

## The Origin of the Eighth

Franz Liszt once compared Richard Wagner's *Nibelungen* tetralogy with an enormous mountain range. This very appropriate metaphor can also be applied to the symphonic creations of Anton Bruckner. Like immense icy peaks rising to lofty heights above the valleys and human settlements, Bruckner's symphonies form a mighty range culminating in the majestic and grandiose Eighth. This was the last symphonic work which its creator was able to give to the world in a complete form. In his sheer titanic struggle over the finale of the Ninth, Bruckner succumbed to a deadly illness leaving behind the Ninth as the greatest torso of the musical literature. Bruckner commenced the Eighth in 1884. He was then 60 years of age and only on the threshold of success and recognition. None of his three great masses was printed, only one of seven symphonies published, the Fifth and Seventh were still unperformed. The events which turned the tide in his favor did not occur in Vienna but in Germany. Bruckner's Vienna was also the Vienna of Eduard Hanslick and Hans Richter. Both were powerful men: Hanslick was the critic of the most influential Austrian newspaper "Neue Freie Presse" and Hans Richter held four important musical positions in the Imperial city. He was conductor of the Court Opera, presided over the Philharmonic Orchestra and the choral concerts of the Society of the Friends of Music and also conducted in the Court Chapel. An excellent musician of imposing appearance, he was no doubt a clever diplomat. A Wagnerian high-priest in Bayreuth and in the Vienna Opera, he championed the cause of Brahms in the Philharmonic concerts and steered clear of Bruckner. In so doing he secured the benevolence of Hanslick and the conservatives. He was elected conductor of the Vienna Philharmonic in 1875 and throughout the first decade of his tenure he did not program even one Bruckner symphony. Small wonder when Bruckner, deeply hurt by this attitude, spoke of Richter as "the generalissimo of deceit". True, in 1881 Richter led the Philharmonic Orchestra in a performance of the Romantic Symphony but it was not in the Philharmonic series. On that occasion he and his musicians did not run the risk of offending the conservative taste of their subscribers and irritating the hostile leading music critics by promoting an Austrian composer who went his own artistic ways.

The decisive turn in Bruckner's long and bitter struggle for recognition came in 1884 with the first performance of the Seventh Symphony in Leipzig under the baton of Arthur Nikisch. It was not an overwhelming success but the brilliant musicianship, enthusiasm and determination of Nikisch, then 29 of age, won a victory for his neglected friend. And ten weeks later (March 1885) the symphony scored a resounding triumph in Munich under Hermann Levi. This event had far-reaching repercussions. Nikisch, although being then an accomplished master of the baton, was still in the ascendancy to fame. His position as first conductor at the Municipal Theater in Leipzig did not carry the great prestige of the post of a Hofkapellmeister such as the one occupied by Hermann Levi in Munich. Levi's high artistic stand-

ing had been lifted to an extraordinary degree by Richard Wagner who had conferred upon him the great honor and high privilege of conducting the first performances of "Parsifal" in Bayreuth. The fact that a musician of highest artistic standing and social prestige championed the cause of a composer hitherto unknown — Levi had never heard the name before — benefitted Bruckner not only in Germany but also in his native land. His stock began to rise in Vienna and Richter finally introduced in 1886 the Seventh in the Philharmonic Concerts. It was during these two eventful years that the Eighth Symphony came into being.

Bruckner began the composition in the summer of 1884 and concluded the sketch in August 1885. "The composition of the Eighth is completed", wrote Bruckner to Levi on September 7, 1885 but he added "I wish the work were also finished", meaning completed in score. It took him two more years to complete this task. "Hallelujah! The Eighth is ready at last and 'my father in art' (*"künstlerischer Vater"*) should be the first to receive the news", reported Bruckner to Levi on September 4, 1887. About two weeks later he dispatched the score to Munich elated by hope and indescribable joy of having the symphony performed through Levi's "masterly hand". Levi lost no time in studying the score, but did not have a favorable impression of the new symphony. Being a sincere friend of Bruckner, Levi found himself in a painful predicament. He did not dare to face the composer even by letters and to tell him of his own inability to understand the new work and to admit the lack of courage to perform it. Levi was fully aware of the terrible shock this bad news was bound to have on Bruckner, and he appealed to Josef Schalk, one of Bruckner's most trusted pupils, for help. Schalk undertook this sad mission and informed his master of Levi's rejection. This message caused Bruckner to suffer a nervous collapse and he even entertained thoughts of suicide. Nevertheless he continued his correspondence with Levi and expressed his willingness to revise the symphony.

