

**Comments on this EXPERIMENTAL restoration/completion of Toscanini's 1935 live Bruckner Sym. No. 7
by 'anonymous'**

=====

I have had a copy of this 'elusive' recording artifact for nearly 38 years but could only bring myself to listen to it in its entirety ONCE: for something less than a minute of music is missing, with the last 13-14 seconds of the first movement coda being the most annoying; there is another long segment missing in movement 4, and a bit taken out of movement 2. In addition, a short rest is missing in the first movement; more on that below.

This flawed, incomplete artifact conveys the majority of a truly great, idiomatic performance of the great Bruckner symphony, which brought the composer more acclaim than any previous work during his own lifetime. Even "Toscanini haters" -- who object to his frequently fast tempi; the close-in recording balance of NBC's Studio 8H; the unflagging intensity that often fails to allow certain types of music to "breathe"; and the sometimes clipped phrase-endings and abhorrence of dramatic rhetoric, "downplaying" the very elements in some romantic works that most people love best -- may find this performance of the Seventh to be "uncharacteristically" satisfying. As often noted in some of the earlier examples of preserved Toscanini performances, this one has some occasional use of tempo rubato, particularly in the first movement (he tended to eschew this in later live NBC Symphony performances and, especially, in recordings. But tempo rubato to Toscanini was like Dorothy Parker's remark about the emotive qualities expressed by Kathryn Hepburn: running the gamut from A to B. It is NOT at all like the more indulgent tempo fluctuations of the earlier romantic interpretive traditions.) Furthermore, the tendency of Toscanini to employ faster-than-usual tempi is certainly NOT evident here; in particular, the finale is strikingly broader than the pacing of many modern performances.

According to Bruckner scholar John Berky (abruckner.com) this version of the Seventh uses the Alfred Gutman edition, being a revision of the original score with some amendments by Bruckner himself. The score was published in Vienna in 1885, and in New York in 1895; a good scan of a clean copy is available free online from the IMSLP website at this URL:

[https://imslp.org/wiki/Symphony_No.7_in_E_major,_WAB_107_\(Bruckner,_Anton\)](https://imslp.org/wiki/Symphony_No.7_in_E_major,_WAB_107_(Bruckner,_Anton))

I did the entire restoration/"completion" edit from aural memory of the work, but one detail continued to bother me. At about 9:32 elapsed time from the very start of the file containing the first movement, there was an obviously missing spot: a bad edit that -- speculatively -- might have been a poor side-join of the old live-transcriptions, or alternatively, a rudimentary attempt to excise a needle-skip. The day after I finished the editing, I downloaded the Gutman edition, above, and confirmed the issue: a missing dotted-eighth rest near the end of page 15. My "fix" was to separate the badly joined phrase; add the rest; continue the surface noise; and to fix the first fraction of a second of the next note, which had been shaved. My memory was good; but I have only followed the score for most of the first movement; if anything else is amiss, I shall correct the problem in the future.

I chose Bruno Walter's live performance with the same orchestra, the Philharmonic-Symphony of New York, in a live CBS broadcast on December 23, 1954, also in Carnegie Hall, to fill the missing spots; according to John Berky Walter also used the same Gutman edition, perhaps likely in the library of the Philharmonic. Walter and Toscanini were especially close colleagues and family friends in the 1930s and,

indeed, some of the early Walter records (pre-LPs) and broadcasts are almost "Toscaninian" in their intensity and tempi; later he seemed to become more mannered, and slower and more introspective. It's conceivable that Walter's early Bruckner symphony performances might have been relatively close to Toscanini's style of the early thirties. As it is, I think that Otto Klemperer's 1933 New York Philharmonic performance of the Bruckner 9th is 'cut out of the same cloth' as this Toscanini interpretation; Klemperer was, in those days, also a near-idolator of Toscanini, admiring his selfless 'literalism' and freedom from the worst 19th-century interpretative excesses.

