

Sunday, 22th July 2018 – 17:00 h
EBRACH ABBEY

KATHEDRALKLAENGE

Anton Bruckner (1824–1896)

Symphony No. 9 in D minor

four movements including finale

based on original sources supplemented and completed

by Gerd Schaller

revised Version (2018)

Philharmonie Festiva

Gerd Schaller

“... that the Symphony may end with a song of praise and glory to our dear God, to whom I owe so much.”

Anton Bruckner's Ninth Symphony stands out from the rest of the composer's oeuvre not just because its daring harmonic concatenations and unique instrumentation look a long way forwards into the 20th century, but also because this, as we understand the situation today, is a work that he started to compose in the summer of 1887 and never truly finished in every detail: Bruckner died on October 11, 1896, while still working on his final masterpiece.

He himself clearly sensed that he would not be able to complete the final movement of his work, otherwise he surely would not have suggested his *Te Deum* in place of the fourth movement. Although extremely numerous and insightful, the surviving fragments of this movement, which were left at various stages of development, present a very incomplete picture of Bruckner's Ninth. In fact, the surviving sketches, drafts and fully scored sheets become increasingly sparse towards the end of the symphony, giving little indication of how the coda might have sounded.

Yet one thing at least is clear. The Ninth Symphony was to be the culmination of Bruckner's achievement as a composer, and so he dedicated it to none other than “*dear God*”, further expanding his concept of the monumental symphony. As in the Eighth, the orchestra is equipped with triple woodwind, eight horns, three trumpets, three trombones, double bass tuba and timpani, giving it titanic dimensions; in the Ninth, admittedly, he forgoes harp, triangle and cymbals.

The work was first performed on February 11, 1903, in a concert given by the *Konzertverein* orchestra in Vienna conducted by Ferdinand Löwe. The conductor had almost completely reorchestrated the work, making changes that approximated the orchestral sound to that of Wagner. The final movement was replaced at this premiere by Bruckner's *Te Deum*.

The first three movements

The commencement of the first movement in measured “Misterioso” has been described as a “solemn ground of being”: string tremolos hover on high, creating a mystic atmosphere. Eight horns introduce an archaic motif, then the main theme enters with a sweeping gesture. As always, the movement establishes three thematic groups and is carried by its monumental architecture with thematically tense interactions. The principle of sonic development is pushed to extremes by Bruckner in the Ninth, the path to emergence of the themes growing ever longer. The compelling musical idea continues to play a major role, but the development process to this “How everything shall be” is drawn out further and further. This is evident not only in the first movement, but also and to an even greater extent in the last. And it is only total silence that can give birth to the sound from which a process of wrestling and gestation finally yields the theme. Meanwhile these thematic eruptions are constantly interspersed with a melodic blossoming of great intensity, till the combative element finally prevails again. The relentlessly pounding Scherzo is boldly and powerfully drawn, full of eerie premonition and black humour.

The Adagio is like a farewell to this world. After a radiantly transfigured theme, the tubas intone a kind of requiem, mingling confidence and resignation. Here too there are thematic reminders of the D minor Mass, the Seventh and the Eighth: recollections of a fulfilled life.

The final movement

“I have done my duty upon earth; I did what I could, and would wish only one thing more: that it might be vouchsafed me to complete my 9th Symphony.” These were the tones in which Bruckner would express his feelings in the final years of his life. Alas, his hopes were dashed — although one might suppose that Bruckner had actually had sufficient time to finish the work between 1887 and his death in 1896. However, he kept putting the last movement to one side and attending to other works, revising his First, Third and Eighth Symphonies, composing his *Psalm 150* and the symphonic choral work *Helgoland*. In retrospect it almost seems as if he was fighting shy of his last finale. Whether this was deliberate, whether he harboured obscure fears, or whether he simply had no clear conception of the coda, is the stuff of speculation.

