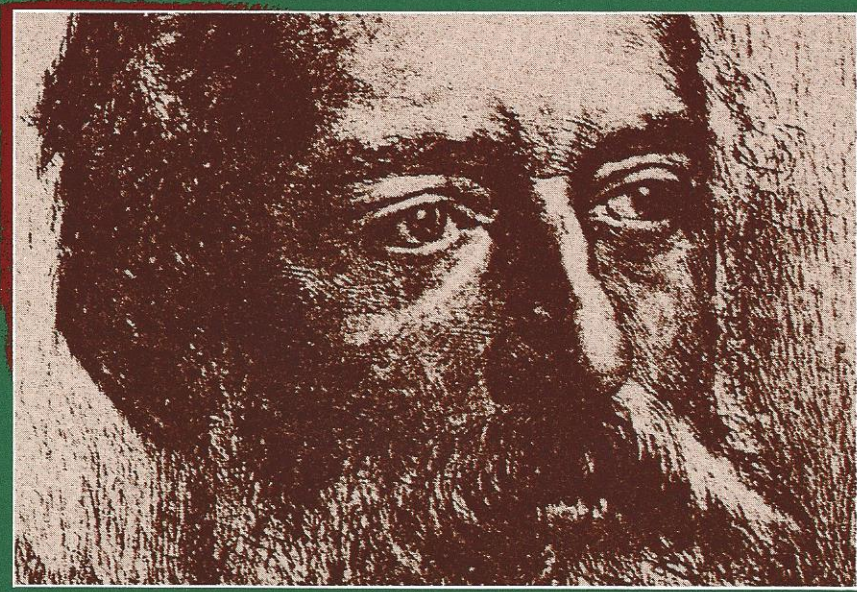




Anton Bruckner (1824–1896)
Symphony no. 8 in C minor
Composed July 1884 to Winter 1887;
revised 1887–1890
Unrevised version first performed in
London, U.K., September 2, 1973

One of the most fascinating aspects of Anton Bruckner's career as a composer was his peculiar habit of revising his own material. Most of his symphonies survive in at least two versions and some were revised three or four times. Performers and scholars of Bruckner's music have spent most of this century analyzing these various versions and assessing their relative merits. Until recently, the two versions of the Eighth Symphony could not be compared in the same manner as those of other symphonies because the original version was not available in print. Only in 1972, when Leopold Nowak completed the monumental task of editing and publishing the first version of the Eighth Symphony, was the world at large made aware of the enormous extent to which the two versions differ. The score of this first version, as edited by Nowak, is recorded here for the first time in North America.



Hermann Levi

How the two versions came to exist in the first place is one of the more tragic episodes in the composer's life. The middle 1880's were among the happiest years of Bruckner's career. After a long and often arduous struggle, he had begun to attract international recognition as a composer. In December, 1884, Artur Nikisch conducted a triumphant performance of the Seventh Symphony in Leipzig and in March, 1885, Hermann Levi directed the same work with great success in Munich. Bruckner's reputation began to extend overseas when Walter Damrosch conducted the Third Symphony in New York on December 5 of the same year. This was followed by performances of the Seventh Symphony under Theodor Thomas in New York, Boston and Chicago in 1886; and on May 23, 1887, Bruckner scored a triumph in England when Hans Richter conducted a critically acclaimed performance of the Seventh in London. In July, 1886, Bruckner's international stature was recognized by the Austrian emperor with the composer's appointment as a knight of the illustrious Franz Josef Order. Only in Vienna, where his enemies were numerous and his critics most outspoken, were his achievements as a composer questioned.

During this period of relative contentment and stability, Bruckner composed his Eighth Symphony. He began the work in the summer of 1884 and completed it early in 1887 after more than two years of intense activity. In the flush of enthusiasm and optimism which accompanied its completion, he sent the score to Hermann Levi, hoping that this conductor who had looked so favourably upon the Seventh Symphony, would give the new work its première. His hopes were dashed when Levi, unable to come to grips with such a complex and avant-garde work, was forced to inform Bruckner in the fall of 1887 that he could not conduct the symphony.

Bruckner was shattered by Levi's decision. In a state of utter depression he began a wholesale revision of the work – a revision so extensive that it occupied him for two more years. The score of the revised version was completed on March 10, 1890, and received its première under Hans Richter in Vienna on December 18, 1892. In spite of the vituperative condemnation of the Viennese critics, led by the redoubtable Eduard Hanslick, the performance was a success. The second or 1890 version came to be the accepted score of the Eighth Symphony and served as the basis for all performances of the work for the next eighty years.

Meanwhile, the first or 1887 version remained in relative obscurity on the librarian's shelf. In 1939, recognizing the beauty and significance of the first version, Robert Haas incorporated some passages from it in the third and fourth movements of his edition of the 1890 score. Nevertheless, until 1972, when Leopold Nowak published the 1887 version in its entirety, it was not possible to perform this magnificent work as Bruckner had originally conceived it.

Even with Nowak's score, comparisons of the 1887 and 1890 versions of the Eighth Symphony are complicated by the fact that the latter version has appeared in three editions with different texts. The first print published by Haslinger in Vienna in 1892, contained alterations and cuts which were made in the Finale without the knowledge or consent of the composer. Robert Haas rectified this situation with his edition of 1939. In 1952, Leopold Nowak published the 1890 version again, this time eliminating the passages which Haas had included from the 1887 version. The difference in length between the three editions of the 1890 version and the 1887 version is best illustrated with a measure count.

	First Version (1887)		Second Version (1890)	
	Nowak 1972	Haslinger 1892	Haas 1939	Nowak 1890
Allegro	453	417	417	417
Scherzo	211	195	195	195
Trio	105	93	93	93
Adagio	329	291	301	291
Finale	771	705	747	709

For the purpose of comparison of the 1887 and 1890 versions, Nowak's edition of the latter is the most useful of the three because it is the only one which contains an unaltered final reading of the second version.

There are enormous variants in orchestration, harmony, voice leading and motivic treatment between the two versions. In some sections one can almost speak of two different pieces, rather than two versions of the same work. For example, major

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alterations in the opening movement occurred toward the end of the development, in the recapitulation of the third thematic group and in the Coda which was abbreviated some thirty measures. Of all the movements, the second was subjected to the most radical changes in the revised version, particularly in the Trio section. Major alterations in the Adagio occurred in the last statement of the principal thematic material which climaxes in C major in the 1887 version and is in E flat major in the second version. In the Finale, the exposition and recapitulation sections were much abbreviated in the 1890 version.

The first version of Bruckner's Eighth Symphony received its world première in London, England, under Hans Hubert Schönzeler on September 2, 1973. The North-American première was given by the National Youth Orchestra of Canada conducted by Georg Tintner in Kingston and Toronto, Ontario, on August 30 and 31, 1982.

Paul Hawkshaw