

THE TRANSCRIPTIONS OF THE ORCHESTRAL WORKS FOR PIANO FOUR-HANDS

Transcribing and arranging orchestral works for piano four-hands was a popular activity in the 19th century since it made it possible for a wider public to become acquainted with the symphonic works of the day. With no phonographic equipment available and few public performances, this was essentially the only way that one could listen to any of Bruckner's symphonies,

Symphony No. 1

Arranged for Piano Four-Hands by Ferdinand Löwe

The arrangement of Bruckner's First Symphony was prepared by Ferdinand Löwe (1865 – 1925), who was one of the founders of the Vienna Symphony Orchestra and a great promoter of the symphonies of his teacher.

Symphony No. 2

Arranged for Piano Four-Hands by Joseph Schalk

The arrangement of the Second Symphony was prepared by the Austrian pianist, Joseph Schalk (1857 – 1900), who was also a pupil of Bruckner at the Vienna Conservatory and was executor of Bruckner's scores after the composer's death in 1896.

Symphony No. 3

Arranged for Piano Four-Hands by Gustav Mahler

Anton Bruckner's 3rd symphony in D minor became known to music historians as the "Wagner Symphony". In 1873 Bruckner travelled to Bayreuth and tried to persuade Richard Wagner, whom he greatly respected and admired, to endorse his new symphony. Bruckner dedicated the work, which contained numerous quotations from, and similarities to Wagner's work, to Wagner himself, "with the greatest respect".

However, doubts about the work soon set in and in 1877 Bruckner re-worked his "3rd symphony", creating a new version. The premiere, on December the 16th, 1877, was a disaster, and thoroughly failed to impress the Viennese audience, with the result that the symphony enjoyed little success until a revised version was composed in 1888/1889.

The adaptation of the 1877 version for piano four-hands was the work of the then 18-year old Gustav Mahler, and this is considered to be his first published work. It is no coincidence that Mahler, as a pupil of Bruckner's, was deeply impressed by this particular work: The "3rd symphony" is considered to be the first to show evidence of the quintessential elements of Bruckner's style, and, as Mahler was later to do with his symphonies, "create a whole world using the whole range of then available techniques."

Symphony No. 4

Arranged for Piano Four-Hands by Ferdinand Löwe

Anton Bruckner's Fourth Symphony in E-flat (WAB104), bearing the name "Romantic", is together with his Seventh Symphony his most popular. With this symphony Bruckner brought to a peak his habit of repeatedly revising his works throughout the years in order to "improve" them. While there are "only" three versions of the Third Symphony, no less than ten versions exist of the Fourth. The first version came out in 1874. The second version of 1878 was given a completely new Scherzo. Bruckner revised the Finale in 1879 and 1880. The symphony was premiered with much success in Vienna on February 20, 1881; Hans Richter conducted the Vienna Philharmonic on this occasion.

Transcriptions and arrangements of orchestral works, made for four hands at the piano, enjoyed much popularity in the 19th century. These would make the orchestral repertoire more accessible to a wider audience. The transcription used for this recording was made by Ferdinand Löwe (1865-1925) who as pupil of Bruckner and founder of the Vienna Symphony Orchestra was prominently involved in getting the symphonies of his teacher performed.

Symphony No. 5

Arranged for Piano Four-Hands by Otto Singer

Anton Bruckner finished his Fifth Symphony in 1875. He himself would speak about it as “my fantastic Symphony”. The work went through the same process as Bruckner’s earlier symphonies; it was rewritten, rearranged and revised. After three years of “improvements”, Bruckner was finally satisfied with his “contrapuntal masterwork” which (to continue with Wilhelm Furtwängler’s words) ended with the “most monumental Finale of all times”. Bruckner was ill and could not be present when the Symphony was premiered under Franz Schalk in Graz in 1894 and never had the opportunity to listen to the Fifth Symphony played by an orchestra.

The transcription used for this recording was made by Otto Singer (1863-1931 - son of the composer bearing the same name) who arranged all Bruckner symphonies for piano four-hands.

Symphony No. 6

Arranged for Piano Four-Hands by Joseph Schalk

Anton Bruckner began composing his Sixth Symphony on September 24, 1879 and completed it on September 3, 1881 in Sankt Florian, Upper Austria. This was the first major work which did not go through further revisions by the composer. Bruckner was able to hear this symphony only once during his lifetime, and only during an orchestral reading session. A first performance was given in 1899 (after the composer’s death) under the direction of Gustav Mahler, who substantially edited the symphony presenting it very much shortened. It was not until 1935 when, under Dutch conductor Paul van Kempen, the Sixth Symphony was heard for the first time in its full length according to the original score.

Bruckner himself spoke of his Sixth as the “keckste Sinfonie” (The “perky” Symphony) - this is fitting, not only because of the pun. Due to its compositional layout, quite daring and modern in those times, but also because of its harmonic and motivic boldness, it has earned a definite place in the orchestral repertoire list. The Adagio of the Sixth is a template for the later Adagio of the Seventh Symphony, which has acquired much renown.

The arrangement for piano four hands was made by Austrian pianist Joseph Schalk (1857-1900) who was Professor at the Music Conservatory of the Vienna Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde. He arranged for the piano the Symphonies of his teacher Bruckner, who in his testament designated Schalk as the administrator and curator of his scores.