In his book *Bruckner* (Zurich, Vienna, Leipzig, 1923), Max Auer tells of “draft sheets” that showed the dying composer had “even made the effort to write a ‘transitional music’ to the Te Deum. The sketches of this allow one to identify a *main theme*, a *fugue theme*, a *chorale* and the *theme of fifths* of the *Te Deum*.” However, writes Auer, Bruckner himself had a strong sense of tonality and for that reason must have come away from the idea of ending a symphony in D minor with a C major Te Deum. The sketches that Auer mentions in such a manner that he might have been handling them himself are no longer traceable — or at least no longer identifiable — and so we shall probably never know for sure if they ever actually existed or not.

That does seem doubtful, in any case, as Max Auer explains in a later book of his, *Anton Bruckner, Sein Leben und Werk* (Vienna, 1934): “In the sketches for the finale, which include a main theme, a fugue theme and a chorale, there is a passage near the end in which the string figurations introducing the Te Deum appear. The conclusion has been drawn from these that the composer intended to write a transition to the Te Deum, which is improbable, because as Alfred Orel shows in Vol. IX of the complete edition, the sketches of the finale are developed up to the coda.” Here too the argument is reinforced by reference to Bruckner’s feel for to-

nality, and Auer closes this section as follows: “How strenuously Bruckner wrestled with the structure of this movement is evident from the fact that it was drafted *five times*, as Orel also demonstrates. At one point these themes even appear piled up upon one another as in the finale of the Eighth.”

This shows that even the very first Bruckner researchers and biographers could only guess the exact structure of this final movement — although one may assume that they did at least have rather more draft sheets at their disposal than are available to modern Bruckner scholarship, and that they were to some extent able to rely on statements by friends and pupils of Bruckner who had spent time with the composer while he was working on the final movement.

And in one respect all biographers are in agreement: there is no doubt about the intended dedicatee of the Ninth. Several expressions of the composer’s wishes have come down to us, but one of the most convincing is surely that quoted by August Göllerich and Max Auer in their multi-volume Bruckner biography, namely that Bruckner had told his physician Dr. Richard Heller: “Let me tell you, I have already dedicated two symphonies to earthly majesties, one to poor King Ludwig as a patron of the arts, one to our noble, beloved Emperor as one whom I acknowledge the highest of majesties upon earth, and now I dedicate my last work to the majesty above all majesties, the Lord God, and I hope he will give me sufficient time to complete that work and I trust that my gift will be acceptable to him. — I shall therefore take up the Alleluya [‘This surely refers to the Te Deum allusions in the Trio,’ Auer comments] of the second movement and bring it to a conclusion in the Finale, so that the Symphony may end with a song of praise and glory to our dear God, to whom I owe so much.”

My expansion of the final movement

It is regrettably impossible to display anywhere near the full extent of my completions in the scope of this article, and so I should like to confine myself here to a number of fundamental points. Any reader who wishes to know more about Bruckner’s draft scores, sketches and outlines, and to appreciate the full import of my approach, is recommended to study the detailed preface to the full score, published by Ries & Erler (Berlin). This also includes a thorough analysis of the entire final movement.

Theoretical considerations

Over all the decades that I have applied myself to the theory and practice of Bruckner’s works, I have always regretted that none of Bruckner’s fascinating sketches and ideas would ever be heard, because they were not handed down to us in a playable form. Before I embarked on my own expansion and completion of the final movement, I naturally asked myself if it was not arrogant of me to take a masterpiece like Bruckner’s Ninth and presume to “complete” it? Renewed involvement with the Ninth Symphony in preparation for a performance of it finally gave me the decisive impetus: I decided to attempt a completion. Because yes, it may be presumptuous — but it did seem to me to be entirely possible and even desirable to compile Bruckner’s extraordinary bold and fascinating sketches and drafts and present them in a performable and above all musically convincing form.