In the meantime he had commenced the Ninth and taken up the revision of the Third Symphony. The revision of the Eighth was eventually carried out between August 1889 and March 1890. But the prospects of a performance in Munich were gone, because Levi had retired from the direction of the concerts. He recommended Felix Weingartner in Mannheim who consented to program the Eighth during the Winter season of 1891 and Bruckner looked forward to the performance with excitement. Meanwhile Weingartner received an appointment as conductor of the Court Opera and the Concerts of the Royal Orchestra in Berlin and he left Mannheim prior to the end of the season. This unexpected change also dashed the hopes for a Mannheim performance of the Eighth, but after having run the gamut of disappointment and despair, Bruckner had the great satisfaction of having the symphony accepted by Hans Richter and the Philharmonic Orchestra. It was played on December 18, 1892, and received with great enthusiasm. Even Hanslick and the Brahms

- partisans acknowledged Bruckner's success. Hugo Wolf called it "a complete victory of the light over darkness" and Bruckner, deeply moved and forgiving the humiliations of the past, expressed his sincerest thanks to Richter and the members of "the highest artistic society in music". Emperor Franz Joseph accepted the dedication of the symphony which appeared simultaneously in 1892 in Vienna and Berlin.

### The Textual Problem

At this juncture we must deal briefly with a problem which is unique in musical history. In the early 1920s rumors began to circulate that the first editions of Bruckner's symphonies, published during his lifetime, except for the Sixth and Ninth, do not represent the artistic intentions of the composer. These rumors were substantiated to some degree by the gradual appearance of the critical *Gesamtausgabe* for which Robert Haas, professor at Vienna University and head of the Music Division of the Austrian National Library was responsible. Bruckner had willed his manuscripts to this venerable institution, and Haas was the logical choice for the editorship of the *Gesamtausgabe*, issued by the National Library (formerly Court Library) in Vienna and the International Bruckner Society. The comparative study of the autograph scores and first editions revealed substantial differences between these sources. This unaccountable and puzzling situation could not be explained because, strangely enough, the printer's copies (*Stichvorlagen*) which formed the connecting link between Bruckner's autograph scores and the first editions could in most cases never be produced. Thus there was in the opinion of Haas and others no authentic source for the alterations, omissions and instrumental changes evident in the published scores. In accordance with the editorial principles of the Complete Edition, the first editions which were used all over for about half a century, were not considered as verified by the composer and regarded "as arrangements by other hands". They were discarded as source material, for it was the avowed and only purpose of the Complete Edition to present Bruckner's creations in their original version (*Originalfassung*). This term must not be confused, as it is always the case, with *Urfassung* (very first version). "*Originalfassung*" in the terminology of the Complete Edition means the version extant in Bruckner's autograph which he considered the final form for presentation to the public. How the editorial practice conformed to the editorial theory we will learn later.

The publication of the original versions caused a heated controversy about the authenticity of the first editions and resulted in a campaign against those whom Haas called the "*Praktiker*" who were charged with the responsibility for the "distortions". These "practical ones" were, as everybody knew, primarily Bruckner's pupils Ferdinand Löwe and the brothers Franz and Josef Schalk. True, in the discussion of many specific cases as presented in the very scholarly reports attached to the individual volumes of the Complete Edition, neither Löwe nor the Schalk

brothers were openly charged with tampering with the original text. Nevertheless, a legend impugning the memory of these deserving Bruckner apostles was created and often circulated by people who, ignorant of the complexity of the problem and the related facts, raised their voices and accused Löwe and Schalk of editorial crimes without offering proofs to substantiate the charges. It is obvious that the copies which went to the printer must have borne the composer's signature and this would to all intents and purposes constitute a de facto authentication of the alterations and changes made in the original text. Taking the possibility into account that the lost printer's copies bearing Bruckner's signature might some day come to light, Haas insisted that alterations and instrumental changes were wrung from Bruckner under duress, and he went even so far as to speak of "sanctions" imposed upon the helpless composer.

