

Which Version of the Bruckner Symphony # 8 did Furtwangler Conduct in April of 1954?

By John F. Berky

There appears to be an ongoing question as to the version of the Bruckner Symphony # 8 that Wilhelm Furtwangler conducted in April of 1954.

The Vienna Philharmonic performance was the Haslinger-Schlesinger-Lienau publication of 1892.

According to musicologist Mark Kluge, *"The Vienna Philharmonic archivist confirmed that the players signed their parts of the 1892 edition documenting this specific Furtwangler performance. If Nowak wrote the program notes for this concert and not once indicated any hint that a pre-publication edition of his was used (in fact, all the musical examples in the program are 1892), and if all of that information was widely published a decade ago, one wonders why the myths are so persistent."*

This is a documented fact, so while this is a persistent rumor, it seems to have been carefully refuted.

Further, Furtwangler wrote in his notebook in 1941 about his dissatisfaction with the Haas editions:

"They have found (it is said) the setting copy [of the Eighth]. Haas says this has changed nothing. The fact remains - violation of Bruckner by scholars. One might sooner speak of a violation of the public by the Haas myth. The fact is that it was not the Gesamtausgabe that made Bruckner famous, but the earlier version. The question is even raised of whether the Gesamtausgabe would have made him quite so famous. I am not concerned with the literal Bruckner, the Bruckner of the 'scribes and Pharisees', but with the authentic Bruckner. And I cannot call only the Original-Ausgabe authentic if another print from a later period is available. This is why Haas' violation myth is necessary, and it is not authentic. It even contradicts the psychology of all great men. Only unproductive minds can seriously believe that a great productive artist can be 'put under pressure' for the duration of a depression. Depression and productivity are essential opposites, the former only ever a reaction, nothing more. The falsification that is done here to the character of Bruckner - Bruckner as a fool - is much greater than [that done] by the essays [attempts?] of the first scholars, Lowe and Schalk."

This is in *Aufzeichnungen 1924-1954*. Weisbaden 1980, from the English translation by Michael Tanner, as *Notebooks 1924-1954*, London 1989.

This explains why Furtwangler reverted back to the Haslinger-Schlesinger-Lienau publication of 1892 in 1954 after giving the premiere of the Haas edition.

The Haas editions are coming under greater scrutiny recently. While they may provide a satisfying performing edition, they represent a version that was never sanctioned by the composer. Even the first published versions (except for the 9th) can make that claim. Nowak's

and later editions are giving us differing performing versions of the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 8th symphonies. Each one is in an edition essentially approved by Bruckner. Based on his notes, it appears that Furtwangler would approve of this approach.