Naturally, the sound quality of my taped aircheck (a 'samizdat' copy passed around by ardent Brucknerians and Walter fans that I acquired in the 1980s) sounded much better than the Toscanini disks. So to prevent the listener from being unduly disturbed and distracted by the inserts, I filtered the bandwidth to resemble the limited spectrum of the 1935 source, and 'continued' the same surface noise (which I extracted and edited together from numerous silent places in the Toscanini transcriptions.) Slight pitch corrections were also necessary, as my copy of the Walter broadcast varied MORE in pitch than the old transfer of the Toscanini disks!

The other, familiar NYP performances by Toscanini that have had wide distribution sound rather similar to this Bruckner artifact. It is said that many, if not most, of Toscanini's pre-NBC performances in New York were recorded for Marcia Davenport, who was -- needless to say! -- a Toscanini enthusiast, bar none. These were recorded by a commercial enterprise in New York, picking up the CBS broadcast signal and transferring them to disks; Marcia apparently played them 'to death' and the ones that have been transferred to LP and later on independent CD labels, are equally noisy, distorted, and limited in sound quality. Could this be one of the Davenport items? I seem to hear, at times, surface clicks that indicate a 78 rpm disk; in other sections the different character of the noises, and their repetition rates, suggests a 33.3 rpm master; both speeds were used for "instantaneous" disk transfers in that time period. In fact, the shellac-covered aluminum disk substrate was introduced to the market in 1935; before that, it was more common to use uncoated aluminum disks and an embossing process, which produced VASTLY inferior sound compared to what it heard on this performance.

The transfer I've used is not exactly the same identical material copy I had on open reel tape, decades ago; but if memory serves, it *sounds* identical. I am sure it could not be the Pristine Audio issue restored by Andrew Rose; I've heard an excerpt of it on his website -- the scherzo -- and it had been equalized in a radically different manner; had added echo; and benefited from noise reduction. The transfer I used, sent to me by a fellow collector with no provenance, had BILLIONS of ticks 'n' pops; the usual grungy disk noises and gouges; wildly varying hiss levels; and other defects related to its incompleteness: one section in the last movement sound suspiciously like the effect one heard with an old Ampex 300 or 350, put into "record" mode to erase the end of a segment. So, it was "raw", unedited, and painful to the ear. In addition, for quite a while in almost each movement there is a piercing, penetrating high frequency distortion (disk wear from a heavy arm or bad stylus?) that is impossible to "repair" to any extent; all one can do it filter it, reducing presence and clarity--and I've been reluctant to do that to any significant extent. Bass-boosting was simply *impossible* due to a huge number of LF bumps, gouges, and thumps that would have become horrendously intrusive.

After I finished the editing -- that is, what I could STAND to do, which includes the manual cycle-by-cycle correction of hundreds of scratches that modern de-clicking software will not TOUCH -- I gave the final

file one SMALL pass of very light envelope noise reduction to try to tame the highs above about 3500 Hz. There are no significant real musical tones on the disks, above about 5k: just distortion, crackle, and hiss.

I have not added any ambience nor changed the balance of tone to any significant extent; what you hear on the raw tape is very close to my end result in terms of balance. But the dynamics on the raw copy were not "real" as some sides were pretty soft; others were very loud--not related to the music or score. I did make a slight attempt to fix the VERY obvious "soft sides" by increasing their gain slightly. No automatic "unlimiting" was done. The ONE small spot of ambience was added to a *fraction of a second* at that missing dotted-eighth rest at 9:32 in the first movement. I had to overlay a tiny bit of reverb to fill in the "dead zone".

I am pretty sure that my "heresy" in combining a Toscanini and a Walter performance of the wonderful Bruckner 7th would infuriate BOTH great conductors; but it is only an EXPERIMENT. No animals were harmed in the filming of this epic; the original still exists, unaltered; and my conscience is clear.

An anonymous recording engineer & Bruckner/Walter/Toscanini enthusiast

17 November 2019