Music is created to be performed and the creating artist needs the performer. The suggestions offered to Bruckner by such eminent musicians and distinguished conductors as Johann Herbeck, Hermann Levi, Arthur Nikisch and Franz Schalk resulted from their practical experience and convictions gained at rehearsals and performances. Even Beethoven heeded the advice given by friends, and one needs only to remember the protracted session in the Palace of Prince Lichnowsky when the reworking of the opera "Leonore" was discussed. It should not be overlooked that Bruckner had heard his works (except the Fifth and Ninth) and was very well in the position to observe and to judge the merits of the ideas his friends and advisers offered and to decide upon them. The very intricate question as to whether the original versions or the first editions should be used for performances is by no means conclusively answered yet. The present writer, who had in his student days not only the opportunity of hearing Bruckner's compositions under the direction of Löwe and Schalk, but was also privileged to play them when they presided over the orchestra, is not prepared to discard the first editions as arrangements and accept the original versions instead. Excluding the first edition of the *Ninth* for which Löwe accepted the responsibility, the case is far from being closed since a new editorial policy was established for the Complete Edition and first applied to the *Fifth Symphony*.

### The Version of 1890

After the collapse of the Third Reich, for whose *Kulturpolitik* the promotion of Anton Bruckner and the Complete Edition was an important concern, Robert Haas was relieved from the editorship of the Complete Works and replaced by Leopold Nowak. Nowak's first achievement in this capacity was a new edition of the Eighth. Published in the spring of 1955 the new score definitely is to supersede the edition presented by Haas in 1939. It is used for the present recording. Nowak explains in the foreword that Haas' edition, which bears the designation "*Originalfassung*" on the title page, actually represents a combination of two versions: the first version of 1887 — rejected by Levi — and the version of 1890. Needless to say, this score can not be claimed as representing Bruckner's ultimate artistic intention, and Nowak's categorical rejection of the method Haas applied in this particular case — and to the Second Symphony, one must add — is a declaration of war against the editorial policy hitherto followed in the Complete Edition. The new edition dropped the designation "Original Version" and defines the score as *Version of 1890*. It marks a turning point in the issuance of

the Complete Edition and we can expect the republication of other "revised original versions" which will differ from the versions edited by Haas. Matters will become more complex, the student more bewildered and the listener utterly confused. As for the Eighth we have to consider the following sources:

1. the version of 1887 (rejected by Levi; publication in preparation)
2. the version of 1890 (published March 1955 and used for the *Vox-Recording*)
3. the first edition of 1892
4. the edition of the Complete Works, vol. VIII edited by Haas.

The version of 1887 employs only woodwind pairs (two flutes, two oboes, etc.) and shows a different sequence of the middle movements (Adagio — Scherzo). The first movement concludes with a powerful *fff* passage (reproduced in volume IV, 2 of Auer's Bruckner biography); the Scherzo has a Trio different from that familiar to us. The climax in the Adagio occurs in C major (E flat major in the later version). The version of 1887 was considerably longer than that of 1890 (the basis of the first edition) as the following diagram shows:

	First Version (1887)	Second Version (1890, Haas)	Second Version (1890, Nowak)	First Edition (1892)
First Mov't .....	453	417	417	417
Scherzo .....	209	195	195	195
Trio .....		93	93	93
Adagio .....	329	301	291	291
Finale .....	771	747	709	705

