

Bruckner was a late starter – not as a composer, but as a master. Although he wrote music from his childhood, he was 40 when he produced his first fully representative work – the Mass in D minor – and 42 when he completed his First Symphony. It is not surprising, then, that he should have waited a long time for recognition; but it seems extraordinary that it did not arrive until he was 60, with the performances of the Seventh Symphony in Leipzig under Arthur Nikisch (December 1884) and in Munich under Hermann Levi (March 1885).

His misfortune was to have settled in Vienna, where the anti-Wagner faction headed by Hanslick saw him (quite falsely) as a “Wagnerian symphonist,” and lost no opportunity of belittling his music in the press. It is significant that his sudden successes with the Seventh Symphony were in Leipzig and Munich: the first was due to his pupils, the brothers Franz and Josef Schalk, who had played the work on the piano to Nikisch and found him enthusiastically receptive; the second was due to Levi, who had discovered Bruckner himself and become a devoted champion of his cause.

Bruckner, with characteristic humility, called his new friend Levi “my artistic father”; and on completing his Eighth Symphony, in 1887, he sent him the score with what might seem an unnecessarily timid plea – “May it find grace!” His timidity, however, proved entirely justified. Levi, faced with this new, adventurous, complex work, found it quite impenetrable. Unable to bring himself to write to Bruckner, he asked Josef Schalk to convey the bad news – but the result was the same: the 63-year-old composer was utterly cast down by this negative reaction from such a great musician. He felt obliged to undertake a revision, which he completed in 1890; even so, the first performance, two years later, in Vienna, was conducted, not by Levi, but by Hans Richter.

Whether Levi criticised any particular features of the work is not known; it seems most likely that he was bewildered by the score as a whole. Nevertheless, his incomprehension was fortunate, in a way, since Bruckner’s revision brought three major gains: the wonderful tragic ending of the first movement, which replaced a fairly obvious blaze of *fortissimo* C major; the deeply affecting melody of the trio of the *Scherzo*, which superseded a rather undistinguished one; and a reorganisation of the tonal relationships in the *Adagio*, making the movement convey its content much more powerfully. These alterations have been accepted by everybody as manifest improvements, and there can be no question of reviving the original score.

Unfortunately, as with nearly all Bruckner’s other revisions, he was not left to work on it alone, but was influenced and assisted – in this case by Josef Schalk. The interference of Bruckner’s devoted colleagues and pupils was, of course, entirely well-intentioned – the cuts and reorchestrations they forced on him, or carried out of their own accord, were completely in the interests of making his works more “effective,” and thus more accessible to the public of the time; but now that Bruckner has become generally recognised as a master, we can only try to eliminate the results of this interference, and hear his music as he himself intended it to sound. The trouble is that, in the case of the Eighth Symphony, this is a very controversial matter. In the final score, six passages were cut from the original (one in the *Adagio* and five in the *Finale*), totalling 60 bars in all, and these

excisions were undoubtedly due to the influence of Josef Schalk; but the score is entirely in Bruckner's own hand.

Luckily, when the Bruckner Society was founded, with the express purpose of publishing scores of Bruckner's works which fulfilled his own intentions, the first editor, Robert Haas, had the insight, and the courage, to restore all these passages from the original score; and it is his edition which Bernard Haitink has used for this record. The justification of Haas's procedure is largely the internal evidence that the cuts are so crude — the kind of thing one might expect, not from a great composer, but from a certain type of conductor (not from Mr. Haitink, however, who says that he does not find these cuts satisfactory, in spite of their being sanctioned by Bruckner's own hand).

But there is also one illuminating piece of external evidence to support this view. In the original score of the finale, the second part of the exposition's second group (seventh bar after letter E, to letter F) lasts for 14 bars, and this passage remains untouched in the final score; but when it returns in the recapitulation (seventh bar after letter Nn, to letter Oo), whereas the original score expands it superbly to 16 bars, the final score truncates it drastically to a mere four bars. This truncated passage ends with an awkward attempt to link forward harmonically to what follows, which looks very much like Bruckner himself working under the pressure of another opinion; and indeed, when the score was in the publisher's hands for the first edition of 1892, Josef Schalk, without Bruckner's knowledge, truncated the exposition's passage in a similar way, but without being able to provide even a feeble harmonic link forward. He gave as his reason, in a letter to the publisher, that the "reminiscence of the Seventh Symphony" here seemed "quite unmotivated" to him; and since both passages contain this supposed "reminiscence," it is evident that he was also responsible for the cut in the recapitulation. It seems inescapable that the humble Bruckner, accepting Schalk's presumptuous demand for these truncations, made the one in the recapitulation as best he could, but overlooked the one in the exposition: his heart was simply not in it.

The result was to create a meaningless lack of balance between the two statements of the second subject — and so Schalk "put it right" himself in the first edition, by simple excision. This shows that he was at least interested in getting the score to make sense; whereas to insist on the letter of Bruckner's final score, as Leopold Nowak does in the second of the Bruckner Society's two editions of the work, may well be to perpetuate a simple piece of muddling.

How much wiser was Robert Haas, in getting rid of Schalk's influence entirely, here and in the other places! And the same may be said of his restoration of many felicities of texture and orchestration from the original, which Bruckner had watered down in going over the score again. Haas's aim was to reconstruct the final form that the symphony would have taken if Bruckner had been left to carry out his revision himself; and if we have to admit that we can never know exactly what that would have been, Haas's edition is probably the nearest we are ever likely to approach to it.