

REVISED 2 MARCH 2018 – EXERCISES AT THE END

We Can Know a Lot About Bruckner's Complete Ninth Symphony



by Alonso del Arte

Introduction

Here is a sonnet by Shakespeare with some words missing. If you know the sonnet, you can fill in the missing words. But if not, you can still try.

Music to hear, why hear'st thou music sadly?
Sweets with sweets war not, joy delights in joy:
Why lov'st thou that which thou receiv'st not _____,
Or else receiv'st with pleasure thine _____?

If the true concord of well-tuned sounds,
____ married do offend thine ear,
____ but sweetly chide thee, who confounds
____ the parts that thou shouldst bear:

____ how one string sweet husband to another,
Strikes each in each by mutual ordering;
Resembling sire, and child, and happy mother,
Who all in one, one pleasing note do sing:

Whose speechless song being many, seeming one,
Sings this to thee, _____.

Receiv'st no badly? Receiv'st not flatly? Receiv'st not exactly? The iambic pentameter of the sonnet provides us with vital clues that help us rule out certain rhymes with confidence. "Exactly" has one syllable too many.

The missing words in the second quatrain are a little harder to fill in without reference to the actual sonnet.

Of course this sonnet is missing words because I have deliberately omitted them. If, due to spills or smudges or other circumstances this sonnet had been transmitted to us incompletely in this manner, filling in the missing words from the concluding couplet would be quite difficult.

I'm not saying that completing a sonnet is exactly like completing Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Requiem in D minor or Anton Bruckner's Symphony No. 9 in D minor. But there are similarities.

To complete Franz Schubert's famous "Unfinished" Symphony in B minor might perhaps be more like if we had only the first two couplets of a Shakespeare sonnet but were missing the third quatrain and the concluding couplet.

I don't know why Schubert did not finish his Symphony in B minor. But I do know the reason is very different from why Anton Bruckner didn't finish his Symphony No. 9 in D minor.

The B minor is not the only one Schubert left unfinished. But it is the only one that was amenable to mythology. The mystery of why Schubert didn't finish it propelled it to the very core of the

standard repertoire, while Schubert's other unfinished Symphonies are still relegated to obscurity.

If it's also a mystery why Bruckner did not finish his Ninth Symphony, then maybe Bruckner can also join Schubert in the pantheon of composers "great" enough to have a few of their works in the overplayed core repertoire.

And let's face it, here in America, Bruckner could use the help. At the beginning of 2017, the Staatskapelle Berlin came to New York to play Bruckner's nine numbered Symphonies in the span of a couple of weeks.

The *New York Times* could have run an article celebrating this important milestone in the history of this great composer. Instead, the *Times* had two critics essentially tell us that Bruckner's music is either too impersonal or too eccentric to be worth bothering with.

That paper is actively discouraging people from getting to know Bruckner's music in general. But there are also conductors who perform Bruckner's music but are actively discouraging people from getting to know the finale of Bruckner's Ninth Symphony.

People like Kent Nagano, who at one time actually inserted *Erwartung* by Arnold Schoenberg into Bruckner's Ninth.

Nagano has the gall to say that it's not "really Bruckner" when a musicologist works to determine, after careful analysis of the available documents, that where a page is missing Bruckner meant to continue a melody from a previous page.

Or that Bruckner meant one instrument to play the same thing as another instrument in unison or octaves. Well, a composition by Arnold Schoenberg is definitely not Bruckner.

Discouraging people from listening to Bruckner's music in general is wrong, and discouraging people from listening to the finale of Bruckner's Ninth is also wrong.

Maybe the mystery of the unfinished Ninth sells more tickets and CDs than the knowledge of an almost complete Ninth. But doesn't that insult the intelligence of the public, suggesting that they are too dumb to weigh the evidence and arrive at their own conclusions?

As it turns out, there is a lot that we do know about Bruckner's complete Ninth Symphony. Although he did not complete it to his satisfaction, he wanted to, and he almost did.

Shakespeare did not invent the sonnet, but his handling of the form was different from that of the Italian poets. And Bruckner did not invent the Symphony, and his handling of the form was also different from that of the Italian symphonists.

Just by being familiar with Bruckner's prior Symphonies you already have a very good idea of how he intended the Ninth to end.

And when you add to that the sketches for the finale, and the pages of the emerging score that were not misplaced, and pages

that were misplaced but later discovered, the mystery vanishes, not completely, but knowledge is revealed.

There is so much that we know about Bruckner's complete Ninth that it can easily fill several books, and it has. My purpose here is to try to concisely summarize what is known, and provide a place to start for those who want to know more.

It's one thing if you have examined all the available evidence of Bruckner's Ninth and concluded that the finale falls short of Bruckner's achievements.

It's quite another thing to actively tell others that they should not look at the evidence for themselves, and worse, to deliberately deceive them as to the nature of that evidence.

When I was first getting to know the music of Anton Bruckner, the finale of his Symphony No. 9 in D minor seemed a hypothetical thing beyond the reach of my inquiry.

The common wisdom I received at the time is that there was nothing of the finale other than a few vague, indecipherable sketches.

It was almost twenty years ago that in a record store in Okinawa I found a recording on the Teldec label that would lead me to know that the finale of the Ninth is an actual score, which, with various degrees of editorial intervention, an orchestra can actually play from.

Most of the text in the booklet and packaging was in Japanese, but this was clearly written in Roman letters on the cover: "SYMPHONY NO. 9 & FINALE." How could this be?

I bought the CD and listened to it. I have to admit that back then I was not convinced. But there was no reason I would have been convinced at that point after just the first hearing. I had so many times listened to Karajan's recording of the three completed movements.

Despite the various flaws that Robert Simpson has pointed out in the first movement and the Adagio, familiarity with Karajan's superb interpretation with a world-class orchestra endowed the three completed movements with a rightness that the previously unknown music of the finale just could not match.

Later on I bought a recording on the Chandos label. There were definitely differences in how the finale was completed. But the recording also included the available pages of the score with silences for the gaps.

It was obvious that there was a lot of material by Bruckner himself that these musicologists were basing these completions on, at least for the beginning of the finale.

We're talking something like fifteen minutes, which even in the context of Mahler's Third Symphony would still be quite a lot.

Certainly I could feel like the establishment had lied to me about Bruckner's Ninth. But then again, the establishment had lied to me about Bruckner in general.

“Bruckner is not a model for composition,” Prof. Albert J. Fillmore of the College for Creative Studies once said to me, for example.

Let me be clear: I am not a university professor, teaching music history or any topic whatsoever. I am a composer, like Robert Simpson. As a composer, there are certain questions I’d like to have answers to:

- What compromises do I have to make to get my music before the public?
- If I become even a little bit famous, will my final wishes regarding my unfinished compositions be obeyed or disobeyed?

Bruckner’s life story does not give clear-cut answers to these questions, but does provide a framework for discussion of these issues.

Of course my compositional process is different from Bruckner’s. But I suspect my compositional process is a lot like that of my contemporaries, involving a lot less handwritten notation and a lot more computer-printed notation.

But Bruckner’s process was different from that of *his* contemporaries, eccentric, some might say. These eccentricities are precisely what enable musicologists to complete Bruckner’s Ninth with far greater certainty than what is possible with, say, Beethoven’s Tenth Symphony.

The two main eccentricities of Bruckner’s process are first the metrical numbers, which then helped organize the bifolios of an emerging score.

That emerging score then evolved by a process of gradual filling in, re-inking and pasting over, something Carragan has demonstrated with the Third Symphony.

So with the finale of the Ninth there aren’t just sketches, but also an emerging manuscript score that would eventually have served as the basis for a clean copy by a professional copyist, but which was instead scattered.

Despite the gaps in this emerging manuscript score, it has been the basis for some very similar completions by some very different people.

I’m talking about people who vigorously disagree with one another about certain minute details of the score, but who in the big picture view agree that what they are working on is more than just sketches.

At some point Bruckner tried to renumber the bifolios of the emerging manuscript score. This has certainly created problems for the completers, but it reinforces the point that we are dealing with a score here. If it was just sketches, why would the composer have cared that the pages were properly numbered?

I don’t have all the answers. But I do know a few of the answers and I also have some idea of where some more answers are to be found. Sure, some questions are difficult to answer because we can’t just call Bruckner on the phone and ask. But

there is a lot of documentation.

We are talking here about something that happened more than a century ago and yet we know so much. Compare this to the life story of Alan Turing as shown in *The Imitation Game*.

One of the final scenes of that movie shows Turing and his Bletchley Park colleagues burning a bunch of top secret papers.

With that scene, the screenwriter, Graham Moore, reminds us that so much documentation was destroyed, and therefore he, as the screenwriter, has a lot of leeway in which to invent incidents in Turing's life. No one can say he's wrong because the documents that say otherwise are no longer available.

And yet we can say that Graham Moore got a lot of things about Turing completely wrong. The goal was to turn Turing from a complicated man into a much simpler, almost robotic sociopath tailored specifically for Benedict Cumberbatch's acting style.

We have a similar simplification with Bruckner's Ninth. The complicated, almost completed document that is the emerging manuscript score, and which with the right editorial intervention can be brought up to performance standards, is converted into vague sketches that only the original genius in better health could possibly complete.

Obviously it is far neater and more poetic to dismiss the finale as something beyond our comprehension, instead of grappling with a document that presents us with problems of varying difficulty.

If you're familiar with Bruckner's music up to the Eighth Symphony and the three completed movements of the Ninth, but you don't know anything about the finale other than that Bruckner wanted to write it, then you already have some idea of how the finale goes.

Just by knowing Bruckner's work prior to the Ninth, you are capable of ruling out many obviously wrong possibilities and narrowing down to a likely, plausible form for the finale of the Ninth.

And when you also have sketches and some pages of an emerging score to go on, the problem should seem a lot less daunting than trying to complete the unfinished compositions of just about any other famous composer.

It is humble to say "I don't know." But it is very arrogant to say "We can't know." Who am I to say that because I don't know, it's impossible for anyone else to figure it out?

Can you imagine if mathematicians in the 20th century had said that no one can resolve Fermat's last theorem? Fermat's assertion regarding a cube as the sum of two other cubes, or of any higher powers of integers, was not the last mathematical thing the French mathematician ever wrote down.

This is something that Fermat's famous conjecture has in common with Franz Schubert's famously unfinished Symphony in B minor, which was certainly not the last music that composer

wrote down.

It is important not to conflate Schubert's B minor with Bruckner's Ninth, as the reasons for their incompleteness are very different.

Such a conflation is precisely one of the mechanisms of deception regarding Bruckner's Ninth, whether that deception is intentional or merely repeated unthinkingly.

Fermat's assertion was not really a theorem, as he never wrote down a proof for his conjecture, and there was no proof for that conjecture until Andrew Wiles proved it a couple of decades ago using some very advanced methods that were not available in Fermat's time.

Like Fermat's so-called last theorem, the problem of Bruckner's Ninth does involve some math. But the math for Bruckner is for the most part simple arithmetic.

Because of the "metrical numbers," we can make sense of the missing pages. Just as Shakespeare organized most of his lines in iambic pentameter, Bruckner organized his later Symphonies in 8-bar phrases.

