

BRUCKNER: Symphony No. 9 in D minor

1. **Feierlich, Misterioso**
2. **Scherzo: Bewegt, lebhaft**
3. **Adagio: Langsam, feierlich**

Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra
conducted by
Eugen Jochum

In August 1887, only two days after he had completed his 8th Symphony, Bruckner commenced work on his 9th. At this time, the composer was beginning to achieve some measure of recognition, musical honours were being bestowed upon him, albeit belatedly, for Bruckner was but one month short of his 63rd birthday.

Work on the 9th Symphony progressed slowly, the initial sketches being put aside in 1889 and 1890 in order that Bruckner might revise the texts of some of his other compositions. In particular the Eighth and First symphonies (the latter work dating from as early as 1866) claimed much of his time. It was not until 1894 that three movements of the Ninth were complete and the composition of the finale had begun. Ill health, both physical and mental, took their toll and at the time of the composer's death in October 1896, this fourth movement was represented only by a series of fully-scored fragments, sufficient in quantity to provide a sizeable symphonic piece. Unfortunately, Bruckner left no indication as to which of a number of alternative episodes were to represent the composer's final choice, nor was a coda sketched out; thus we can never know how Bruckner envisaged the summation of his last great masterpiece. Of those three completed movements left to posterity, the last, a spacious *Adagio*, proves to be a very suitable valediction; indeed the composer himself referred to this movement as his "farewell to life".

The first movement opens in deepest solemnity. A soft string tremolo is held beneath hesitant chords from the wind instruments. All eight horns, supported quietly by trumpets and drums, call across this twilight of mysterious sound. Gradually the tension tightens, the fragments knit together and the main theme of the first movement is hurled out by full orchestra. Descending pizzicato strings sustain the tension and after a brief crescendo, the slower second subject enters, the cellos taking the theme from the violins to enrich the texture. Soon, oboe and horn foreshadow a third theme on which a crescendo is built, ennobled by the horns. A hush precedes a double reference to the first theme. Pizzicato strings underpin snatches of the second subject, which leads to a massive restatement of the first climax of the work, a veritable torrent of repeatedly descending violins adding to the tumult. The music then halts without warning. Bruckner now draws the threads of symphonic argument together with a reminder of the material used so far: an angular march uses an inverted version of the first theme, the second subject expands graciously and another climax is built upon a grotesque reminiscence of the third melody. The

third and fourth horns ring out in a brief fanfare and a gentle chorale for brass brings in the

coda over a menacing drum roll. The strings play a five-note figure from the opening of the work over and over again and blazing trumpets finally weld this motif into the whirling fury of the closing bars.

The first movement's awe-inspiring range of musical mountain peaks and mysterious chasms is succeeded by a *Scherzo* of powerful determination. A keyless chord on woodwind ushers in a disturbed descending pizzicato figure which strides irregularly forward until a climax is reached and a gigantic, insistent theme is hammered out culminating in a massive affirmation of the very figure hinted at by the descending pizzicato strings. An angry, more dissonant climax rounds off the opening passage of the movement and soft drum strokes lead to a development of the themes which are fully restated, at the close of this *Scherzo* section, in two climaxes similar to the earlier ones. The contrasting *Trio* section moves more rapidly. It hastens along over a throbbing accompaniment and although a lyrical melody attempts to bring some relaxation, the violins soon recommence their breathless career. Eventually the lyrical theme is expounded more fully, but the disturbed, rushing strings have the last word before the identical repeat of the whole gigantic peasant dance of a *Scherzo* rounds off the movement.

A gentle, yet impassioned cry from the strings, followed by the warm intonation of the lower brass, announces the great *Adagio*. Fullness of tone in the large orchestra is enhanced, in this movement, by the replacement of four of the horns by tubas—two tenor and two bass. A rising, lyrical theme ensues, but a four-note phrase (oboe, then horn) is given greater attention and it is from this that a two-peaked outburst is fashioned, topped by a repeated trumpet figure. The second subject enters after another of Bruckner's soft brass chorales, it is an expansive melody but the composer does not dwell upon it. The oboe soon announces an inverted version and then strings, in a brighter, more sanguine mood, muse upon this inversion. The opening theme appears but again Bruckner does not develop it, the striding crescendo that follows being only very loosely based upon it. A bridge passage now leads to a further onslaught from one of the two peaks of the first double climax, followed by the optimistic inversion of the second theme. Unexpectedly, a phrase from the first subject is used in a concise, daring modulation, strings pontificate momentarily and the summing up commences. Over quiet, clashing woodwind a fragment of the first melody is built up. The second theme enters over a tramping bass, broken string phrases create a sense of urgency, the drums crash in and a magnificent, dissonant torrent of sound, allied rhythmically to the second subject, ends with a silence which arrives with dramatic suddenness. A mild crescendo fails to reach the expected trumpet-topped peak and the violins descend until a heart-searching flute solo hovers over trembling strings. The ethereal ascent of the first melody from this solemn *Adagio* closes the incomplete Ninth Symphony in an atmosphere of confident serenity.

