

A HISTORY OF COMMERCIAL RECORDINGS OF BRUCKNER'S 8TH SYMPHONY

TBJ Meeting, Oxford, April 2009

- * c1924 First ever. Adagio of #8. Berlin SOO/Klemperer on 4 acoustic 78's.
- * 1941 First complete. NYPSO/Walter, live, first issued on LPs in 1982 (1892 Edn).
- * 1949 First complete studio recording.(Haas Edn), Hamburg PO/Jochum, first released on 11 Polydor 78's then by American Decca on 5 LP sides c/w Te Deum.

John Berky's BSVD lists, as of 15/12/08, 275 commercial recordings of origins as follows:

Period:	1940/49	1950/59	1960/69	1970/79	1980/89	1990/99	2000/09
Number:	4	19	21	54	50	55	>72

Breakdown of versions/editions:

Edition/version:	1892 Edn	1887v	1888 Adagio	1890 ed Haas	1890 ed Nowak
Number:	15	9	2	116	133

Orchestra tally is:

Orchestra:	VPO	BPO	MPO	ACO/RCO	BavRSO	NDRSO
Number:	25	21	15	11	11	8

Conductors:	Karajan	Celibidache	Wand	Asahina	Haitink	Tennstedt
Number:	17(Haas)	16(Nowak)	14(Haas)	14(Haas)	10(Haas)	10(Nowak) +1(Nowak)

SOME MILESTONES:

- * 1941 Walter's pioneer recording of the 1892 edition.
- * 1944 Karajan's first recording of mvmts 2 to 4 with the Berlin State Orch of the Haas edn for German Radio (Finale in stereo) and a Musikverein performance, nominally of the Haas edn, by Furtwangler and the VPO, first issued in 1969, now accorded classic status.
- * 1949 A bumper year, with Jochum's Hamburg recording of the Haas, 2 Furtwangler performances with the BPO, and Abendroth's of the Haas with the Leipzig RSO.
- * 1955 Renowned for the first recording of the 1890v in Nowak's edn by the VSO under Horenstein and for Van Beinum's of the Haas with the Concertgebouw. Both scored well in Stephen Johnson's 'Collection' survey in the Sept 1996 issue of the Gramophone.
- * 1957 Karajan's first complete studio recording of the Haas with the BPO in mono and stereo, and a live Klemperer/Cologne RSO of the 1890 Nowak without the savage cut in the Finale of his 1972 New Philharmonia recording for EMI.
- * 1969/70 yielded the only 2 recordings by British conductors: Reginald Goodall with the BBCSO at the Proms in 1969 and Barbirolli with the Halle in 1970 (both Haas).
- * 1980/1 saw the first digital recordings: Barenboim/CSO and Haitink's second recording with the ACO (both Haas).
- * 1982 Pioneer recordings of the 1887v by Inbal/Frankfurt RSO and by Tintner/NYO Canada. (The 1973 premiere by Schönzeler/Bournemouth SO saw its first commercial release last year).
- * 1984 Giardini's classic of the 1890/Nowak with the VPO (one of the first to be issued simultaneously on LP and CD in 1985).

* 1988 Karajan's last recording of the 8th, with the VPO, in the Musikverein, another accorded classic status.

* 1993 The slowest 8th to date (104 mins) of the 1890 Nowak edn by Celibidache and the MPO on EMI (compare this with the fastest run through the 1892 edn in 1961 by Joseph Krips/NYPO taking 65 mins and one by Steinberg/BSO in 1962 at 61:30. A Koussevitsky/BSO 1947 broadcast of a heavily cut 1892 edn has also survived).

* 2000 The first recording to include the 1888 Adagio on 4 Electones under Noguchi, followed in 2004 by Naito's recording with the Tokyo City Orchestra.

* 2001 yielded Wand's RCA recording of the Haas with the BPO (exceptionally fine according to RO in the Gramophone Jan 2002 issue, though some other reviewers prefer his 1993 NDRSO recording).

Finally - a curiosity: Lionel Rogg's 1997 recording of his transcription of the 8th for organ, complete except for a substantial cut in the Finale.

Some are now available on SACD (>4) and/or on DVD (>16). The earliest so far to reach DVD seems to be Karajan's 1979 St Florian performance with the VPO, previously on VHS and Laser Disc. The earliest in SACD seem to be Wand's 2001 recording of the Haas with the BPO along with Asahina's 2001 Osaka PO recording (also Haas), plus Oue's 2004 (same edn and orchestra) and Haitink's 2005 of the Haas with the Concertgebouw).

Two features of the recent recording history of the 8th (and generally) are notable :

* Increasing rarity of studio as opposed to live recordings

* Increasing commercial release of unofficial (pirated) recordings (nearly 100 of the 275) mostly issued since year 2000. At least some of these will no doubt appear, eventually, as official releases.

One way or the other, excellent recordings of this magnificent symphony will continue to be issued, now that it has secured its place in the repertoire of all top orchestras throughout Europe and beyond.