The year 2016 was quite important to our understanding of this puzzle. In June 2016, Riccardo Muti led the Chicago Symphony and Chorus in Bruckner's Ninth Symphony (without the finale) and *Te Deum*.

On an aesthetic level, that may sound like a bad idea, but it is far more respectful of Bruckner's wishes than ending the concert with the *Adagio*.

And in July 2016, Gerd Schaller led the Philharmonia Festiva at the Ebrach Musiksommer in Bruckner's Ninth with his own reconstruction of the finale.

Schaller had previously recorded someone else's completion, and I will get more in detail about these different completions later on.

Before I heard Schaller's completion, I was fairly certain that the first ten minutes or so would sound very similar to other completions. For the most part, that is the case.

What is going on here with these different completers who produce such similar scores with most of the surprises occurring later on?

Exposition

The last Symphony that Bruckner was able to complete was No. 8 in C minor. For much of the 20th century, the Ninth was known only by its first three movements.

Music appreciation in America has mostly ignored Bruckner, but when Bruckner was mentioned, the Ninth would be presented as a mystery on par with Schubert's famous Symphony in B minor.

It's then quite easy to fool people into thinking that for some

inexplicable reason Bruckner wrote very little of the finale of his Ninth Symphony even though he supposedly had time.

A lot of people like to say that “we can’t know” Bruckner’s intentions, and they use that as an excuse to only play the three movements of the Symphony that Bruckner completed and pretend that they are piously respecting Bruckner’s wishes.

This attitude ignores Bruckner’s own work on the score of the finale of his Symphony; he had gotten a lot farther with it than a lot of people realized. It also ignores his own suggestion to use the *Te Deum* as a makeshift finale. Whether he finished the finale or not, he never wanted his Symphony to end with the *Adagio*.

Those who try to justify the three-movement version as respectful of Bruckner’s wishes are, at best, misinformed, and at worst, dishonest.

There are also those who dismiss the finale on their own personal aesthetic assessment, or they feel that Bruckner tried but time just ran out.

The difference is that the latter are willing to consider new information and new approaches that come along, while the former tell us that we can’t know anything further about the finale so we should just stop asking.

The truth is that we *can* know a lot about Bruckner’s complete Ninth Symphony. There are pages and pages of documents, from Bruckner’s own sketches *and the score*, to analysis of the sketches and the score, and realizations and completions of the score.

I emphasize again, the score of the finale was quite close to complete when he died. But this is only obvious after examining the nature of the gaps.

We also need to let go of certain preconceptions as to how a composer actually goes about his work. A composer doesn’t always just sit around waiting for inspiration.

Not every listener wants to read all those pages and pages of documents, or has time to. It is my aim in this document to summarize what we know and what we can know about Bruckner’s complete Ninth Symphony, and to point the way for those who wish to become better informed.

This summary is no substitute for reading all those documents. But it is my hope that any question that can be answered today is, if not answered in this summary, it is answered in one of the documents mentioned in this summary.

At least a few conductors are vaguely aware of their own hypocrisy in dismissing the finale of Bruckner’s Ninth, for which there is a lot of material in Bruckner’s own handwriting as somehow not being “really Bruckner,” yet have no trouble with Mozart’s *Requiem*, which is nowadays usually played in the completion by Franz Xaver Süssmayr.

Süssmayr’s approach to completing the Mozart *Requiem* was nowhere as scientific as that of Nicola Samale and Giuseppe

Mazzuca in completing Bruckner's Ninth, nor as carefully considered as that of William Carragan, also for Bruckner's Ninth.

John A. Phillips and Benjamin Gunnar Cohrs later joined the Samale and Mazzuca team and created still more completions. There are also completions by Sébastien Letocart, Jacques Roelands and Nors Josephson to consider.

The Bruckner Gesamtausgabe (the complete edition of Bruckner's works) will not publish anyone's completion. Which is understandable.

But they have published Bruckner's own score of the finale as best as can be done with pages missing, both in facsimile of Bruckner's handwriting and typeset.

You don't have to take my word or anyone else's as to which completion most faithfully follows Bruckner's intentions. You can take the finale documentation from the Gesamtausgabe and compare it against the score of a completion.

I myself had forgotten that Benjamin Gunnar Cohrs, who has done so much to increase our understanding of Bruckner's complete Ninth Symphony, has also worked on Mozart's Requiem, figuring out what Mozart was really getting at and clearing away the stylistic impositions of Süssmayr.

The story of Mozart's Requiem is more complex and checkered than I care to get into here, and more barnacled with mythology.

I only wanted to make the point that the Süssmayr completion, judged by the same standards that are used to dismiss other works left incomplete by their original authors, fails miserably, yet is accepted far too readily.

I'm not hearing anyone wringing their hands about how Süssmayr's completion is "not really Mozart."

William Carragan has articulated certain ground rules for completing these kinds of works. I have a feeling that if someone were to review Süssmayr's completion for compliance with Carragan's rules, they would find Süssmayr lacking.

If you challenge all the people who have worked on Bruckner's complete Ninth to document what they copied directly from Bruckner, what they deduced from similar passages and what they invented outright, you will find that their presentations of the finale consist mostly of what Bruckner himself wrote by his own hand.

At least for the first 278 measures. That's almost ten minutes of music for which the completers have little to do besides bringing some of Bruckner's notational eccentricities into line with modern practice.

Then there's a gap, then some more pages of pretty fully orchestrated music, more gaps, and more pages with just the strings written in, and more gaps.

The main reason the finale continues to be debated today is

that the very last page of the score is missing. Maybe it is sitting in a pile of paper just waiting for someone to go through and discover it.

Or maybe it has been destroyed and there is no hope of recovering its contents. But I'm not going to pretend that I know the answer to that question.

The last page was not blank. But neither was it fully filled in. It most likely had the strings filled in and indications as to what the winds and brass were to play. So that casts a lot of doubt on the final pages of any completion, however plausible they sound.

Let's talk dollars and cents, making sure to keep the old adage "time is money" firmly in mind, from the score and parts, rehearsals, publicity, concert all the way to recording.

The conductor's score of the incomplete Ninth, in its Orel edition from Luck's Music Library, costs \$120. A set of parts costs \$310, and should be sufficient for an orchestra with eight first violins, eight second violins, six violas, four cellos and two double basses.

Additional parts can be had for \$8 each. The rental fee is \$221, and requires notification a year in advance, though for this particular work I imagine Luck's would be fine with slightly shorter notice.

Now, a world-class orchestra like the New York Philharmonic or the Chicago Symphony Orchestra surely already has all these materials, or maybe they have the Nowak edition, or maybe even both.

Suppose they decide to acquire the score and parts for a complete Ninth and it costs almost \$1,000 total. They can afford that.

But there is also the work that comes with that. Maybe the musicians have bowings and other markings in the Orel or Nowak edition that they want transferred to the complete edition (such as the Cohrs edition with the Samale et al finale), and maybe this can be accomplished almost automatically, notwithstanding the occasional hiccup, but it still would not be instantaneous.

Not that Cohrs recommends doing that, given that he has characterized the Nowak edition as being so full of mistakes that it is barely any better than Orel's edition.

There would certainly need to be more rehearsal time. I e-mailed a world-renowned conductor about this, and he said that yes, of course, since it's adding about 20 minutes of music to the concert.

However, in terms of rehearsal time, the finale of the Ninth would be more expensive than some unrelated 20-minute composition that the orchestra had to learn.

The conductor has to understand how the finale fits in with the familiar three movements, and he has to teach this to his

players.

There is also the concern that ticket sales could suffer if the program is just one Bruckner Symphony with a finale regarded with suspicion by the uninformed.

Ideally, a concert runs 2 hours, including a 20-minute intermission. That leaves 100 minutes, 80 to 90 of which would be taken up by the Ninth.

I have a suggestion that could alleviate both ticket sales concerns and intermission concerns: Start off with Ron Grainer's theme music for *The Prisoner*.

Immediately follow that with Michael Haydn's Introduction to *Der büßende Sünder*, and then follow that immediately and also with barely any pause with Bruckner's Ninth Symphony, up to the Scherzo.

Then intermission before the Adagio and finale. Round this out with John Williams's music for *The Empire strikes back* end credits.

Maybe my suggestion sounds ridiculous, but at least I'm not sticking a composition by someone else in the middle of Bruckner's Ninth and then pretending to be a guardian saint of Urtext piety.

I am specifically talking about Kent Nagano, who, as I mentioned earlier, one time many years ago actually inserted Schoenberg's *Erwartung* into Bruckner's Ninth.

Only because this infuriated Nagano's mentor, Günter Wand, did the younger conductor ridiculously arrive at the conclusion that the three completed movements of Bruckner's Ninth don't "need anything else."

I think Kent Nagano disrespected Bruckner by interposing Schoenberg into his Ninth without his permission, and now Nagano is pretending to be respectful of Bruckner by willfully ignoring what Bruckner himself wrote for the finale.

A lot of publicity for a concert of the Ninth with a finale reconstruction could be had for free, as the idea of a complete Bruckner Ninth is still a new thing, as opposed to the idiotically misplaced piety of placing an incomplete work on a pedestal.

For the orchestra's marketing team, a complete Bruckner Ninth would present no difficulty.

As for recording, in addition to needing more studio time, there is the issue of one CD or two. If the whole thing turns out to be way more than 80 minutes, you probably need two CDs, which entails certain expenses even if neither CD contains more than 50 minutes of music.

For Audio DVD and audio files for download or streaming I suppose there is no problem with a 90-minute recording; some sellers put as many as 200 "tracks" on a single virtual "disc."

Given the resistance to the complete Bruckner Ninth, record producers may feel trepidation at taking on any of the completions.

But they shouldn't. Bruckner fans are growing suspicious of the "complete in its incompleteness" nonsense, and they're buying recordings of the most recent completions at a faster pace than the producers had hoped for.

The 2012 recording by the Berlin Philharmonic, conducted by Sir Simon Rattle in the final Samale et al completion on the EMI label, had an Amazon.com sales rank of #107,364 when I checked on December 28, 2015.

And when I checked again on March 24, 2017, it was #68,339 in "paid albums" and #3,300 in the Classical category of digital music.

And then on March 2, 2018, I was surprised to find it had actually increased slightly to #68,214 in "paid albums" and dropped only slightly to #3,317 in the Classical category of digital music.

The 2003 Naxos recording of Johannes Wildner conducting the New Philharmonic Orchestra of Westphalia in an earlier Samale et al completion had a sales rank of #139,496 in 2015, and #49,798 in 2017.

When you drill down to Symphonies on CD and vinyl, the Wildner recording had a rank of #1,445.

There are some caveats to these numbers and how I have written down, but these numbers are quite telling even with a grain of salt.

By contrast, Simone Young's recent recording of the three completed movements had a sales rank of just #184,124 in 2015. When I checked in 2017, only one new copy was available brand new for \$83.38, which is obviously prohibitive for a decent sales rank.

By the way, if you want to support women conductors, I suggest you check out her other Bruckner recordings.

Christoph von Dohnányi, live at the Salzburg Festival, fared a little better than Young, at #159,691.