Before commencing work on the actual completion, then, there were a number of conceptual questions to address. What would be the correct, or best, way to approach the material? What seemed desirable, or achievable — and what must be ruled out? A putative reconstruction was logically impossible, because one can only reconstruct something that was previously there. So my aim was not reconstruction but creation — the attempt to collate and expand the assembly of all existing fragments to form a truly authentic completion oriented towards Bruckner’s late style, placing the new work in its historical context.

My prime concern was to use as much of Bruckner's original material as possible. Large parts of the score were fully orchestrated by Bruckner, though these complete sections grow scarcer as one progresses, and there is no coda. Taking the composer's early sketches, which until now have received little attention, I was able to draw on an important additional source of essential Brucknerian ideas, and it was these first drafts that enabled me to elaborate the fugue, for example, or compile the recapitulation. Instead of taking a later draft of the movement, allowing too much potential for speculation, I often preferred to adopt a detailed sketch carrying more authority or an earlier sheet of the score. I was greatly helped in this process by the fact that Bruckner had often roughed out leading voices and the harmonic course of a passage, even if supporting lines were still missing. That gave me the compositional framework for many of the sections. In the fugue, for instance, I only had to write six completely new bars out of 57, in the recapitulation (44 bars) just four.

The process of writing a completion naturally taught me that the search for one sole solution would always be in vain. When bridging gaps, which could not simply be "filled up", but must be "fully charged" with the spirit of the music, a number of competing variants or approaches were always musically credible and logical — because if it was possible to be reasonably sure what the first bar or two of a missing passage must have sounded like, this assurance gave way to pure speculation from the third bar at the latest. And yet a decision had to be made.

Substantially, there were five major gaps in the course of the final movement. Closing these gaps meant defining the relationship that the missing passages had to the overall architecture of the movement: were they conceived as part of an intensification, an elaboration, a development, a climax maybe, and how could they be convincingly incorporated into the work without departing too far from Bruckner's own style?

The basis for the score recorded here was my own intensive involvement with the complete corpus of currently available material, given that the original sources were to be seen in the light of overriding considerations concerning the movement perceived as an edifice, or understood as a narrative; there were naturally semiotic aspects to be considered as well, along with the question of the spiritual background to the fragments.

Over and above all this, my work of completion was subject to compositional principles that are characteristic of Bruckner's late style. With effect from the Seventh Symphony, or in any case from the Eighth, this late style comes ever more to the forefront, and I extrapolated these principles by analogy and applied them to the present expansion and completion of the movement. I took further inspiration from Psalm 150 and the symphonic choral work *Helgoland*. And ultimately it was my decades of experience as a conductor and interpreter of Bruckner that informed the present concert version; it should also be mentioned that I performed a first version of my completion in concert in 2016 and recorded it for CD. I thus had the chance to assess the practical validity of my assumptions.

My actual procedure

As in the first movement, Bruckner opens the finale of his Ninth with an introductory passage, which ends abruptly. In the silence, the solo flute is heard over the "Bruckner chord" in the horns. A phase of renewed preparation gives way to the mighty D minor theme, made up entirely of descending sixths — and the interval of the descending sixth is to play a central role alongside the tritone in the course of the final movement. The lyrical supporting idea consists of the same material as the theme, and the closing group is a chorale-like theme that bears a relationship to the major-modulated B flat minor tune of the Wagner tubas in the Ada-

gio. It is heard in E major and is thus at a tritone interval from the B flat minor of the tuba tune.

As in the Fifth Symphony, the final movement of the Ninth centres on a fugue. Parts of this are original Bruckner, but up to the end of the recapitulation there are five gaps to be filled. After the recapitulation comes the coda, and from here on, the material is sketchy to say the least — nor is it even clear that it really belongs in the coda.

My completion gives the coda a tripartite form: development/culmination – intensification – apotheosis.

