

Bruckner's Eighth Symphony: Some Editorial Issues

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In the first act of *Siegfried*, a mysterious Wanderer lures the hapless dwarf Mime into a game of riddles. Each is required to ask the other three questions about the history of the Ring. Poor Mime is the only one in the opera house unaware that the game is rigged. His adversary is none other than Wotan in disguise, the god who caused all the trouble in the first place. Not only can the Wanderer respond to all of Mime's questions, he crushes the dwarf with a query that only the god himself can answer: who can forge the pieces of Siegmund's sword anew after Wotan had shattered it? Of course only he who is without fear can accomplish the task – not Mime.

Having worked now on the critical report for Bruckner's eighth symphony for more than five years, I have learned to empathize with poor Mime. Only the gods may be able to answer some of the riddles. Here I would like to share some preliminary conclusions about the sources – answers to the equivalent of Mime's three questions:

Which modern edition of the 1890 score more accurately reflects the surviving manuscripts: Haas or Nowak?¹

What is the music "for later times" that Bruckner recommended the conductor, Felix Weingartner, cut from the Finale?²

How reliable is the first edition?³

To begin, a brief recapitulation of the history of the symphony: Bruckner composed what is now known as the first version between the summer of 1884 and August 1887. In September of that year he sent the score to one of his staunchest supporters, the conductor Hermann Levi, in the hopes of obtaining a first performance in Munich. Levi's now famous rejection of the symphony in early October of 1887 served as a catalyst for a tortuous series of revisions that resulted in what is now referred to as the second or 1890 version of the symphony.⁴ In 1892 the first edition appeared, edited by Josef Schalk and Max von Oberleithner. It differed from both manuscript scores, although the 1890 version served as its starting point.

To date, the truly astronomical number (by Bruckner's standards) of seventy-nine primary sources for the symphony, by far the most for any of his compositions, have been identified in libraries and private collections throughout the world. Undoubtedly more will be found. At least five sources known to have existed during the composer's lifetime have yet to surface.⁵ The first point to be made here is that, as Dermot Gault alluded in his work on the Adagio, we should forget all traditional notions of clear-cut first and second versions of the symphony.⁶ These will be referred to from here on as the 1887 and 1890 readings. Bruckner was so zealous, one might even say obsessive, in making his revisions that he left behind hundreds of superseded sketches and score pages in varying states of completion from the entire span of 1884 to 1890. The number of variant readings for the four movements is so overwhelming – almost 1,000 pages in all – that we have yet to decide how to deal with them in a practical manner from an editorial perspective.

Perhaps the most significant contribution of work on the critical report has been the discovery, in private possession, of the earliest copy score of the 1890 reading of the symphony. The copyist, Victor Christ, began writing this score on 10 March 1890, the date of the composer's final revision and, with the exception of very minor discrepancies, copied the final reading of the autograph verbatim. Considered in conjunction with autograph materials, with the almost contemporaneous engraver's copy for the first edition, and with correspondence of the composer and his students, the newly-found manuscript provides unequivocal answers to the three questions posed at the outset.

In the course of making his revisions for the 1890 reading, Bruckner deleted a number of passages in the Adagio and Finale without discarding the bifolios from the autograph score as he had done with dozens of others. Instead, for reasons as yet to be determined, he left the crossed-out measures in the autograph score. Robert Haas restored most of these deletions in his edition. He also reverted to the orchestration of 1887 in a number of places. Apart from a well-documented personal addition, Haas in fact printed a mixture of intermediate stages of the work. By contrast, with two notable exceptions to be discussed below, Leopold Nowak's edition contains the reading in the autograph score of 1890 – i.e. without the passages Bruckner had deleted.⁷ Nowak's score is undoubtedly closer to Bruckner's final intentions.

The reading in the Nowak score was the one Bruckner sent to Weingartner for a first performance that never materialized in Mannheim and the one the composer gave to Josef Schalk and Max von Oberleithner for printing in 1891. It was this

reading to which Bruckner referred in his famous letter of 27 January 1891 to Weingartner:⁸

Please shorten the Finale as marked because it would be much too long and is valid only for later times, to be sure, for a circle of friends and aficionados

From an editorial perspective, the operative phrase in this passage is “as marked.” The cuts in question are measures 345-386 and 583-646 of the Finale, both of which in fact are designated as optional readings in the autograph score and the copy in private possession. Dermot Gault pointed out the first of the two optional cuts in his study of the symphony. Otherwise it has been impossible for modern performers and scholars to identify the cuts because neither Haas nor Nowak included the shorter alternative readings in their editions.