Claudio Abbado's recording of the incomplete Ninth with the Lucerne Festival Orchestra was at #25,476 in 2016, but that's probably because it was named Orchestral Recording of the Year by *Grammophone* magazine.

After *Grammophone* named other Orchestral Recordings of the Year, Abbado's Lucerne recording has dropped to #115,857, though it had a respectable #3,969 in the Symphonies on CD or vinyl category.

Back in 2015, I had predicted that the Abbado recording would eventually plummet in sales rank, while the Rattle and Wildner recordings would hold steady throughout the year, and that's more or less what has happened.

To be fair, there is a lot more competition among the recordings of the incomplete Ninth. For example, the Abbado recording is a Deutsche Grammophon release.

Once that issue is out of print, Deutsche Grammophon could

reissue it, but I think it would make more sense to reissue a Karajan recording.

The Gerd Schaller recording of the latest Carragan completion was not doing well in 2015, but I think it's because it comes bundled with the Fourth and the Seventh, which are popular enough to be present even in the collection of someone who might consider himself only a casual Bruckner fan.

This applies equally to MP3 downloads: on Amazon.com, to buy the Ninth (Carragan completion) from the Schaller album you also have to buy the Fourth and the Seventh.

If they separated out the Ninth, I think it would skyrocket past the Young and Dohnányi recordings.

It is true that Bruckner did not finish his Ninth Symphony to his satisfaction. The score of the finale was not ready to turn over to a copyist. But Bruckner actually got a lot closer to finishing than the music appreciation racket has led us to believe.

Perhaps the only morally valid objection to completing is this one presented by Hans-Hubert Schönzeler, and it goes something like this:

Since Bruckner dedicated the Ninth Symphony to God, and God decided that Bruckner would not live to complete it, it is disrespectful to God to attempt to complete Bruckner's Ninth.

This argument presupposes the existence of God, but since Bruckner believed in God, it does not matter if we don't believe in God as we try to be respectful of Bruckner's wishes.

Another problem with this argument is that it presupposes that God decides when people die of natural causes. This does not sit comfortably with the notion that God gives us free will.

Then death by natural causes is in part a consequence of the decisions of the deceased.

Bruckner was not an alcoholic, like Michael Haydn or Jean Sibelius, but he was not puritanical, like Leopold Mozart; he did enjoy beer on a fairly regular basis.

And he also enjoyed snuff on special occasions. Plus his sexual abstinence spared him the problems that come with sexually transmitted diseases.

There was not as much health information in those days, though there is something to be said for not having to deal with a steady stream of contradictory studies like we do nowadays. Coffee, red wine, chocolate, these things are good or bad for you according to whatever news report you've last seen.

Prayer and church involvement are good for you, more than one study has concluded, and there is no doubt about Bruckner praying and being involved in church.

Maybe Bruckner prayed for a miracle to grant him more time to work on the Ninth, and maybe God did grant a miracle at some point. But the miracle could still be seen as a consequence of

Bruckner asking for the miracle.

So, when Bruckner died on October 11, 1896, did he decide he did not want his Ninth Symphony played at all? Unlikely, given that he took steps to make sure the three completed movements were placed in the hands of a conductor.

Or did he instead decide that he wanted the *Te Deum* as a makeshift finale, since he had been unable to complete the finale? That's possible.

Or maybe he decided that, although he had not accounted for every single bar of the finale, he had left clear enough indications of what he wanted that anyone with a modest modicum of orchestration knowledge could fill in what he had not had time to take care of.

Maybe you are of the opinion that the finale of Bruckner's Ninth Symphony, even after making certain allowances, is not a satisfactory conclusion.

We are all entitled to our opinions. I am of the opinion that the finale of the Fourth Symphony, in whatever version, is an unsatisfactory conclusion for that work.

It is in the Fifth, Seventh and Eighth Symphonies that Bruckner wrote finales of unassailable suitability to conclude those respective works.

The finale of the Sixth Symphony can only be faulted for its coda not being as triumphant as the very optimistic coda of the first movement led us to expect.

So if you have a low opinion of the finale of the Ninth, I hope it is an opinion you arrived at after listening to all the available reconstructions and completions, and after learning at least the basic facts about the whole Ninth Symphony, and not just accepting as your own the opinions of critics too lazy to research the matter, or worse, the opinions of people with a financial interest in an incomplete Ninth.

John Berky, who runs the Bruckner Symphony Versions Discography, has probably listened to every completion that is commercially available and a few more besides that, so he is in a position to have an informed opinion.

"While I have no doubt that Bruckner wanted to continue on and did so, I think he knew that the task before him might just be too much for him to accomplish and the ending of the Adagio may be a form of resigned farewell. So while I look forward to every performance of the Symphony with its Finale, I still inherently feel that Bruckner knew that the Ninth may just have to end after the Adagio," Berky writes.

When someone has an informed opinion, even one that you disagree with, there is something to be learned. Robert Simpson, who fell for the "complete in its incompleteness" nonsense, had a very important point to make about the first three movements.

Some people are of the opinion that the first three movements constitute an irreproachable masterpiece. But Simpson points out

quite a few awkward details in the first movement and the Adagio that Bruckner would certainly have improved if he had time to write down the whole finale and look back over everything.

By elevating the incomplete Ninth to the pedestal for a masterpiece, it becomes much easier to dismiss the finale. But we must remember that Simpson wrote that “the kind of precision that we find in Bruckner’s most perfect work is not quite achieved in either the first movement or the *Adagio* of the Ninth—but for all we can tell, they may simply be less unfinished than the Finale.”

There are many exciting and dramatic moments in the completed movements of the Ninth (I describe some of those in the “Overview of the musical narrative” section).

But there are also exciting and dramatic moments in the finale, as well as many moments that connect the finale to what has happened before, and which let us know that there was some advance planning that went into it long before Bruckner started on the score.

Another thing that we need to confront are the idiotic ideas we have in this society about originality and inspiration. Supposedly we value originality, yet one of the most famous compositions in our core repertoire is the Symphony in C major by Georges Bizet, a skillful plagiarism of the Symphony No. 1 in D major by Charles Gounod.

And inspiration is thought to come in sudden bursts. The composer hangs around doing nothing, until suddenly he gets a thunderbolt of inspiration, and must then rush to write it all down before the inspiration vanishes.

The reality is that a truly great composer can write music in the absence of inspiration, and that writing music involves a lot of advance planning. The roots of all the themes of Bruckner’s Ninth Symphony can be identified in the exposition of the first movement.

The idea that Bruckner didn’t come up with anything for the finale until 1895, when his death was on the horizon, is highly suspect.

If nothing else, Bruckner at the very least thought about how the finale would integrate some important theme from the first movement into a crucial point in the finale.

As early as 1887, when still enjoying the success of his Seventh Symphony and looking forward to the success of his Eighth Symphony, Bruckner had ideas about the finale of the Ninth.

Maybe not precise ideas as to content, but definitely at least vague ideas as to how the conflicts presented in the initial themes would be resolved in a resplendent finale.

To truly understand the Ninth Symphony, we must not just look at the three completed movements, nor just at the finale. We must look at the whole thing as a coherent, organic entity from

beginning to end, that, to be sure, has its flaws, but is also one of the most important Symphonies in the entire repertoire.

One more thing before getting more in depth: I don't intend this summary to be comprehensive, but I do intend it to be factually correct. If you spot any factual errors, please let me know by e-mail: alonso dot delarte at gmail dot com. Use the subject line "Bruckner 9 Knowledge Summary" to prevent your message from going into some spam folder I hardly ever look at.

If you have differences of opinion, I want to hear about those, too. Please also e-mail me for those. Whatever you do, don't use Facebook to contact me; I might take months to respond if I respond at all. I check my e-mail more frequently.

Genesis and reception

The genesis of the Ninth Symphony is still going on. The composer will probably not have anything new to add, but this does not completely rule out that a previously lost page might come to light, or that there might be a new insight on the pages we currently have.

Bruckner started sketching his Ninth Symphony on August 22, 1887. It had been less than two weeks prior that Karl Aiger finished copying the score of the first version of the Eighth.

So when on his birthday that year Bruckner wrote a letter to Hermann Levi announcing the Eighth Symphony, he was already working on his Ninth.

This is entirely consistent with what we know of Bruckner's tremendous confidence as a symphonist, how he would start on a new Symphony before he had given the newly completed work to a copyist, and before there was any hope for a performance.

And we can be sure that in late 1887 he wasn't just thinking about the first movement of the Ninth, he was planning the structure of the whole thing, coming up with themes that he could assemble, modify, disassemble and reassemble over the course of a big Symphony.

The story is now very well known of how Levi was puzzled by the Eighth Symphony, prompting Bruckner to not just revise the Eighth, but also some of his earlier Symphonies.

Plus he was still expected to compose choral pieces for grand occasions, like Psalm 150 and *Helgoland*. And on top of that, he was still an active professor.

So with all these interruptions, the first movement was not completed until 1893. Maybe we could have done without another version of the Third Symphony, but the revision of the Eighth Symphony was beneficial to the Ninth.

Bruckner finished work on the Scherzo (but not the Trio) of the Ninth later on in 1893. For this Symphony he seems to have had no doubt that the Scherzo should go second, and he seems to have been fairly set on the content of the Scherzo proper.

The Trio was originally going to be in F major and in a slower tempo. Later on he came up with the idea of it being in F-sharp major.

And lastly he decided it should be in F-sharp major and at a faster tempo than the surrounding Scherzo, completing it in 1894.

The first F-sharp major Trio stands in the middle between the original F major Trio and the finished F-sharp major Trio not only chronologically, but also as an in-between step in a mutation process.

The reason I know all this is because the original F major Trio and the first F-sharp major Trio have been both published as supplements to Volume 9 in the Gesamtausgabe.

There is also a recording of these two discarded Trios in a chamber orchestra arrangement.

By November 1894, Bruckner had completed the Adagio. Many have compared the way this Adagio ends to how the Adagio of the Eighth Symphony ends.

But no one would dare suggest that the Eighth Symphony is somehow complete without its finale.

Another productive comparison is to the Adagio of the First Symphony. Those final bars sound much more earned in the Ninth than they do in the First.

Illness kept Bruckner from working on the finale until 1895, the same year he gave the conductor Karl Muck the manuscript score of the three movements he had completed thus far.

Anton Meissner had copied the first three movements and would probably have copied the finale as well if Bruckner had lived long enough to finish it.

This is pure speculation on my part, but I think that in December 1894 Bruckner thought he was going to die that month, and not live to see another year.

Maybe this is when Bruckner prayed to God most fervently for more time to finish the Symphony. And whether or not God answered those prayers, his friends were aware of his plight.

It is a fact that Emperor Franz Joseph became concerned about Bruckner's health, and generously provided him an apartment at a palace lodge.

No more stairs for the old man to climb. By May 1895, Bruckner was feeling much better and resumed work on the Ninth Symphony, now turning to the finale.

By June 1896, he had set down on paper a fairly complete succession of musical events, with a clearly defined phrase structure and harmonic framework.

Now it was just a matter of filling out the woodwind, brass and timpani parts, and tweaking the string parts.