In its first version the symphony was a creation of enormous dimensions which had bewildered Levi, and the subsequent reduction brought about conciseness and greater coherence. The procedure, practiced by Haas, to restore passages removed by Bruckner can by no means be condoned. Although considering the purification of Bruckner's works, as his foremost editorial task, Haas nevertheless inserted as "organically vital" passages which Bruckner himself had eliminated after careful deliberation. Nowak points out (*Oesterreichische Musikzeitschrift*, May 1955) that the version of 1890 comes close to the first edition which is another way of saying that this criticized and maligned edition actually follows the version of 1890. It differs structurally only once from Bruckner's autograph. In the exposition of the finale there is a six measure reminiscence of the Adagio of the Seventh which Bruckner had removed from the corresponding part in the recapitulation. Nowak admitted the inconsistency but refused to eliminate the passages in accordance with the first edition.

### I. Allegro moderato

The symphony is scored for 3 flutes, 3 oboes, 3 clarinets, 3 bassoons (the third interchangeable with contra-bassoon), 8 horns of which 4 are interchangeable with Nibelungen tubas, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, 1 double bass tuba, 3 kettledrums, cymbal and triangle (in the third movement), 3 harps (in the second and third movements), strings.

The first movement displays a clear-cut sonata form. There is a three part exposition, a three part development and a three-part recapitulation. Even a brief analysis would require much space and numerous music examples. Thus our discussion must be confined to a few outstanding features. The *C minor Symphony* opens in F minor and the tonic is only touched *en passant*. The second theme shows a

favorite rhythm of Bruckner, already apparent in the main theme. The first dynamic climax is followed by a modified restatement of the opening theme in the bass accompanied by a violin tremolo in very high position. The development opens with a dialogue of the tubas and oboe. Later on a tremendous climax reaches its peak in the combination of both the first and second themes in augmentation. The recapitulation shows a different picture from the exposition. The theme is stated by the oboe in C minor, but there is a counter melody in D flat, announced by the flute, one of the first examples of polytonality. There is another climax in the closing group, but its power is spent rapidly and thereafter only thematic fragments are heard to the end of the movement.

## II. Scherzo — Allegro moderato

A piece of perfect regularity (A — B — A) the Scherzo exhibits two contrasting elements: the fluttering tremolo of the violins and the sturdy, stocky phrase first announced by the violas and violoncellos. Originally associated with Bruckner's friend Almeroth, the composer later regarded it as a musical symbol of the "*Deutscher Michel*". The Trio in A flat also shows the A — B — A design and is almost an adagio in character.

## III. Adagio

*Feierlich langsam; doch nicht schleppend*  
(Solemn and slow but not dragging)

The Adagio in D flat major is perhaps the longest in symphonic literature. It is a sonata movement of very great dimensions and deviates significantly from the ordinary pattern. The basic form is clearly preserved. The exposition contains four theme complexes, which are manipulated in the development but partly omitted in the recapitulation.

## IV. Finale

*Feierlich, nicht schnell*  
(Solemn, not fast)

It is a sonata movement of extraordinary proportions:

Exposition	252 measures
Development	184 measures
Recapitulation	210 measures
Coda	63 measures

There are three theme complexes: the energetic main idea, a carillon motive effecting the transition to a mild choral melody and the closing theme characterized by falling fourths. The development shows two divisions, each ending with a great dynamic climax. Almost the entire thematic material of the exposition is manipulated and appears in contrapuntal combinations. The recapitulation enters in full force. Elaborating on the main ideas, it uses powerful dynamic developments which are topped in the Coda. The Coda begins pianissimo in C minor and increases gradually in power and sonority. The climax is reached with the turn to the major key and then the tonic is victoriously maintained throughout the last twenty-three measures. The dynamic climax is matched musically and spiritually through the combination of the main idea of all four movements:

- I in basses, trombones, doublebass tuba, bassoons
- II in flutes, clarinets, trumpets
- III in horns
- IV in tubas.

In the conclusion of the symphony the unification of disparate elements is nobly achieved; and the major triad emerges victorious, elevated to sublime heights amid overwhelming orchestral splendor.

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