

Sébastien Letocart's Notes to the Recording of his Realization of the Finale of  
Bruckner's Symphony No. 9  
(Nicolas Couton conducts the MÁV Symphony Orchestra of Budapest)  
Lirica CD-107

I want to make it quite clear that my completion of the finale of Bruckner's Ninth Symphony is based strictly on Bruckner's own material. This I have orchestrated as faithfully and discretely as possible. There are two main different aspects to understand the purpose of this completion:

- Firstly, besides having to fill in some of the orchestration of the existing parts, there are six gaps in the development/recapitulation that have to be speculatively reconstructed sometimes with the recreate of coherent links. The gaps are located

- i. at the transition between exposition and development (pedal tone on E: 7'11"-7'57"),
- ii. in the middle of the first part of the development (8'42"-8'55"),
- iii. at the end of the fugue (*stretto*: 11'13"-11'43"),
- iv. in the recapitulation at the transition to the third group (16'36"-16'47"),
- v. in the middle of the third group (choral theme played by the oboe: 17'40"-18'07") and
- vi. at the tense transition to the coda (18'38"-19'02").

My forthcoming thesis will give a bar-by-bar explanation of the musicological thinking and meaning behind my completion and additions as well as give details of the reconstruction phase.

- Secondly, my elaboration of the coda, however, shares neither the same task nor the same concern about the question "what would Bruckner have done" because it is quite simply impossible to know or to guess. We only have a few sketches of and some vague testimonies (Heller, Auer and Graf) about the Finale's continuation; we know nothing even about the precise number of bars, but all these hardly give any idea of the global structure Bruckner had in mind.

Nevertheless, I felt that this part of the finale had to be as important as those in the finales of the Fifth and Eighth Symphonies. My extrapolated coda in four parts (bars 36, 28, 36 and 59 respectively) although only allowing itself to use the thematic contents and motives from the finale itself, my construction is partly inspired by the codas of the the Fifth and Eighth Symphonies.

The coda begins with a long crescendo based on Bruckner's 24-bar sketch which is built on a tritonic progression and which is linked thematically to the very beginning of the movement. I prolong this to 36 bars by adding another 12 bars of my own that culminate with the quotation from the Eighth Symphony (first part: 19'06"-20'22").

The second part begins (20'23"-21'11") with the last appearance of the chorale, i.e. the third group's main theme, which is treated in the same manner as the Fifth Symphony with integrated quotations of the main themes of the opening movements of the Fifth (20'34"-20'39") and Seventh Symphonies (20'51"-20'57").

The third part (21'12"-22'21") begins with a four-bar sketch of Bruckner that recalls the coda (violins and brasses) of the Fourth Symphony. The continuation is based on the *saltus duriusculus* (insistent repetitions of descending sixths and sevenths) of the finale's beginning (0'48"-1'04" corresponding to the passage in the coda: 21'32"-21'46"). It is followed by the same rhythmical and thematic progression as in the exposition of the first thematic group but elaborated from one of Bruckner's last sketches dated May 1896. It consists of a harmonic outline and a metrical structure of 16 bars (21'47"-22'21"). It is combined with the "heroic" motive (trumpets) that was heard for the first time at the end of the development (horns: 12'54"). The third part brutally ends on a climax dissonant chord (*parrhesia abruptio* at 22'15").

The fourth part, the "coda of the coda" (22'23"-24'43"), builds a long and static D pedal, as Bruckner probably intended, which is a sort of mysterious and ethereal remembrance of the first movement's coda, being a long crescendo based on what I identify as the "Hallelujah theme" (2 Horns and 2 Wagner Tenor Tubas at 22'29"-23'11" and then after 2 trumpets at 23'12"-23'30"). As Richard Heller, Bruckner's doctor, testified, a majestic "Alleluia" was to conclude the Ninth Symphony. Indeed Bruckner explained to Heller that the finale had to end with "a song of praise dedicated to the dear Lord" based on a theme of the *second* movement. At the time Bruckner played passages of the finale on the piano to Heller however, was the order of the inner movements 'scherzo-adagio' or 'adagio-scherzo'? We have neither a clear nor certain answer. In my opinion, this "Hallelujah" theme seems to find its origin in the trio of the Scherzo (violins 1, bar 53 letter B at 4'08" / *idem*, bar 205 letter H at 5'51" – cellos-bassoon 1, bar 113 letter D at 4'46") and not in the Adagio.

Finally, the coda culminates on the same violent Neapolitan E flat dissonance as in the first movement and leads to a *coagmentatio* in D major of the four main themes of the work (fourfold piling-up at 24'04"), crowning the whole work exactly as in the Eighth Symphony. Note also that some small details have been rewritten or modified in the score of the whole movement after this recording was made.

Concerning this *coagmentatio*, Max Graf wrote after consulting some hypothetically lost manuscripts in the possession of Franz Schalk that there was "a 'Hauptthema' (whether the 1<sup>st</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> movements' is unclear but most probably the 1<sup>st</sup>), a 'Fugenthema' (certainly the Finale's Fugue), a 'Choral' (also certainly the Finale's) and the 'Quintenthema' of the *Te Deum* and once these four themes are even combined all together (*übereinandergestellt*), there is a quadruple superposition (*eine vierfache Thürmung*) as we find at the end of the Eighth Symphony." Max Graf was a music critic and Max Auer who also mentioned the same combination (probably repeating what he read from Graf) was a dilettante only. One can reasonably say that both these "amateurs" should not be considered as critical or musicological researchers. Furthermore, the idea of a *coagmentatio* of the four main themes of the symphony has now been discarded by the Australian musicologist, John Allan Phillips, who considers Auer's and Graf's writings about this subject not very relevant.

However, having no satisfying alternative, the idea of a "Hallelujah" theme culminating with a coagmentation of the four main themes of the symphony remains for me the most structurally convincing and the most musically effective possibility. Two other combinations that use the *Te Deum* motive, the chorale, the 1st movement's main theme and the fugue theme from the Finale as described by Graf have been easily realized but have been discarded because musically unsatisfying (see these two musical examples in my forthcoming thesis).

In a recent thesis, John Allan Phillips broaches the subject about the substitution problem for the Finale as planned by Bruckner (who was extremely troubled about the idea of dying) in the middle of the third thematic group (recapitulation): a sudden transition for the insertion of the *Te Deum* ... Obviously, this solution cannot seriously be taken into account because of the question of the proportions and musical coherence: the duration of the *Te Deum* is approximately 25 minutes. What would such an "intrusion" (since Bruckner never managed to put the coda on paper) mean after hearing  $\frac{3}{4}$  of the finale (about 18 to 20 minutes)? No doubt one can see it as a kind of capitulation by the composer after realizing that because of his inability he could not simply revise the work right from beginning to end as was once his practice and which he had been struggling to follow for two years; now he could never manage to fix his ideas in a fully satisfying musical form without a lot of extra work. Indeed this finale can sometimes leave the same impression of a work "not fully arrived at" or of a state "still to be realized" like the first versions of the Third (1873-74) Fourth (1874) and Eighth Symphonies (1887). The reasons for the difficulty in finishing his Ninth Symphony were probably a combination of physical and mental disorders. Nonetheless, this music still fascinates, although it is incomplete, as much by its grandeur, its power as by the wrenching enigma of its incompleteness. We acknowledge the same problem with another extraordinary symphony which, left unfinished at the composer's death and although entirely sketched out, leaves this strange and enigmatic feeling of a process held forever in suspension. Of course, I mean the Tenth Symphony of Mahler.

Sébastien Letocart, composer.

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