

Sergiu Celibidache concerts in Japan (A Discographic Puzzle)

by John F. Berky

It is the height of irony that a conductor who so thoroughly disliked the process of recording would end up with one of the most complete recorded legacies of any 20th century conductor.

Sergiu Celibidache performed for the moment. He felt that a recording would inaccurately preserve one moment's creativity by locking it in time thus ignoring any subsequent interpretations.

As Celebidache's fame grew, and his quirk regarding recordings became better known, music enthusiasts and collectors began to fill in the gaps in the conductor's recording legacy by recording from the audience virtually every concert the conductor gave. These recordings began to circulate so pervasively that the conductor's family finally gave permission to EMI and Deutsche Grammophon to release some officially sanctioned and professionally recorded performances made by radio stations in Germany and Sweden.

Nevertheless, the bootleg recordings continued to circulate and the advent of the recordable CD and the Internet have only heightened the process. But with pirate recordings, documentation is often sketchy and unreliable. In fact, some producers of these discs will purposely offer incorrect dates to their performances in an effort to protect a source or to pretend to fill in a gap in the recorded repertoire. Celibidache enthusiasts have attempted to clean up this dizzying array of recordings by compiling what they call the "CeList." In 10 point type, the list goes on for 347 pages. The Bruckner section alone is 22 pages. This essay is going to concentrate on a small section of that list – the Celibidache Bruckner performances that were given in Japan.

All of Celibidache's Bruckner performances were given by the Munich Philharmonic between October of 1986 and April of 1993. Concerts planned for 1994 were cancelled. The list below was kindly furnished to me by Mr. Mitsuru Suda of Tokyo, Japan.

Symphony No. 5 in B flat major	Suntory Hall - Tokyo	22-Oct-86	Wed
Symphony No. 8 in C minor	Festival Hall - Osaka	4-Oct-90	Thu
Symphony No. 4 in E flat major	Orchard Hall - Tokyo	6-Oct-90	Sat
Symphony No. 7 in C minor	Orchard Hall - Tokyo	8-Oct-90	Mon
Symphony No. 8 in C minor	Orchard Hall - Tokyo	10-Oct-90	Wed
Symphony No. 7 in C minor	Bunka Kaikan - Tokyo	13-Oct-90	Sat
Symphony No. 4 in E flat major	Suntory Hall - Tokyo	16-Oct-90	Tue
Symphony No. 7 in C minor	Suntory Hall - Tokyo	18-Oct-90	Thu
Symphony No. 8 in C minor	Suntory Hall - Tokyo	20-Oct-90	Sat
Symphony No. 4 in E flat major	Bunka Kaikan - Tokyo	15-Apr-93	Thu
Symphony No. 4 in E flat major	Symphony Hall - Osaka	20-Apr-93	Tue
Symphony No. 3 in D minor	Suntory Hall - Tokyo	22-Apr-93	Thu
Symphony No. 4 in E flat major	Suntory Hall - Tokyo	24-Apr-93	Sat
Symphony No. 7 in C minor	Cancelled	17-Oct-94	Mon
Symphony No. 8 in C minor	Cancelled	18-Oct-94	Tue

Below is a list of recordings from these concerts:

Symphony No. 3

The Symphony No. 3 was performed once and has been offered on a pirate Vibrato CD (#304) and a private Gewandhaus CD (CG-16)

Symphony No. 5

The single performance of the Symphony No. 5 was recorded in the audience and released on a pirate Karna Music CD (#159M) but was later released commercially on an Altus CD (ALT-138/9). It has subsequently been issued as a single layer SACD (ALTSA-138)

Symphony No. 7

The Symphony No. 7 from October 8, 1990 has not been offered – possibly not recorded.

The Symphony No. 7 from October 13, 1990 was recorded in the audience but never released. A private recording is in circulation.

The Symphony No. 7 from October 18, 1990 was released commercially on Sony Video VHS, Laser & DVD (the last in a boxed set) Sony has also released the audio on a hybrid SACD (SICC-10180) It has also been offered on pirate CDs and DVDs.

Symphony No. 8

The Symphony No. 8 from October 4, 1990 has not been offered – possibly not recorded.

The Symphony No. 8 from October 10, 1990 was placed on a Private Gewandhaus CD (CG-23/24).

The Symphony No. 8 from October 20, 1990 was released commercially on Sony Video VHS, Laser & DVD (the last in a boxed set) The audio has been released on an Altus CD (ALT-183/4) and a single layer SACD (ALTSA-183) It has also been offered on pirate CDs and DVDs.

Symphony No. 4

The Symphony No. 4 is a bit more complicated and has been saved for last.

The Symphony No. 4 from October 6, 1990 was recorded in the audience and offered on a pirate World Music Express CD (WME-1009/10).

The Symphony No. 4 from October 16, 1990 was recorded in the audience and offered on a pirate Vibrato CD (2VLL-68) and a private Gewandhaus CD (SC-33/34). There is also a second recording from a different place in the audience that has circulated privately.

For the 1993 performances, I have examined the following available recordings:

- Three Zero THO-010 (April 1993)
- Theo van der Burg CD 7 (April 20, 1993)
- Theo van der Burg CD 12 (April 20, 1993) (CD incorrectly dated April 24, 1993)
- Karna Music KA-209M (April 20, 1993)
- Eternities ETC D 551-52-S (April 20, 1993) (CD incorrectly dated April 24, 1993)

All of the above recordings are the same and can be identified by a faint “knock” at 28 seconds into the opening movement. This recording has been offered as the April 20th and 24th concert from various sources. Another recording on the Gewandhaus label is yet to be examined.

JFB (April 19, 2009 – updated August 18, 2022)