In early July, Bruckner came down with a terrible case of pneumonia. Still he worked on the finale whenever he could muster the physical strength to set on paper what was so clear in his mind.

On the day he died, he left some three hundred bars of the finale pretty much fully orchestrated. Almost the first sixty bars or so he left with each of those bars containing either musical notes or a whole rest.

The whole rests are important because they show a particular instrument or voice is to be silent for that measure, ruling out the possibility that the composer may have wanted to write some notes in that measure but didn't get around to it.

For roughly the second half of this score Bruckner wrote a lot for the strings but left most of the woodwind and brass measures completely blank.

Still, I think it's quite reasonable to believe that Bruckner died feeling like he had left so good an indication of how he wanted this finale to be that someone else could readily fill in what he could not.

Trouble was, Bruckner's estate was not properly secured immediately after his death the way it should have been. Souvenir hunters helped themselves to several pages, and to this day there are five major gaps in the manuscript score of the finale.

I can only speculate as to what Ferdinand Löwe thought when he first looked at the score of the finale. Did he notice the gaps caused by the souvenir hunters? Did it occur to him to try to fill those gaps with his own free composition?

Rightly or wrongly, Löwe has a reputation for bowdlerizing Bruckner's scores. Prior to Benjamin Korstvedt's relatively recent research, the 1888 version of Bruckner's Fourth Symphony was considered by many to be an inauthentic reworking by Löwe.

That is a more complex issue than I can get into here, so if you're at all interested in it, seek Korstvedt's edition of the 1888 version in the Gesamtausgabe.

There is no doubt that Löwe reworked the completed movements of the Ninth Symphony, and at least one of his changes (softening a harsh chord in the Adagio) has been well documented.

But he probably decided that it was too much to try to fill in the gaps in the finale.

And maybe he also thought about Schubert's Symphony in B minor, now the most famous of Schubert's unfinished Symphonies.

Schubert wrote two movements in 1822 and the score remained in obscurity until 1865, when Johann Herbeck conducted its premiere.

Herbeck, by the way, also conducted two of Wagner's operas and helped get Bruckner appointed to teach at the Vienna Conservatory.

Schubert's popularity had grown steadily between 1822 and 1865. But the mystery of why the B minor Symphony was unfinished when he supposedly had time to complete it must surely have helped cement Schubert's place in the pantheon of the

great composers.

So perhaps Löwe thought that Bruckner, who as late as his Ninth Symphony showed the influence of Schubert, would be helped by having an unfinished Symphony of his own for which curious listeners could speculate as to the reason why the composer did not complete it.

Death is the most obvious reason, in Bruckner's case. But that hasn't stopped people as recently as 2015, like Kent Nagano, from suggesting that Bruckner had lost interest in or inspiration for the piece, thus transferring to Bruckner an explanation that has been given for the incompleteness of Schubert's B minor.

Presumably Löwe grieved for some time before getting to work on re-orchestrating the three completed movements of Bruckner's Ninth.

This he got done in 1902, and it was in his 3-movement version that Bruckner's Ninth was first presented to the public on February 11, 1903.

And it was Löwe's version that continued to be heard until April 2, 1932, when Siegmund von Hausegger presented Löwe's version back to back with the three completed movements from Bruckner's manuscript score.

That 1932 concert created a moral imperative to publish Bruckner's music according to the manuscript scores he bequeathed to the Austrian National Library, without the well-meaning adjustments of his pupils (like Franz Schalk, who re-orchestrated Bruckner's Fifth Symphony to include an offstage brass band and cymbals).

But that concert also reinforced the very mistaken idea that what Bruckner wrote for the finale consisted of just a few fragmentary and incoherent sketches, and that it would take too much free composition to turn these into a musically satisfying narrative.

Although the commonly heard version of the time was the major reworking by Löwe, a lot of the score of the finale was in the possession of the Schalk family well into the 1930s.

When Alfred Orel published a supplement to Volume 9 of the Bruckner Gesamtausgabe in 1934 on the finale sketches, the material presented was so thin that completing the finale seemed hopeless.

The first Bruckner Gesamtausgabe was tainted by the Nazis. In order to use Bruckner as an exemplary Aryan artist, the Nazis needed to tweak Bruckner's biography to downplay his religious devotion.

Not only were Bruckner's great Masses and many motets ignored by the Nazis, the idea of the Te Deum as a makeshift finale for the Ninth Symphony was not even mentioned.

The highly praised recording of the Ninth by Wilhelm Furtwängler in 1944 was of only the first three movements. This was the norm in Nazi Germany and continued to be the norm for

the rest of the century.

One tidbit from Cohrs that I am particularly grateful for is the fact that Furtwängler had actually wanted to conduct Fritz Oeser's arrangement of the finale exposition. But due to intervention from Robert Haas, Furtwängler did not do so.

After the war, Furtwängler's own Symphony No. 3 in C-sharp minor could have become another example of "complete in its incompleteness," and was even recorded by Wolfgang Sawallisch as such, on a CD with three tracks, the last of which is the Adagio.

That was in 1996; back in 1988 Alfred Walter had recorded the complete four-movement Symphony on the Marco Polo imprint of Naxos.

It is entirely reasonable to believe that some pages of the score of the finale of Bruckner's Ninth were lost or even destroyed during World War II, which makes it all the more amazing how much has actually survived to the present day.

After World War II, as Bruckner's religious music was rediscovered (in great part thanks to Eugen Jochum), but the idea of the Te Deum as makeshift finale continued to be dismissed.

But no one wanted to dismiss that idea for the same reason as the Nazis, while at the same time no one wanted to admit a financial objection to hiring a choir. So then it was that the Ninth is in D minor and the Te Deum is in C major, end of story.

It seems no smart aleck has ever suggested transposing the Te Deum to D major. But others have suggested that since the Adagio ends in E major, there's actually nothing wrong with appending a C major composition to serve as finale.

The real problem with the Te Deum as finale goes much deeper than key signatures. Since before World War II it was known that in the actual finale of the Ninth Symphony Bruckner alluded to the Te Deum. But this is a one-way street: the Te Deum makes no allusion to the Ninth Symphony.

Bruckner's fans who had seen nothing of the finale sketches still had some ideas about the finale of the Ninth that they could easily deduce from earlier Symphonies.

In the Third, for example, the D minor trumpet theme that Wagner liked in the first movement, recurs at the end, transfigured to D major.

And the Eighth (in its 1890 version) concludes with a combination of the main themes of all four movements in a grand fanfare.

It would be imprecise to call this "contrapuntal," but it certainly is impressive and it certainly made sense that Bruckner would do something like that in the Ninth Symphony.

Curiosity about the finale of the Ninth continued to grow. Gottfried von Einem's *Bruckner Dialog* must have stoked that curiosity.

The piece is appropriately called a dialogue because it is

Bruckner and Einem having a conversation, and it is very clear that the chorale comes from Bruckner.

The beginning of that piece doesn't sound anything like Bruckner, and I'm not sure how typical it is of Einem. But then there is the chorale from Bruckner's finale sketches, and at this point the music sounds like Einem has photocopied it straight out of Bruckner's score.

As Bruckner's chorale is repeated later on in the piece, Einem adds more and more interjections of doubt and despair. But even if you haven't heard any completions, you will recognize the exhausted winding down from the final statement of the chorale as coming from Bruckner, not Einem.

I believe that if Robert Simpson had heard Einem's piece, he would have changed his mind on the viability of completing Bruckner's Ninth.

It wouldn't have been the first time Simpson changed his mind about a composer's final Symphony, having done almost an about-face on Nielsen's Sixth. Nor was it the first time he changed his mind about Bruckner.

But the most significant new work on the finale of Bruckner's Ninth didn't take place until 1983, when Nicola Samale and Giuseppe Mazzuca reviewed all the materials available at the time and found there was a much clearer indication of the structure of the piece than had been previously thought.

Bruckner numbered the bifolios, and, more importantly, numbered the bars of the bifolios according to phrase structure. So where gaps occur, we can have a very good idea of what is missing.

The first major gap in the finale score is bifolio 15, which is still missing and might have been destroyed. John A. Phillips writes that its contents "must be left to our imagination," but he also writes that "the further eight measures of this bifolio ... would have continued the triplet figuration and augmented Te Deum motive, leading into the G-flat major chord which appears at the beginning of the next surviving bifolio."

Sounds to me like a very reasonable description of what bifolio 15 probably contains. The later gaps are more difficult to reconstruct, and require more deduction, and possibly some invention.

It was at about that time that William Carragan also released a completion. Samale and Mazzuca added first John A. Phillips and later Benjamin Gunnar Cohrs to their team and released more versions as more material was found and previously available material was reassessed.

Carragan also made more versions of his completion. Nors S. Josephson and Sebastien Letocart also got in on the game, and others still.

If we compare these completions, one thing is abundantly clear and worth repeating: for roughly the first half of the finale,

all these completions are essentially the same. That gives you an idea of how much Bruckner wrote and how little the editors had to deduce or invent.

Only now that we know so much about the finale, can the reception of Bruckner's complete Ninth begin to be properly assessed, though the long tradition of incomplete performance will continue to affect how the complete Symphony is received.

An issue that I honestly had never thought about it is that of formal balance. Many think that with only three movements, conductors felt the need to stretch out the first movement to match the Adagio in duration and more neatly place the Scherzo in the middle.

With the finale, the thinking goes, the first movement needs to be played faster. Well, tell that to Kurt Eichhorn, in whose 1993 recording with the Bruckner Orchester Linz the first movement clocks in at a little over 26 minutes, making it more than a minute longer than the Adagio. The finale is a good half hour, so obviously this takes two CDs.

Not that it matters as much in the era of the iPod (and the Zune, Sansa and whatever other MP3 players are still fighting for a piece of that pie), but I think it is important for a recording on CD of the complete Ninth to either be all on one disc or to be on two discs with the first movement and the Scherzo on Disc 1, and the Adagio and finale on Disc 2.

Such a 2-disc layout is preferable to having the three completed movements on Disc 1 and the finale by itself on Disc 2. Having to manually remove Disc 1 after it spins down from the Adagio to put in Disc 2 for the finale reinforces the idea that the finale is somehow foreign to the Ninth Symphony.

By contrast, feeling physically energized after the last strike of the Scherzo, the changing of CDs is less jarring, and the finale flows more logically from the end of the Adagio.

The complete Ninth is gradually gaining acceptance. In European performances of the complete Ninth, Audiences are responding with standing ovations.

There is resistance, of course, considering the inertia to a performance tradition of almost a century. Some critics in New York reacted with mild dismissiveness to the American premiere of the final version from the Samale et al team.

There is no clear consensus among reviewers on Amazon.com on Rattle's recording of the complete Ninth with the Berlin Philharmonic.

Manuel Pagan, for example, complains that the rendition of the first three movements is not quite on par with the finale, "as if Sir Simon were waiting to spring the Finale on us and just going through the motions on the other three movements."

A listener from Santa Fe seems to have an almost diametrically opposed opinion, but on reading his review his objection comes more from his assessment that "Bruckner was a

composer of such genius and originality that no group of musicologists has the remotest chance of completing his masterpiece.”

