874)<sup>21</sup> indicates that this theme was originally thought as *alla breve* and *scherzando*. Here is the first motive of this theme (called ‘IIb’ in Table 1 above) as Bruckner initially wrote it in 1874:



*Flutes in the 1874 version (bars 105 to 108)*

We observe that Bruckner, in the 1880 version, modified the theme’s metric (from two to four beats) and transformed the quintuplets into an alternation of triplets and quavers, making it more flexible – we remember that this ‘IIb’ motive is indicated ‘*Belebter*’ (*more lively*) in the 1888 version:



*Flutes in the 1880 version (bars 105 to 108)*

More significantly, we note that the next motive (named ‘IIc’ in Table 1) in the 1874 version contains quite a tricky to realize quintuplet of quarter notes:

*First violins in the 1874 version (bars 111 to 112)*



In 1880, Bruckner in this passage changed from two to four beats and suppressed the quintuplet (almost impossible to realize in a four-beat measure). In the 1888 version, this motive is indicated ‘*Noch etwas belebter*’ – ‘*even livelier*’:

*First violins in the 1880 version (bars 109 and 110)*



Of course, Bruckner transformed the metric of this passage, but it seems to us absurd to think that this theme must be played twice as slow, thereby totally changing the character of this theme, even if the metrical change evidently leads to the theme being slowed down. To respect the tempo indications of

<sup>21</sup> Moreover this movement is indicated as ‘*Allegro*’, that is to say a tempo clearly faster than those indicated in later editions (‘*Bewegt, doch nicht zu schnell*’ – ‘*Lively but not too fast*’ – in the 1880 version, and ‘*Mäßig bewegt*’ – ‘*Moderately fast*’ – followed by the metronomic marking 72 for the half note in the 1888 version). No other indication appears in the movement, but that does not mean that we cannot change the tempo for this second theme!

the 1888 version helps to find again part of the original *scherzando* character, which had entirely disappeared in the 1880 version.

#### **4. The Importance of the Historical Recordings and of the First Printed Editions: towards a true 'Historically Informed Performance'?**

However, most discussion of authenticity have failed to make clear the vital distinction between matters of sonority that are largely cosmetic - what instruments are used, how they are placed on the stage, and so on - and the far more fundamental matter of tempo, which is as central to a piece of music as the actual notes to be played. It is, of course, no insignificant matter whether a piece is played on the piano or the harpsichord, on valved or valveless brass instruments, on stringed instruments with steel or gut strings. But the tempo at which a piece is to be played - a question often lumped together with these others in discussions of authentic performance practice - is of a different dimension of significance.<sup>22</sup>

Conductors, who were recorded during the 1940s and the 1950s at a relatively old age, were so given to this practice of *tempo rubato* that we might wonder if it would have disturbed 19th century composers – or rather whether they would have considered such flexibility as normal and so having no need to be indicated. Remember what Arnold Schoenberg wrote in 1948:<sup>23</sup>

Today's manner of performing classical music of the so-called 'romantic' type, suppressing all emotional qualities and all unnotated changes of tempo and expression, derives from the style of playing primitive dance music [...] Music should be measured - there is no doubt. As an expression of man it is at least subject to such changes of speed as are dictated by our blood. [...] Change of speed in pulse-beats corresponds exactly with changes of tempo. When a composer has 'warmed up' he may feel the need of harmonic and rhythmic changes. A change of character, a strong contrast, will often require a modification of tempo. But the most important changes are necessary for the distribution of the phrases of which the segment is composed [...] To people who have never heard those great artists of the past who could venture far-reaching changes of every kind without ever being wrong, without ever losing balance, without ever violating good taste - to such people this may seem romantic.

The progressive use, after the end of World War II, of the Nowak and Haas editions of Bruckner's symphonies is certainly a reflection of the aesthetic that started dominating the 1950s, when the 'perfect' realization of the details of the score became an end in itself: at last all the 'truth' about Bruckner's symphonies revealed without the least bad taste or additions from an external hand! The perfectly hygienic score ... But was Bruckner in those manuscripts edited by Haas and Nowak really as meticulous and precise in his notation as a composer from the second half of the 20th century? The first composers who wrote exactly and manically everything in their scores were Piotr Tchaikovsky and Gustav Mahler. And during the first decade of the 20th century, when someone like Alban Berg, while composing a strict sonata-form (for example his Sonata, op. 1, composed in 1907, only eleven years after Bruckner's death), indicated many tempo markings in his scores (and very often by indicating 'Tempo I,' 'Tempo II' etc), we can easily imagine that, while doing it, he was simply and explicitly putting in the score all that had previously only been implied.