They are found on Fols 144r and 168r of the autograph score in the Music Collection of the Austrian National Library, Mus. Hs. 19.480/4. Both folios (144 is actually the first of a bifolio) were inserted at rehearsal letters Z and Pp respectively for the sole purpose of including the alternative shorter readings. At measure 345 Bruckner instructed that rehearsal letter Z should not be played in the abbreviated version and, at 583, partially erased: *eliminate rehearsal letter Pp and skip to Uu*. At measure 345 Bruckner added a new four-measure transition with an indication that it led directly to rehearsal letter Aa (measure 387). The transition will be printed in the critical report. The purpose of these alternate readings is clarified in the newly found manuscript where Victor Christ added annotations, presumably at Bruckner’s instruction. At measure 345 he wrote: *if the cut is taken, skip bifolios 17 and 18 and go directly to bifolio 19*. At the end of the cut, before the four-measure alternative transition leading to measure 386, he wrote: *when the cut is taken, use*

the following 4 measures which lead directly to rehearsal letter Aa. And at measures 580-581: In cases of extreme necessity, skip from Pp to Uu.

Finally a word about the first edition: After the *Bruckner-Streit* of the 1930s, the first editions more or less disappeared from the corpus of performed Bruckner scores. During the late 1970s Manfred Wagner called for their re-evaluation and, in recent years, Thomas Roeder, Ben Korstvedt and others have demonstrated that their universal banishment was in fact misdirected.⁹ With the exception of relatively minor editorial emendations, the printed scores of symphonies three and four, for example, contain bona fide versions. The same cannot be said for the first edition of the eighth. The engraver's score, in the Archive of the Society for the Friends of Music in Vienna (A178a), was at first identical to the autograph and newly found copy. Two of its movements were also copied by Victor Christ. Today it contains hundreds of additions and changes in the hands of Josef Schalk and Max von Oberleithner, including cuts to the Finale different from those recommended by the composer, numerous additional tempo indications, and the systematic replacement of Bruckner's block dynamics with terraced crescendi and diminuendi. The only autograph entrance in the entire manuscript is the annotation *1. Satz* on the wrapper of the first movement.

Extensive correspondence between the two editors survives in the Music Collection of the Austrian National Library.¹⁰ These letters demonstrate that, as in the case of the Mass in F Minor and fifth symphony, the editors conspired to keep most of their alterations secret from Bruckner until it was too late for him to object. The following citation is taken from a letter from Josef Schalk to Oberleithner dated Vienna, 31 July, 1891:

Dear Sir:

After a week of the most arduous labor, the score of the Finale [of the eighth symphony] is finally ready for printing. It was no small chore. The numerous alterations that I perceived as necessary throughout could only be done properly with the most careful attention to detail. You will easily recognize that my objectives were clarity of effect and expression. Moreover I was fortunate to identify a most appropriate and easily implemented cut [measures 523-580] from the last page of bifolio 24 to rehearsal letter Pp (in place of those designated by the composer who would have made a victim of the two most interesting parts of the movement). With my cut only a relatively unnecessary crescendo [Steigerung] and the repetition of the otherwise lengthy chorale-like second group [Gesangsperiode] are missing.*

I assure you.....that I have made only the most necessary alterations; much had to remain unchanged, because to do otherwise would have been irresponsible.

If you harbor any doubts, please get in touch.

I was not able to pass your greetings on to Bruckner because, when I went to visit him, his apartment was closed. He had already left. We can both only be happy about that in his best interests.

And on 5 August Schalk cautioned Oberleithner:

Please only communicate with the publisher about the corrections. If Bruckner has to read from a hand-written score at a rehearsal, all of our good intentions will come to naught, and instead of his thanks, we may earn his wrath.

Pleas for the revival of the first edition have been based upon claims that the spurious additions and deletions reflected contemporary practice, and that Bruckner was aware of what Schalk and Oberleithner were doing.¹¹ However valuable the additional editorial markings may be as reflections of late nineteenth-century performance practice, there is no evidence that Bruckner had any knowledge of their presence in his score of the eighth symphony until after it appeared in print. Proponents of the first prints pointed out that the student editors were devoted to Bruckner and were in touch with him about their alterations.¹² The

Schalk/Oberleithner correspondence indicates that the editors did indeed communicate with Bruckner about some of the changes. It also demonstrates that the editors eventually lost patience with what they must have felt was Bruckner's pedantry and began, not only to make changes without consulting him, but also to deliberately conceal them from him. This change in attitude appears to have taken place among the editors over a period of years. As Thomas Roeder observed, in the 1889 version of the third symphony, Franz Schalk and the composer worked hand-in-hand to produce a unique amalgam. A similar process resulted in the first edition of the fourth. The students grew less and less tolerant of the composer's interference through the early 1890s. Eventually, with the Mass in F Minor and the fifth and eighth symphonies, they came to disregard him all together.