But that comes after saying too many of the materials are lost and Bruckner’s energy was flagging, which makes me wonder if he has actually looked at any of the finale documentation in the Gesamtausgabe.

Joey Wang criticizes the Conclusive Revised Edition of the Samale et al team as “not conclusive at all,” much preferring the Adagio as the ending.

There are also misgivings about making the principal theme of the first movement “the bad guy” of the finale. That melody does occur as a crisis point close to the coda in a lot of the completions.

But in my opinion it is inaccurate to call it a “bad guy,” especially given that if we accept the piling up of themes as essential to the finale coda, then that same first movement theme occurs one last time, fitted into a D major fanfare.

Could there be a silent majority here? Maybe most people who have bought this disc (or MP3 album) are not yet fully won over but neither are they ready to accept the dogma from Löwe. Maybe they will be won over once they have had time to listen to the whole album from beginning to end a few times.

However much some people may like the incomplete Ninth, there is an increasing awareness that ending with the Adagio clearly goes against the composer’s wishes.

At this point it seems appropriate to mention a theory from Daniel Zarb-Cousin, a young composer who is a big fan of Gustav Mahler, as many young composers tend to be these days.

The Adagio of Bruckner’s Ninth is too personal and Bruckner would have considered it inappropriate to end on such a mood, Zarb-Cousin posits.

Maybe Bruckner did subconsciously think of it that way. But on a conscious level, I think it mattered more to Bruckner that there he knew of no precedent for a 3-movement Symphony ending with an Adagio.

On June 23, 2016, Riccardo Muti closed out the Chicago Symphony Orchestra season with the three completed movements of Bruckner’s Ninth, followed by soloists and the Chicago Symphony Chorus joining the orchestra for Bruckner’s Te Deum.

The idea of using the Te Deum as finale has also gained some credence on CD. There is a new Karajan release on the Archipel label, which is essentially a repackaging of a 1962 recording with the Vienna Philharmonic (and the Singverein der Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde in Wien plus four vocal soloists and an organist) of the three completed movements of the Ninth Symphony on tracks 1, 2 and 3, and the Te Deum all on track 4.

In spite of my familiarity and my awareness of what I was going to hear the first time I popped in that Archipel disc, I still

found the start of the Te Deum, after the conclusion of the Adagio, very jarring.

This is because the Adagio gradually winds down to a quiet conclusion, and the sudden outburst at the beginning of the Te Deum, even though you know it's coming, is still surprising.

And it still feels surprising because it is not in keeping with Bruckner's aesthetic for how a finale should begin, notwithstanding the finale of the First Symphony.

But perhaps even more jarring is the Barenboim recording of the first three movements of the Ninth Symphony with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra on Deutsche Grammophon with the Chicago Symphony Chorus joining in on track 4 for Psalm 150.

I hope the CD has a good, long pause before Psalm 150. On iTunes I could either filter out Psalm 150 or explicitly exclude it from Up Next.

The next performance of the complete Ninth won't be until May in Berlin, according to Cohrs's website, if I've understood it correctly (it's day, month, year, I think).

The next American performance probably won't be until 2019 at the earliest.

Clearly there is much work left to be done in getting the truth out.

Overview of the musical narrative

A smart-aleck might describe Bruckner's Ninth as a Concerto Grosso in D minor for flute, eight horns, and orchestra.

That description misses the point of the tight symphonic integration of the Ninth Symphony, but it does give an idea of the importance of the flutes and the horns throughout the whole narrative.

If you wish to listen to a recording of the complete Ninth and follow along with the score, it does not make much difference if you follow along with Haas or Nowak for the three completed movements.

But for the finale, if you don't have the score of the completion you're listening to, you can actually follow along pretty far, before becoming hopelessly lost, by using what your Library might call "Volume 9A" or "9B" of the Bruckner Gesamtausgabe: the documentation of the finale sketches edited by John A. Phillips.

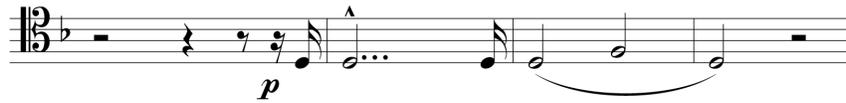
Just don't use the facsimile of the handwritten score for following along with the recording, unless you think you're very good at reading the handwriting of a physically weak old man.

And also be prepared for the contrast of the paper. The Orel or Nowak might be quite yellowed, and might contain handwritten annotations from other people who have checked out that score, while the Phillips will probably be a pristine and often sparse

white.

I. Feierlich, misterioso

The strings start with a tremolo on the note D, and the woodwinds come in without adding any harmony, setting the stage for the eight horns to intone this awe-inspiring theme in unison:



Unlike Beethoven, who seems to create the themes as we listen, Bruckner starts with the themes already formed.

Bruckner builds up to a terrifying theme for the entire orchestra:



(You will see accent marks for the winds instead of the down bow signs for the strings).

Then there is music with pizzicato strings that might remind you of the Third Symphony, but the mood has nothing to do with the naïve heroism of that earlier work. This leads to a lyrical theme in A major, but it is so full of melancholy and anxiety that it does not relieve the intensity of the music thus far:



Maybe Bruckner had written horns *gestopft* (a German word for a special horn technique) before, but as far as I can recall he used this technique only in the first movement of the Ninth, producing a subtly menacing mood (when he writes *gestopft* notes later on in the “development” the effect is downright sinister).

The third theme brings things back down to D minor and closes the exposition with an air of weariness. Robert Simpson says it would be more accurate to call this a statement, and the rest of this movement a counterstatement.

And he’s right, because although Bruckner was certainly

thinking about development and recapitulation, the line between the two is blurred to such an extent that it really makes more sense to call it a counterstatement.

However, the statement is an exposition in the sense that it exposes themes for the entire Symphony. Every theme in the Scherzo, Adagio and finale is mutated from a theme in this statement.

An important moment to highlight in the counterstatement is a very hazy allusion to the Seventh Symphony. Also notice how the themes of the statement are sometimes completely transformed in character by simple changes of intervals.

With a grinding dissonance with E-flats, the first movement comes to a fatalistic and desperate end.

II. Scherzo e Trio

A dominant chord with omitted root, sharp seventh and flat ninth, is how I would describe the chord with which the Scherzo starts off.

Doesn't sound all that unique on paper, but it has impressed almost everyone who has written about the Ninth Symphony, with many saying that it points ahead to the next century.

With sneaky strings Bruckner builds up anticipation to this battering rhythm:



Soon the entire orchestra is on this rhythm, and then the sneaky string line is transformed to violence.

An oboe solo brings down the the decibels but not the tension.



from Earth. I hear more the icy coldness.

And so the Trio ends in such a way that we are still just as on edge as we were at the beginning of the Scherzo, which is now repeated da capo.

III. Adagio

A pleading theme from the first violins begins the Adagio.



Note that the fifth and sixth horns have switched to tenor tubas in B-flat and the seventh and eight horns have switched to bass tubas in F. These are the so-called Wagner tubas, those modified horns that Bruckner first used in his Seventh Symphony.

This leads to an ecstatic passage, a blinding source of light that says there is still some genuine hope. But even here there is an eeriness, coming mainly from the string sonority, that undermines the hopefulness.

After this winds down, it is a quieter passage that offers a more realistic sense of hope.

But when the opening theme is repeated, you can tell Bruckner is setting up a major crisis point, and along the way to that crisis point, Bruckner gives pizzicato strings a very subtle allusion to the Scherzo. The culmination is a chord so discordant that Ferdinand Löwe felt it had to be smoothed out.

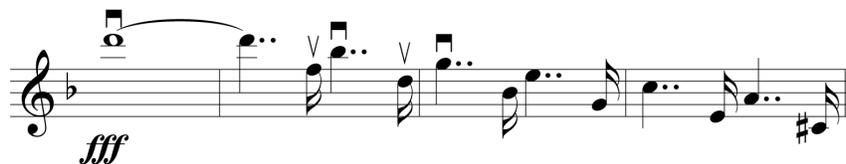
After a pause and a bit too easily, the music turns calm and winds down. What a lot of commentators have failed to notice in this coda is a tritone progression that will have consequences in the finale. The Adagio ends with the horns and tubas playing an E major chord.

IV. Finale

It is with a soft drum roll on G that Bruckner subtly brings us out of the Adagio. The wisp of a theme first served up is nervous and hesitant, but also very clearly related to the first big theme of the first movement.



The similarity is even more inescapable for the principal theme of the finale, presented in a unison like the principal theme of the first movement:



With this theme, the possibility of a triumphant rather than tragic conclusion seems likelier than at any prior point in the drama. The lyrical second subject group still has a strong tinge of melancholy, but there is also a sense of more positive things to come.

This is even more so with the chorale quoted by Gottfried von Einem in his *Bruckner Dialog*, accompanied there as here with triplets in the violins. This quotation condenses the horns' staves:



The use of a figuration from the Te Deum at the beginning of the development lends credence to Fritz Oeser's idea of writing a "bridge" from the finale fragments to the Te Deum.

But this figuration, which comes from the barbaric beginning of the Te Deum, here acquires a charming sweetness as it accompanies a flute melody.

After developing the second subject group themes a little bit, Bruckner starts a tense fugue based on the principal theme (Nikolaus Harnoncourt describes this fugue as "wild").

A horn theme appears, and although it feels new, it can clearly be traced back to previous themes.



Notice how far I have gotten without naming any specific completions?

There is a very Schubertian moment, somewhat more prominent in some completions than others. It is not surprising to find Schubertian traits so late in Bruckner's oeuvre, just as we should not be surprised to find Handelian traits in late Beethoven.



The continuation of this Schubertian moment, and the moment itself, are nevertheless unmistakably Brucknerian.

On the way to the coda, the sketches provide a clear indication

for one last crisis point, which most of the completers have taken to mean a recurrence of the second theme I quoted above for the first movement.

When John A. Phillips published the finale documentation, many thought there was nothing for the coda other than descriptions in words from people like Max Auer or Dr. Richard Heller.

Though we do not have the last page of the finale score, we do have sketches for the coda, so that by taking into account the descriptions in words, it is possible to join together the themes of the four movements in a way similar to what happens in the coda of the Eighth Symphony in its 1890 version.

At least that's what one of the completers has told me. Some other people who have also studied the available materials very thoroughly make a very pessimistic assessment regarding the coda. Henry Gough-Cooper, for example, wrote to John Berky:

“There are four brief four- and five-system short-score sketches for the coda, the first has some detail for 24 of its 36 bars, but then lapses into a 12-bar progression of whole- and half-note chords; the other two sketches are much more ambiguous and fragmentary ..., consisting of single lines of about one note or chord per bar with often two or more of the systems blank.”

Perhaps it is with the coda that suspicion of what the completers do runs highest. Reconstructing the coda goes way beyond the simple and routine interventions that are so frequently made on scores from the Baroque and Classical periods.

As I mulled over these remarks, it occurred to me that perhaps we are placing just way too much emphasis on the coda, even though Bruckner did come to regard the coda of the finale as being of greater importance as he became older and revised his earlier works.