We can also notice that Bruckner's contemporary and rival Johannes Brahms indicated *accelerandi* and *rallentandi* in a manuscript before removing them for publication: indeed we find some markings that Brahms pencilled into the autograph score of his Fourth Symphony's finale, indicating tempo fluctuations for specific variations (we can listen perfectly to this tempo elasticity in the recordings of Max Fiedler – a conductor who knew Brahms well – conducting Brahms's Second and Fourth Symphonies). Brahms removed these markings before the publication of the score, but this

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<sup>22</sup> From Benjamin Zander's extensive article on the interpretation of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony

<sup>23</sup> Arnold Schoenberg, *Style and Idea: Selected Writings of Arnold Schoenberg*. Edited by Leonard Stein, with translations by Leo Black. New York: St. Martins Press; London: Faber & Faber. 1975

certainly does not mean he had changed his mind about them. Brahms wrote about them in a letter to Joseph Joachim in January 1886: 'I have entered a few modifications in pencil in the score. These are desirable and useful in a first performance, even necessary... as long as a work is unknown to an orchestra (or a virtuoso).' <sup>24</sup> Once the interpreters knew the work perfectly, they modified the tempi naturally making those extra markings superfluous. This implied no doubt that Brahms expected interpreters to modify the tempo more than is indicated.

Another point deserves to be examined: the progressive 'appropriation' of Bruckner's music by the Nazi ideology in the 1930s. To celebrate German music's grandeur, this dogma needed slow and monumental interpretations.<sup>25</sup> A slow and steady interpretation of Bruckner's music was already advocated in Oskar Lang's book *Anton Bruckner, Wesen und Bedeutung* (Bruckner, Nature and Meaning)<sup>26</sup> in 1924 in the chapter 'Probleme der Wiedergabe,' (Problems of Interpretation) some years before the appearance of the new editions by Robert Haas. But while it is true that the new editions were to some extent linked to the political climate as is documented by Robert Haas's own preface to his edition of the Eighth Symphony,<sup>27</sup> it could appear a little bit exaggerated to see Nazi ideology as an explicit root for a new way of interpreting Bruckner's music. All the same, the new editions of the 1930s confirmed and helped to enforce a trend which had already existed much earlier and it is not forbidden to see that the tidying of the scores made by Robert Haas could be considered as the search for a 'philosophical and pure truth' detached from any performance point of view. Nazi ideology therefore may have been one of Haas' motivations, who with Alfred Orel, was known to be an ardent Nazi long before the Anschluss.<sup>28</sup> There is no doubt that the new editions replacing the original publications were the root cause for the massive change of performing style which occurred worldwide from the 1950s onward.

The tempo indications contained in the first editions consequently seem to us very important and must be used to reach certain objectivity when interpreting Bruckner's music. Of course, to confuse Schalk's revisions, cuts and re-orchestration on the one hand and tempo indications on the other hand must be avoided because the parameters are absolutely not the same. Every element in these scores should not be considered as *suspect*.

## 5. Perspectives for the Future?

The recent publication by the MWV of the 1872 and 1877 editions of the Second Symphony constitute from this point of view an exemplary model: indeed these editions restore the indications of tempo fluctuation contained in the first printed edition of 1892; moreover the editor, William Carragan, does not hesitate to add some of them in places where they are felt to be missing. A similar approach should be followed in future publications of 'interpretative' editions of other Bruckner symphonies. It would be up to the 'historically informed' (or not) interpreter to follow them (or to reject them). But if we seriously do take into account this important aspect of tempi and of their flexibility, would it not finally mean giving back to most of the music of the late romantic period and to Bruckner's in particular a significant part of its complexity and its expressive richness that many performers and scholars tend to ignore or even to erase?

*[... ]interpreters must submit to the text, but don't have to be the slaves of blind submission,*

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<sup>24</sup> « Ich habe einige Modifikationen des Tempos mit Bleistift in die Partitur eingetragen. Sie mögen für eine erste Aufführung nützlich, ja nötig sein... solange ein Werk dem Orchester (oder Virtuosen) fremd ist. »

<sup>25</sup> But things are not as simple as they may appear: indeed Oswald Kabasta, a conductor who conducted very moving and contrasted interpretations as we have seen, was a member of the Nazi party ...

<sup>26</sup> Oskar Lang, *Anton Bruckner. Wesen und Bedeutung*, Munich 1924. Oskar Lang (like the conductor Hans Weisbach, who also welcomed the appearance of the 'Originalfassungen' during the 1930s) was close to the Nazi Party.

<sup>27</sup> In which the editor emphasizes Bruckner's reference to the German hero Michel.

<sup>28</sup> This is documented in the interview given by the eyewitness, Joseph Braunstein, to Benjamin Kortsvedt, published in *The Bruckner Journal*. Vol 3, no.1 March 1999

*without any understanding . To look for a work's Urtext and to look for a good way of conducting is the same activity, which can't be summed up as following the signs as exactly as possible.  
When it comes to publishing or to performing, one should never forget to understand.  
Kurt Masur<sup>29</sup>*

Nicolas Couton  
Creil, France, 2008

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*Nicolas Couton is a conductor and has just recorded, with the MAV Symphony Orchestra of Budapest, Bruckner's Ninth Symphony with the Finale as completed by the Belgian composer Sébastien Letocart; this recording available on John Berky's website [www.abruckner.com](http://www.abruckner.com).*

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<sup>29</sup> Extract from a recent interview concerning his interpretation of Beethoven's symphonies in relation with his editorial work for the Breitkopf editions.