What constitutes a bona fide version is a question that, as with so many others about Bruckner's revisions, must be answered once piece at a time. That is perhaps the strongest argument in favor of continuing editorial efforts on the composer's behalf, however many different readings they may turn up. Completing a critical report for the eighth symphony will not produce a new definitive reading of the symphony. It has already turned up valuable sources that shed new light on editorial issues that have perplexed performers and scholars for generations – answers to Mime's questions so-to-speak. It will reduce misunderstandings, correct editorial errors and, most important, provide a better context for informed discussion. As for unanswerable questions from the gods (such as why did Bruckner do what he did?), when all the sources have been systematically organized and analyzed, we will have some important new information about the genesis of the symphony, particularly about the years between 1887 and 1889. It is a sad fact that

most of the rhetoric about Bruckner's relationship with Levi, the first print and the Nowak/Haas controversy has been generated in an almost total vacuum of published information about the primary sources. With a little luck and a lot more hard work the Critical Report should be able to fill that void.

¹ The Bruckner Collected Works Edition has published three scores of the symphony: two different readings of the 1890 version and one of the 1887. Robert Haas, ed. *Anton Bruckner Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, viii, VIII. *Symphonie C-Moll [1890]*. (Leipzig, 1939); Leopold Nowak, ed. *Anton Bruckner Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, viii/2, VIII. *Symphonie C-Moll: Fassung von 1890*. (Vienna, 1955/1994); and Leopold Nowak, ed. *Anton Bruckner Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, viii/1, VIII. *Symphonie C-Moll: Fassung von 1887*. (Vienna, 1972/1992). The present writer is preparing a report on the sources for the symphony because neither Haas nor Nowak provided a critical apparatus for their editions.

² Andrea Harrandt and Otto Schneider†, eds. *Anton Bruckner Sämtliche Werke: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, xxiv/2, *Briefe, 1887-1896*. (Vienna, 2003), p. 114.

³ Anton Bruckner, *Achte Symphonie (C-moll) für großes Orchester*. (Berlin and Vienna: Haslinger-Schlessinger-Lienau, 1892).

⁴ For much of the twentieth century Levi's rejection of the symphony was the subject of a notorious apocryphal anecdote. Levi was alleged to have been afraid to tell the composer that he did not understand the new symphony and therefore could not conduct it. According to the anecdote, he asked their mutual acquaintance, Josef Schalk, to communicate the bad news to Bruckner. Fortunately Levi's letter of rejection directly to the composer, dated 7 October 1887, has been found and published. Harrandt, *Bruckner Briefe 2*, p. 23.

⁵ Including the score that Bruckner sent to Levi and the parts that were prepared in Mannheim for Felix Weingartner. Harrandt, *Bruckner Briefe 2*, pp. 94 and 120.

⁶ Dermot Gault. "Anton Bruckner Symphony No. 8 Intermediate Adagio: Critical Commentary," available at < www.abruckner.com/Data/Documents/B8-Gault.htm >. Gault's commentary accompanies an edition of an intermediate

version of the *Adagio* preserved in a copy score, Austrian National Library Mus. Hs. 34.614.

⁷See Leopold Nowak, "Anton Bruckners Achte Symphonie und ihre zweite Fassung." *Österreichische Musikzeitschrift* 10/5 (1955), pp. 157-158; Dermot Gault, "The 1890 Version of Bruckner's Eighth – Haas contra Nowak." *The Bruckner Journal* 8/3 (2004), pp. 17-25; and "For Later Times." *The Musical Times* 131/6 (June 1996), pp. 12-19.

⁸ Harrandt, *Bruckner Briefe 2*, p. 114.

⁹ Manfred Wagner, *Der Wandel des Konzepts: Zu den verschiedenen Fassungen von Bruckners Dritter, Vierter und Achter Sinfonie*. (Vienna, 1980), pp. 39-52; Thomas Röder, ed. *Bruckner Sämtliche Werke*, 3, Revisionsbericht. (Vienna, 1997), 241-245; and Benjamin Korstvedt, ed. *Bruckner Sämtliche Werke*, 4/3. (Vienna, 2004), Vorwort.

¹⁰ The letters are preserved as Fonds 32 Oberleithner 168. They have been printed in part in Thomas Leibnitz. *Die Brüder Schalk und Anton Bruckner*. (Tützing, 1988), p. 276; Franz Grasberger, ed., *Anton Bruckner zum 150. Geburtstag* (Vienna, 1974), p. 33; and Nowak "Bruckners Achte Symphonie und ihre zweite Fassung," p. 158. They will be included in the forthcoming second edition of Bruckner letters edited by Andrea Harrandt.

¹¹ Benjamin Korstvedt, *Symphony No. 8*. (Cambridge: 2000), pp. 24-25, 88-90 and 93.

¹² See for example, Werner Wolff, *Anton Bruckner Rustic Genius*. (New York, 1942), pp. 261-262.