Consider for instance how the Third and the Eighth Symphonies end in their original versions. These two finale codas are very much alike. How confident do you feel in your ability to write something like that but to end the Ninth Symphony?

Later on, in revising the Third Symphony, Bruckner used the trumpet theme that Wagner liked from the first movement, transfigured to D major, to conclude that work.

And he revised the Eighth Symphony to end with a “piling up” of themes from the previous four movements.

Keep in mind that revising the Eighth Symphony caused Bruckner to put the Ninth on hold. At the time Levi rejected the first version of the Eighth, Bruckner was very likely envisioning the Ninth to end pretty much the same way.

But after revising the Eighth, it makes sense to think that Bruckner would also want to end his Ninth in a way that ties the whole thing together at the end.

If we believe that there are no sketches for the coda available whatsoever, it would make perfect sense to try to see if the themes

of the Ninth Symphony can be piled up in a manner similar to the themes of the Eighth Symphony.

And if we can figure out how to pile up these themes, however vague the sketches for the coda may be, we can try to see if those vague sketches make any sense compared against how we have piled up the themes.

Let's say that no one can come up with a halfway decent attempt to reconstruct the coda and we resign ourselves to just not having a coda.

Does it make sense to ignore such a substantial amount of material over a few pages? Not to me, it doesn't. To those who'd much rather be listening to Tchaikovsky's Pathétique, well, yeah, I suppose it does.

It's like a jigsaw puzzle, to be sure, but we do have a lot of the pieces.

Weighing the completions

All the completions available on CD today give a very good idea of the first half of the finale, because the editors did not have to invent much.

After that, it takes either careful analysis of the available material or free composition to create a musically satisfying musical structure.

Some completions are better than others in the sense of coming closest to what Bruckner intended when he died. Others see a chance to sneak their own idiosyncratic ideas into a composition that has achieved an almost mythical stature.

Some conductors dismiss the idea of playing any finale completion or even the fragments as "experimenting." For others, the piousness of not playing any Bruckner score that has been meddled with by other hands outweighs the importance of presenting the Ninth Symphony closer to the complete entity Bruckner intended.

Nikolaus Harnoncourt figured out a way to have it both ways: play what we have of the finale with spoken explanations in the gaps. Fortunately for those of us whose German isn't as good as we would like, Harnoncourt recorded his remarks in English, too. The missing pages could be found "tomorrow," he declares.

But he must realize that even if that happened, those pages would still require a modern musician to make decisions on many details.

Some details may seem rather small to most listeners but are nevertheless details too big to be properly decided in rehearsal. They need to be decided before the first rehearsal.

Yoav Talmi has also recorded the finale fragments that were available to him at the time. The disc also includes William Carragan's first completion of 1983, so that listeners may judge for themselves what it is that Carragan has added and whether or

not they find it an appropriate deduction of what is missing from the available pages of Bruckner's score.

In the decades afterward, Carragan has edited some of Bruckner's other Symphonies for the Gesamtausgabe (such as the Second Symphony), but the finale of the Ninth maintained its grip on his psyche, and in an appropriately Brucknerian twist, he's revised his completion over the years.

Gerd Schaller with the Philharmonie Festiva has recorded Carragan's 2010 edition of the finale completion. The 4-disc set also includes the Fourth and Seventh Symphonies, with the Ninth occupying Discs 3 and 4. The Disc 3/Disc 4 break appropriately occurs between the Scherzo and the Adagio.

Carragan is not the only one to try to complete the finale nor the only one to revise his effort, though not all who try their hand at it lone wolf it like him.

Nicola Samale and Giuseppe Mazzuca did a realization in the 1980s which Eliahu Inbal recorded as part of his Bruckner cycle for Teldec, the cycle which gave the world some of the first recordings of earlier versions of Bruckner's other Symphonies.

The coda in this completion is appropriately like that of other first versions of Bruckner's Symphonies: essentially a "sheet of sound" single-mindedly on the tonic chord, but without recalling themes from the previous movements (compare the 1887 version of the Eighth Symphony for an instructive example).

Mazzuca dropped out of the team, and from 1986 onwards, Samale worked with Benjamin Gunnar Cohrs, and John A. Phillips joined the team in 1990, producing a new version that was recorded by the Bruckner Orchester Linz conducted by Kurt Eichhorn, Cohrs explains.

To some extent the revision being about ten minutes longer is because of Eichhorn's slower tempi (only slightly slower than Inbal for the three completed movements) but some should rightfully also be attributed to the team including more material.

In 2005, Samale and Cohrs released a new edition. Due in part to new philological insights, they revised again in 2008, and again in 2010 and 2011.

The Samale team figured out a way to pull off the combination of themes in the coda, and that is what you hear in the Eichhorn recording.

Their 1996 revision was recorded by Johannes Wildner on Naxos; if you must build your Bruckner cycle on Naxos, this might mean Tintner for most of the other Symphonies, but choose Wildner for the Ninth.

One of the most recent, and most rounded-out recording of a completion is that of the Berlin Philharmonic conducted by Sir Simon Rattle on the EMI label in 2012, using the "final impression" from the Samale team of 2011.

Everything sounds correct up to the end, but there is somewhat a sense of fatigue for listeners at the final crisis point.

Critics have blamed the unfamiliarity of the musicians with the finale, which is in sharp contrast to their familiarity with the three movements Bruckner completed (the Berlin musicians have played that more familiar music).

This is a problem for the listeners as well, which is why I am keen to emphasize that one should not listen to the finale by itself, but rather in context with the three completed movements.

But there is another problem, and to be quite brutally frank, that is the danger of monotony. In the Eighth Symphony, the potential for monotony is destroyed by the jubilant Scherzo with its serene Trio (which however does have precisely just the right shades of melancholy to not be out of place).

In the Ninth, the Scherzo is different in mood from the preceding movement, but its violence does nothing to relieve the prolonged intensity of the first movement. The Adagio also has its share of intensity, but at least it also suggests the ending might not be tragic after all.

Guarding against monotony in an 80-minute Symphony must at the same time be balanced with making sure the triumphant coda grows organically from what has happened before, and doesn't just feel tacked on and obligatory like in the Zeroeth Symphony.

The missing pages preceding the coda are perhaps even more crucial than the final pages, since those final pages could be deduced with a great deal of certainty even if they are indeed irrevocably lost.

Given that Bruckner clearly meant to end the Ninth with a triumphant conclusion, there are then two polar extremes of how the finale could go wrong.

On one end we have the aforementioned tacked-on victory. And on the other end, we have a victory that comes at the end of a battle fought long past the point people stopped caring.

The composer has to simultaneously show the light at the end of the tunnel but at the same time keep up the suspense. Bruckner surely thought about these issues (though certainly not with these words), or perhaps not even at a conscious level.

There is no doubt in my mind that Carragan and the Samale team are motivated in their work by a genuine desire to produce as close as possible an image of what Bruckner had come up with in 1896 with the available materials.

The members of the Samale team have carefully documented their decisions, so that we may see that they have been faithful to their understanding of the extant bifolios, and limited free composition as much as possible.

Although Carragan has not documented his completions as profusely as Samale et al, I am convinced that he is aware of his place in the big picture, and that he has not overstepped the boundaries within which a completer must necessarily confine himself.

I can't say the same for Sebastien Letocart, but that's because I am not really informed as to his methods and his goals, and I have only heard an excerpt of his completion on YouTube.

I have not examined his score nor his documentation of his procedure (I'm told his documentation is available only in French). The Ninth with the Letocart completion is available as a download from Amazon.com and from abruckner.com.

I have yet to listen to Jacques Roelands's completion, but from what Carragan has written, it sounds like Roelands's work must be taken seriously and be given full consideration.

For all my praise of Carragan, I must admit that I think that the Samale team has produced a much more convincing completion, one truer to Bruckner's spirit.

But I could change my mind on this as I become more familiar with Carragan's latest completion.

Carragan's first version seemed somewhat weak to me (but that could be Talmi's fault), while in the more dramatically powerful 2010 version, some elements closer to the coda strike me as strangely Mahlerian (there is a difference between counterpoint and amorphous Nature murmurs).

Still, Carragan has certainly done a much better job than Clinton Carpenter, whose completion of Mahler's Tenth has certain details that give me the impression that Carpenter is stepping on Mahler's toes.

Warren Cohen, conductor of Musica Nova Arizona, would disagree with my assessment of Carragan in relation to the Samale team. In 2009, he conducted Bruckner's Ninth with that orchestra, and he chose the Carragan completion for the finale.

"The notes in the new edition of the Cohrs et al version are terrifically informative and offer elaborate justifications for the choices the editors made in the parts where they contributed to the score," Cohen wrote in the orchestra's blog.

"In reading their justifications, I was struck by the fact that as elaborate and well thought out as they are, they are often speculative," he adds, and goes on to say that "In the final analysis, we are doing a performance, not a scholarly dissertation."

Maybe I don't care which bifolio of the sketches has what watermark, and maybe I don't care whether a particular bifolio was in Schalk's or Löwe's possession.

But I do care that anyone claiming to have completed Bruckner's Ninth has looked after such minute details, and I appreciate the ability to examine those minute details for myself if I am so inclined.

For after all, a composer could take some of the sketches, follow that up with some free composition with a couple of Bruckner's mannerisms thrown in for good measure and then claim that as a completion. Pastiche or parody are two other ways a finale completion can go wrong.

“Somehow, the extensive forensic analysis did not lead Cohrs et al to a joyous conclusion to the work,” Cohen opines. “The feeling of their coda is majestic ... but the ending lacks the feeling of joy Bruckner said he wanted.”

I think a composer’s words should be taken with a grain of salt. If he could think of the perfect words to express his meaning, maybe he should have been a poet rather than a composer.

This reminds me of Bruckner’s “Volkfest” finale for his Fourth Symphony. To me, that doesn’t sound like a “people’s festival” at all. Actually, I hear an undercurrent of tragedy.

Maybe the Cohrs et al coda for the finale of the Ninth does have the mood that Bruckner was going for, even if we call it “majestic” rather than “joyous.”

While I may disagree with Warren Cohen on various minor points, we should nevertheless hold him up as an example for other conductors to emulate.

Instead of blindly accepting the pronouncement of the “three-movement totality” by the music appreciation racket, Cohen has carefully examined the available performing versions and made his own decisions.

I have heard Cohen’s performance on YouTube, and it might still be available there by the time you read this. It’s a little bit hard to find, with John Berky’s Bruckner discography website providing the most direct route I could find.

Nors S. Josephson is not as well known as the other completers. His version is interesting for the highly apocryphal inclusion of a snare drum.

But more importantly, what seemed to me on first hearing to be a stronger reference to the first movement as a crisis point prior to the coda than what we find in the other completions, a procedure very similar to what Mahler does in his Seventh Symphony.

To my knowledge, Josephson’s completion has only been recorded twice. The first time was by the Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland Pfalz conducted by Ari Rasilainen in 2007.

The more recent recording is by the Aarhus Symphony Orchestra (known for their recordings of Vagn Holmboe’s Symphonies) conducted by John Gibbons.

Rasilainen manages to get through the finale in less than 14 minutes, perhaps suggesting how Carl Schuricht might have interpreted a finale completion.