Symphony no. 7

Arranged for Piano Four-Hands by Franz and Joseph Schalk

"A symphonic gigantic boa constrictor, contrived, bloated, abnormal, noxious..." - the influential Viennese music critic Eduard Hanslick branded Bruckner’s Seventh Symphony with these dubious attributes. This was one of the reasons why this work was not premiered in Vienna but instead received its first performance on December 30, 1884 at the Stadttheater in Leipzig under the direction of Arthur Nikisch.

The Seventh was dedicated to King Ludwig II of Bavaria after an acclaimed celebrated second premiere in Munich with Hermann Levi as conductor. Levi spoke of it as, "the most significant symphonic work since Beethoven's death". Two years later, in 1886, the Symphony had its successful Viennese first performance with Hans Richter conducting the Vienna Philharmonic.

Nowadays, the Seventh is probably Bruckner's most performed symphony. The composer had to wait until he was 60 years old to be able to enjoy its first resounding success. This work sealed his international reputation as symphonic composer and finally, after many years of disappointments, gave him true recognition.

We owe this piano four-hand version to Franz and Joseph Schalk who as students of Bruckner arranged several of his symphonies, effectively contributing to the dissemination and popularity of Bruckner's work.

Symphony No. 8 in C minor (1884-1892)

Arranged for Piano Four-Hands by Joseph Schalk

„This Symphony is the creation of a giant and surpasses all other symphonies by the Master in its spiritual dimension, with its richness and its grandeur“. These were the words of composer Hugo Wolf, who was deeply impressed after attending the premiere of this work in Vienna on December 18, 1892. The composition dedicated „To the Imperial Royal Apostolic Majesty, Kaiser Franz Josef the First“ was enthusiastically revelled by the press as „The Crown of Music of our Times“. Bruckner had previously held deep doubts about his new composition and made multiple revisions and changes to its first version of 1887 after conductor Herman Levi rejected the score sending it back with strong recommendations. The magnitude of this work attested by Hugo Wolf manifests itself in varied aspects, above all in its length, which dwarfs all other Bruckner's compositions. Bruckner would speak of his Eighth as a „Mysterium“ and used to say he drew the inspiration to conceive it from Richard Wagner's world of sound and sense, but also after a historic encounter between the Austrian emperor with the Russian czar Nikolaus III. Karajan biographer Richard Osborne was right on the money when he wrote: „Bruckner's Eighth stands like the Mount Everest among all 19th century symphonies“.

We owe this piano four-hand version to Joseph Schalk who arranged several of Bruckner's symphonies, effectively contributing to the dissemination and lasting popularity of his teacher's work.

Symphony No. 9 in D Minor (1887 - 1896)

Arranged for Piano Four-Hands by Joseph Schalk and Ferdinand Löwe

Analogous to Ludwig van Beethoven's ninth symphony, Bruckner's Ninth can be regarded as a musical testament of the composer. Among all his works, this symphony carries a special distinction: despite being his last composition in this genre, left unfinished, it is concurrently a beam shining light upon the future of music history. According to a verbal report by the composer's doctor, Bruckner dedicated this work „to the Majesty of all Majesties, the Loving God“.

Shortly after the completion of the first version of his Eighth Symphony in 1887, Bruckner began drafting his Ninth. Its genesis got off to a slow start and was hampered by work on new editions of earlier symphonies and two large scale commissions. Bruckner completed the third movement in 1894 and worked on the Finale until his death on October 11, 1896, leaving it unfinished.

During the twentieth century several composers and musicologists embarked on different attempts to reconstruct the incomplete fourth movement. After extensive research, several possibilities emerged that could complement the extant fragments.

But either way, the first three complete movements firmly underscore how innovative Bruckner's late creations are with regards to harmony and instrumentation. The Ninth points far into twentieth century developments regarding harmony and instrumentation.

We owe the version for piano four-hands of this symphony to Bruckner students Joseph Schalk (1857-1900) and Ferdinand Löwe (1865-1925). Both dedicated themselves to disseminating the composer's work.

Symphony No. 0 in D Minor – “Die Nullte” (1869)

Arranged for Piano Four-Hands by August Stradal

Contrary to what was previously accepted, Bruckner's Symphony in D minor (WAB 100) was not composed between October 1863 and May 1864, but in 1869, three years after his first numbered Symphony in C minor (1865/1866) had been premiered. Later in 1871, the composer, who during his life was quite sensitive to criticism, omitted this “Symphony No. 2” from his catalog of works.

In 1895, one year before his death, while preparing his scores for posterity, the composer wrote on the title page of this Symphony the remarks “not valid”, “only an attempt”, “futile”, “revoked”, and further underlined his dissatisfaction with the composition adding a slashed zero (“ø”) as a deletion sign.

The Symphony was consequently found among the composer's papers. Its unabridged premier took place in 1924 during events in Klosterneuburg, Vienna, commemorating Bruckner's hundredth birthday.

It seems that Bruckner had wanted to test new structural solutions in the “Nullte” before using them fully in later symphonies. The Third Symphony benefitted particularly from the lessons learned from “Die Nullte”. Traces of these solutions are perceptible in the Ninth as well. Even when the second and fourth movements of the “nullified” exhibit a certain degree of unfinishedness, these should not be underrated and should be considered integral steppingstones in the development of the symphonist.

The version for piano four-hands was made by the highly respected pianist August Stradal. As a student of Bruckner, Stradal worked on a large number of piano transcriptions of the composer's symphonies. He also worked with Franz Liszt between 1884 and 1886 and accompanied him as his last student to Budapest, Bayreuth, and Rome. Stradal's piano four-hand transcription of “Die Nullte” was discovered as a handwritten manuscript in the Austrian National Library in Vienna.