The more leisurely pace of Gibbons’s recording, clocking in at a little over 20 minutes, allows one to appreciate various contrapuntal details Josephson seems to have added to the source material, perhaps crossing the line into free composition.

For the Gibbons recording, Josephson seems to have eliminated the snare drum. But at many points Gibbons sounds almost dull compared to Rasilainen.

Joan Schukking may be the least known of the completers. Schukking's coda sounds a lot like the one from the latest Samale et al completion, but there are one or two new ideas in it worth considering.

Like almost every other completer, Schukking has revised, and explained the process: "I have used three sketches that Bruckner possibly had intended for his coda, but between the first and second sketch I have composed 22 bars. I have also used some characteristics of the coda's [sic] of the finales of the symphonies which preceded the Ninth Symphony, in particular that of the Fourth ..., Sixth, Seventh and Eighth symphonies. So I have derived the musical material exclusively from the the first theme group of the finale. I have very little quoted from the other movements of the Ninth and nothing from other symphonies. I have only quoted the rhythmic motif of the Scherzo in the final cadence and in the final pedal point I have tried to combine four themes from the four movements. And I have given the melodic line to the wind instruments and the accompaniment to the violins as Bruckner did in his codas. I have published my thoughts about the coda of B9-4 in general in *The Bruckner Journal* of July 2013."

Having only done the coda, Schukking's completion is only available as a MIDI file, though Schukking is quite willing to provide score and parts if asked.

The same is probably also true of Jesus Masia, who has gone a few steps beyond Schukking and provided an MP3 of his own completion of the coda made from such high-quality sample libraries that at moments you may almost be fooled into thinking you're listening to a real orchestra.

But, as with most performances created with high-quality sample libraries, solo woodwind instruments in the softer passages are the dead giveaways that you are not hearing a real orchestra, though there can also be clues in the more fully orchestrated passages.

In his completion, Jesus Masia includes references to the finales of the Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Symphonies, but I have to admit that as much as I like those, they don't sound like convincing interpolations into the Ninth's finale.

But there are many interesting ideas that make me curious about hearing Masia's own original compositions.

The conductor Gerd Schaller has several important advantages over Schukking and Masia. For one thing, he had already conducted an orchestra in Bruckner's Ninth with Carragan's completion before embarking on his own completion.

So when Schaller announced that, I knew I had to take him seriously, and I waited with anticipation for the release of his recording with the Philharmonia Festiva.

For the first three movements, I did not notice anything different from his earlier performance with the Carragan

completion.

Though John Berky's discography does show a noticeably slower first movement and noticeably faster Scherzo and Adagio (more than a minute and a half for the latter) even though he's using the Nowak edition in both instances.

We probably should not draw any conclusions from Schaller going through Carragan's completion in little more than 22 minutes but taking almost 25 minutes for his own completion.

For the first seven minutes or so of the finale, nothing stood out as different from the other completers. And it shouldn't, because what Bruckner was able to write down was fairly close to what he held in his mind.

At about 7:40 was my first uh-oh moment the first time I listened, and there are other details that surprised me, but on repeated hearings, this and other details later on strike me more as a matter of orchestral emphasis than anything else.

I'm not completely convinced by the coda, though. The way it begins is not the resignation in the Eighth, leading to the realization that this is a victory after all.

Rather, the beginning of the coda in Schaller's completion sounds to me like we could go on fighting this thing for another hour or two.

That runs counter to Robert Simpson's principle of pacification, that in a Symphony Bruckner strives to go from conflict to peace.

I think ultimately that's what justifies placing the Scherzo second in both the Eighth and Ninth Symphonies. As optimistic and joyous as the Scherzo of the Eighth is, there is an awareness in the music that there is still a long way to go.

When the Scherzo of the Eighth is done, it is still possible for the Symphony to come to a tragic conclusion, because the arduous journey of the Adagio is still ahead.

And while a tragic conclusion might still seem possible at the beginning of the coda of the finale of the Eighth, one has to acknowledge that several moments in the finale prior to that are far calmer than anything in the prior movements.

Schaller's completion of the Ninth might be the most dramatic of them all, and that, in my opinion, is not necessarily a good thing.

But if Schaller's completion helps more people realize that Bruckner actually wrote a lot of the finale of the Ninth in what would have been the manuscript score, it would have been worthwhile.

And really, that should be the main take-away here. Bruckner wrote a lot of the finale of the Ninth, and several pages at the beginning of the score were very close to fully orchestrated.

Bruckner was done with the sketches. For roughly the last year of his life, he worked on the actual score of the finale of the Ninth.

To dismiss all that music just because someone else added a dot here or a slur there is absurd.

Conclusion

All this, taken together with Bruckner's desperate suggestion of using the Te Deum as finale very clearly indicates Bruckner intended his Ninth Symphony to be in four movements, and that he never considered the coda of the Adagio a suitable way to end the entire Symphony.

But note that even with Beethoven's precedent for a choral Symphony No. 9 in D minor, and the likelihood that he would not live to finish the finale, Bruckner continued to work on the finale of his Ninth, in a race against time.

The Te Deum is not the finale of the Ninth, and the Adagio is not the finale either. The finale is the finale.

With about ten or fifteen minutes' worth of music for the finale coming directly from Bruckner, can we really just ignore all that music and act like it doesn't even exist at all?

If you don't like Bruckner to begin with, then yeah, you definitely can. But if you have read this far, you probably do like Bruckner's music.

Despite all this work by all these different musicologists to take what is available of the finale of the Ninth, there are those using their positions of authority to spread lies and misinformation about the finale of the Ninth.

They falsely characterize Bruckner's own score, a work in progress that had progressed quite far, as merely sketches, and dismiss the work of the musicologists as somehow being "not really Bruckner."

Even though souvenir hunters helped themselves to pages of Bruckner's manuscript score of the finale, today we have a very good idea of just how close to finished the Ninth actually was.

If you can read music, you should look at the finale documentation in the Gesamtausgabe and judge for yourself how much needs to be filled in to create a musically satisfying structure.

Once you have listened to as many available completions as you can get your hands on (making sure to hear the finale in context immediately after the Adagio), and have reviewed the available documentation, you're ready to have an informed opinion on Bruckner's complete Ninth.

Maybe you don't think the finale Bruckner left is a valid conclusion to the Ninth, even after listening to the reconstructions in context and making certain allowances, and maybe you like it just fine as a three-movement work.

But if that's the case, you need to be honest with yourself that your preference is not backed up by the composer's wishes. Your preference is based on your own aesthetic assessment, and people

can respect your opinion if you're upfront about that.

Another point to chew on: what if there were also gaps in the three completed movements? Let's say, hypothetically, we were missing what Simpson describes as a "crudely scored apex" in the first movement, the reprise of the first Trio theme in the Scherzo, and roughly from bars 105 to 124 in the Adagio.

These passages could be reconstructed from sketches, or, if the sketches were also missing, they could still be reconstructed with great confidence on the basis of what happens around them, and also by comparison to similar moments in the Eighth Symphony.

I am sure that if there were these gaps in the first three movements, there would be people who would lie to us, saying that hardly anything has survived of the Ninth Symphony and therefore we should not bother trying to reconstruct it.

They would say that instead of a score there are only sketches, and that there is no validity in taking the liberty to complete them. They would completely deprive us of Bruckner's Ninth.

If we accepted their opinion in that scenario, then we would deprive ourselves of music that some consider to form one of the greatest Symphonies in the entire repertoire.

Even if the people in the scenario accepted what they have of the Ninth Symphony, there might be some who say that the missing pages contain much better music than what any musicologist can reconstruct.

And if those missing pages were somehow recovered after a performance tradition was established in which, say, the missing pages were just replaced by pauses, the music of the missing pages would sound rather unfamiliar and unconvincing, at least on first hearing.

But two of the gaps I have selected for this hypothetical scenario are precisely passages that Robert Simpson has described as not being quite on par with the quality we've come to expect from Bruckner.

Much worse scenarios than this could be our reality according to events at crucial junctures in 1895 and 1896. Bruckner not giving Karl Muck anything of the Ninth, for one, the executor of his estate taking even longer, being another.

Let's entertain a silly slippery slope idea: if we accept the finale, then we also have to accept a whole slew of new Bruckner works made without Bruckner's participation.

For instance, a rock opera titled *Astra* could be made by taking random passages from Bruckner's papers.

We do know that Bruckner considered using *Astra*, a libretto by Gertrud Bollé-Hellmund based on Richard Voss's novel *Die Toteninsel*.

So if you can find even just one melody in a sketchbook that could be reasonably attributed to *Astra*, and you want to reconstruct the whole opera, well, go for it. I doubt anyone will

ever find such a thing, though.

There is nothing wrong with using a Bruckner melody as a starting point for an original composition. I wish someone would write some variations on a theme by Bruckner (actually, Lowell Liebermann has written some, but he seems to be the only one).

But when you have an emerging manuscript score in Bruckner's hand, and what you're for the most part doing is inferring orchestral doublings and filling in gaps caused by the unauthorized removal of pages, can you call that original composition?

For the coda everyone would feel better if the final pages were finally found. But I think it is a mistake to assume that Bruckner's own coda is some kind of mystic revelation, when it is more likely just a refinement of what he had done in previous finale codas.

Therefore, a completer must not try to come up with anything innovative for the coda however much he thinks Bruckner might have innovated, but instead content himself with something that would not sound out of place to a casual Bruckner fan.

In my opinion, the most difficult music to reconstruct is the final approach to the coda. Imagine for a minute that we were missing the final pages of Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony. It wouldn't be too hard to guess what goes on the final page.

The pages leading up to that final page would be a little more difficult. Would it occur to the completer to recall the first subject theme from the first movement in the same way as Tchaikovsky? Maybe, maybe not.

An argument that holds way more water than the silly slippery slope notion is that with more time to work, Bruckner would quite likely have not just completed the finale but also revised it.

But he would also have revised the first movement and the Adagio. It makes sense to think that Bruckner would have improved the weak spots identified by Robert Simpson if he had had time.

Maybe then we should also deprive ourselves of the first movement and the Adagio of the Ninth, as they also represent unfinished music, massaged by various editors.

Can I get a second on that? Anyone? Anyone at all? Never mind. Withdrawn.

Another point to chew on: practically nothing you hear on a classical music radio station today is played straight from the composer's original score.

Engraved music has rendered most musicians incapable of playing music from handwritten parts, however neat the handwriting may be.

Also, many works of the core repertoire (Beethoven's, in particular) have been distorted by misprints from publishers and misinterpretations from conductors that have been accepted into the performance tradition as if they came directly from the

composer. Editorial intervention is then necessary to restore what the composer actually meant.

Lastly, composers are not perfect, they make mistakes just like anyone else. Plus they make assumptions about what is clear or not to their interpreters.

Sometimes these assumptions are understandable but it's still necessary for an editor to clarify what the composer meant by bringing the composer's notation into line with modern standards.

Other assumptions by the composer leave editors with puzzles that are not so easily resolved. Examples of both kinds of assumptions can be found even in Bruckner's completed works.

Sometimes editors dial down Bruckner's use of cautionary accidentals (some musicians go so far as to claim cautionary accidentals are never necessary) and change the way certain instruments are transposed (like cellos in the treble clef).

And sometimes editors puzzle over whether a certain pattern of articulation is meant to recur when Bruckner repeats certain melodies (like with the Fifth Symphony).

Problems of this sort are not unique to Bruckner. Plenty of examples can be found by reading the prefaces of various Urtext editions of Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, etc., from Bärenreiter.

If you are a conductor or an orchestra board and you want to put on Bruckner's Ninth, and you honestly want to respect the composer's wishes, you then only have three options:

- Present the finale fragments with spoken explanations between the gaps, like Nikolaus Harnoncourt.
- Perform a realization or completion.
- Use the Te Deum as makeshift finale.

But if you only want to play the three completed movements, with the end of the Adagio as the end of the concert, then you need to be honest with yourself and with the Audience that this is your personal preference and there is nothing from the composer himself to support it.

There is much in the finale that is exciting, dramatic and thoroughly Brucknerian. Orchestral musicians and listeners alike are curious about this music, but conductors remain skeptical. In my opinion, there is no good reason to deprive ourselves of this music.

At the 2015 Brucknertage, Carragan said that the finale, "even as a fragmented and patched-together assemblage, still has a great deal to tell us about the authentic inspiration and lofty goals of Anton Bruckner, and it is a pity not to take every opportunity offered to become familiar with it and its profound meaning."

It is extremely difficult to imagine how Bruckner would have completed the Ninth Symphony if he had had more time. But if we appreciate Bruckner, we need to come as close as we can to how Bruckner envisioned it at the time that he died.

I am not going to recommend any specific completion as the

best. Without having heard Roeland's completion, I am not informed enough to make such a recommendation. But I do strongly recommend the latest completions by Samale et al and by Carragan.

And I reiterate that it is important to listen to the Ninth Symphony as a whole, from beginning to end, in one sitting, or, if necessary, taking a small break between the Scherzo and the Adagio, rather than between the Adagio and the finale.

For further study

As long as this document may seem, it is only a summary of what we know about Bruckner's complete Ninth Symphony, a drop in the bucket of information now available on this previously obscured work. The wide margins help give an impression of greater length.

Further study should start with Volume 9 of the Gesamtausgabe, including the various supplements: the Revisionsbericht for the the three completed movements detailing the manuscript score in minute detail; documentation of the two discarded Trios for the Scherzo; documentation of the finale, including facsimiles of Bruckner's handwritten score; and a score with explanations in words (in German and in English) to be spoken in a "workshop" concert (like Harnoncourt has done).

Nowak is not the last word on the three completed movements. Benjamin Gunnar Cohrs says he has uncovered so much evidence to show that the three completed movements are even less finished than has been previously acknowledged.

In the Gesamtausgabe, Cohrs has put out a new score correcting many errors from the Orel and Nowak editions, and accompanied by the most extensive Revisionsbericht in the entire Gesamtausgabe.

A lot of the scores of the Gesamtausgabe might be available at a university library near you, except perhaps the most recent, like the latest research from Cohrs on the three "completed" movements.

For the more recent scores, you might have to go to the Musikwissenschaftlicher Verlag Wien (MWV) website, which has [a page in English](#).

Any good completion of the finale should have a thorough documentation of sources and methods, to inspire confidence that the completers went first according to Bruckner's score of the finale.

Then, where that is lacking, according to the sketches, then according to parallels from other Bruckner compositions, and only as an absolute last resort, free composition.

This is certainly the case with the final Samale et al completion, available from Musikproduktion Hoeflich. It seems to be the completion most open to detailed scrutiny, but I am not

aware of anyone actually carrying out such an examination yet.

There is also some documentation that deals specifically with the dispersal of the sketches, like Hans-Hubert Schönzeler's thin little book on the Krakow sketches (at the time this was published, it cemented the impression that completing the finale was hopeless).

I have not read the dissertation by John A. Phillips for the University of Adelaide but I intend to as soon as I can get my hands on a copy.

Benjamin Gunnar Cohrs has produced several documents, some of them almost 300 pages, in German and in English, and he has provided me PDFs of some.

By comparison, the 80-page booklet Cohrs wrote for the Eichhorn recording is short, especially considering that it duplicates the same text in Japanese, English and German.

Still shorter summaries are to be found in other recordings of the Samale et al completion, as well as the Harnoncourt recording of the finale fragments.

The only other completer to provide any sort of documentation that I am aware of is William Carragan, with his most recent essay being "Ground Rules for the Successful Completion of a Great Work," which he presented at the 2015 Brucknertage.

And now there are documents other than Bruckner's own that are hard to come by. The score from the first Samale and Mazzuca completion is now a relic very few people have.

There's more to list, but just what I have mentioned here makes for a lot to read. These documents include some speculation, but also a lot more hard facts than anyone could have imagined a century ago.

Glossary

In discussing Bruckner, there are certain German words that you are going to run into sooner or later.

In this document I have not shied away from using German words like "Gesamtausgabe" and "Revisionsbericht." There are actually a few more German words you're likely to run into even if you only look at articles and books on Bruckner in English.

So here are a few words and their definitions that you're likely to run into if you continue your study of Bruckner's music.

Bogen. Bifolios.

Gesamtausgabe. A complete edition of a composer's works, often including youthful works and incomplete works. The Bruckner Gesamtausgabe includes documentation of the finale of the Ninth Symphony as well as two volumes of Bruckner's letters (in German).

Gesangsperiode. The more lyrical, song-like second subject

group of a sonata form movement, like the first movement of a Symphony. Bruckner is said to have coined this term, but it has also proven useful for other composers, like Mahler and Sibelius.

Gestopft. A muting technique for the horn that makes for “a curiously nasal and metallic [sound], with a sharp edge to it” (Kent Kennan, *The Technique of Orchestration*). Composers who use this effect more than Bruckner probably use the French word “bouché” or the Italian word “chiuso.”

Hauptthema. The principal theme.

Revisionsbericht. A critical report detailing in great detail, in some cases bar by bar, the contents of the manuscript sources and prior editions used for a new edition. Most listeners would probably only skim these, but knowing of the existence of these reports should assure listeners of the validity of the edition.

Stichvorlage. The engraver’s copy of a score. Ideally the composer reviews this copy before the publisher runs off hundreds of copies.

Urtext. Literally “original text,” an edition that seeks to present the composer’s original music as clearly as possible, but in modern music notation. These editions are sometimes lacking in certain amenities, like rehearsal letters, which may or may not be easy to carry over from an edition the musicians are accustomed to playing from.

Exercises

To take away some of the mystery regarding what a completer does, I have come up with some simple exercises.

To do these exercises, you just need some basic knowledge of harmony, counterpoint and orchestration. You can easily check that you have done these exercises correctly by referring to the relevant scores.

Print out the following four pages and write on them with pen or pencil. Each page corresponds to one exercise described on this page, below.

1. This page from Michael Haydn’s Symphony in D minor (Perger 20, Sherman 29, Farberman 30) is missing the timpani part, the double bass part and most of the second violin part. Fill them in. Hint: In Haydn’s time, double basses generally just doubled the cellos at the octave.

2. In this page from a famous fugue by Johann Sebastian Bach, I have deleted some notes from measures 16, 17, 20 and 21. Identify and restore these notes.

3. This final page of Bruckner’s Eighth Symphony is missing almost everything. Without referring to the score, fill in the missing measures. I know, I know, I should have splurged on a second staff for the trumpets, but at least it spares you from having to deal with the F transposition for the first trumpet (sounding a perfect fourth higher than written, I’m guessing).

4. This final page of the first movement of Bruckner’s Ninth Symphony is missing almost everything. Without referring to the score, fill in the missing parts.

232

Ob.s

Bsn.s

232

Hn.s

a 2

B \flat Tpt.s

232

Timp.

232

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

Detailed description: This page of a musical score for a symphony in D minor, page 57, covers measures 232 to 235. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with multiple staves. The woodwind section includes Oboes (Ob.s), Bassoons (Bsn.s), Horns (Hn.s), and B-flat Trumpets (B \flat Tpt.s). The percussion section includes Timpani (Timp.). The string section includes Violins I (Vln. I), Violins II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Double Bass (D.B.). The key signature is D minor (two flats). The time signature is not explicitly shown but is implied to be 4/4. Measure 232 features a complex texture with chords in the oboes and bassoons, and a rhythmic pattern in the bassoons. Measure 233 shows the horns and trumpets entering with a melodic line. Measure 234 is marked 'a 2' and features a more active melodic line in the trumpets. Measure 235 continues the melodic development in the trumpets and bassoons. The strings provide a steady accompaniment throughout the measures.

14

Musical score for measures 14-16. The system consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. Measure 14 features a treble staff with a whole note G4 and a bass staff with a whole note C3. Measure 15 shows a treble staff with a half note G4 and a bass staff with a half note C3. Measure 16 has a treble staff with a half note G4 and a bass staff with a half note C3. The music is in C major and 3/4 time.

17

Musical score for measures 17-19. The system consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. Measure 17 features a treble staff with a half note G4 and a bass staff with a half note C3. Measure 18 shows a treble staff with a half note G4 and a bass staff with a half note C3. Measure 19 has a treble staff with a half note G4 and a bass staff with a half note C3. The music is in C major and 3/4 time.

19

Musical score for measures 20-22. The system consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. Measure 20 features a treble staff with a half note G4 and a bass staff with a half note C3. Measure 21 shows a treble staff with a half note G4 and a bass staff with a half note C3. Measure 22 has a treble staff with a half note G4 and a bass staff with a half note C3. The music is in C major and 3/4 time.

21

Musical score for measures 23-25. The system consists of two staves: a treble clef staff and a bass clef staff. Measure 23 features a treble staff with a half note G4 and a bass staff with a half note C3. Measure 24 shows a treble staff with a half note G4 and a bass staff with a half note C3. Measure 25 has a treble staff with a half note G4 and a bass staff with a half note C3. The music is in C major and 3/4 time.

741

Fl.s

Ob.s

B \flat Cl.s

Bsn.s

Hn.s 1, 2

Hn.s 3, 4

Ten. Tb.s

Bass Tb.s

C Tpt.s

T. Tbn.s

B. Tbn.

Tuba

741

Timp.

741

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.

Detailed description: This page of a musical score for Symphony No. 8 in C minor, page 125, covers measures 741 through 746. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with multiple staves for each instrument family. The key signature is C minor (three flats) and the time signature is 4/4. The woodwind section (Flutes, Oboes, Clarinets, Bassoons, Horns, Trumpets, Trombones, and Tuba) is mostly silent in these measures. The strings (Violins I and II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass) are active, with the Violins playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes and the other strings providing harmonic support. The C Trumpets have a melodic line starting in measure 741. The Timpani has a single note in measure 746.

560

Fl.s

Ob.s

B♭ Cl.s

Bsn.s

Hn.s 1, 2

Hn.s 3, 4

Hn.s 5, 6

Hn.s 7, 8

B♭ Tpt.s

T. Tbn.s

B. Tbn.

Tuba

560

Timp.

560

Vln. I

Vln. II

Vla.

Vc.

D.B.