The first part, the development/culmination, is based on original sketches by Bruckner, who had sketched out a whole chain of tritone-linked sixth chords. This section culminates like the Adagio of the Ninth in a particularly dissonant chord — likewise taken from one of Bruckner's sketches.

After a general rest, the second part of the coda, the intensification, begins over a pedal point on D with a quotation: the opening motif of the first movement. The ensuing chorale fragment — developed by me from the tuba passage in the Adagio (*Abschied vom Leben*, “departure from life”) — receives its logical extension in a chorale draft of Bruckner's. This brief chorale section possesses a certain affinity with the *non confundar in aeternum* (I shall never be destroyed) from the *Te Deum*, which also plays a major part in the Adagio of the Seventh Symphony.

I have deliberately quoted the start of the symphony, marking — it might be said — the beginning of life, in the coda, in opposition to the modified *Abschied vom Leben* chorale fragment. I have then related it to the upward-striving *Non confundar* fragment, in other words: The promise of eternal life implicit in *Non confundar* is in direct correlation with the “departure from life”, indeed it forms the logical, positive consequence of that parting.

In the third part of the coda, the apotheosis, I have united the theme in fifths from the *Te Deum* with the closing-group chorale and the rhythmic reduction of the main theme from the first movement. The main theme [of the final movement ?] and the fugal theme derived from the same material are likewise integrated. The much discussed *Allehuya*, which Bruckner allegedly planned to incorporate into the close of his Ninth, has been left out of account, because it is not clear what Bruckner really meant. However, I have developed a radiant motif in the trumpets and woodwinds that then plays a major role in the closing apotheosis — and so is a modest attempt to satisfy Bruckner's wish for *a song of praise and glory to our dear God* with which to close his great work.

Gerd Schaller

Philharmonie Festiva

is a symphony orchestra consisting of selected, high-calibre musicians from leading German orchestras, which was brought into being by its conductor Gerd Schaller in 2008 as the *Ebracher Musiksommer* festival orchestra.

Schaller's intention was not to create a seasonal project orchestra; he was planning for the long term, with the aim of establishing and developing his own top-class outfit, a festival orchestra that could do justice to his own ambitious projects — an unashamedly elite ensemble. Right from the start, the challenge and the stimulus to conductor and musicians alike was to develop a shared sound: a tricky business, given that the instrumentalists were bound to bring their own consciousness and concepts of sound from their various home orchestras, but at the same time an intriguing enterprise, given that the Philharmonie Festiva has no set way of doing things, no routine, but is always open to new experiences and experiments. That means the musicians have the feeling of creating something new and mutually beneficial together, breaking new ground with each project.

The orchestra's musicians, who have deliberately chosen to make music with one another, thus have the opportunity to test musical boundaries together and on occasion go beyond them. Another special feature of the Philharmonie Festiva is surely the idea that here in a large concert orchestra it is possible to think and feel in terms of chamber music, something the musicians have practised from the ensemble's beginnings with great commitment and increasing success.

In the first place it is Gerd Schaller's aspiration to rediscover mainstream symphonic repertoire by giving this special orchestra its own musical handwriting; at the same time he desires the Philharmonie Festiva to perform rarely played or long forgotten works in the concert hall and the recording studio. Such works have already included concert performances and CD recordings of the opera *Merlin* by Carl Goldmark, the Great Mass by Johann Ritter von Herbeck and Franz von Suppé's Requiem — all works that would stand little or no chance in the concert programming of the musical mainstream.

One project that is especially dear to the heart of Gerd Schaller is his Bruckner cycle, in which he and the Philharmonie Festiva perform all versions of Bruckner's symphonies in concert and record them to CD; the first 19 CDs of this series are already available on the Profil Günther Hänssler label — the very label that has supported the orchestra's projects from the start and has given serious long-term thought to the evolution of the ensemble.

Another of the orchestra's important partners is Studio Franken, the Franconian arm of Bayerischer Rundfunk, which records many of its concerts for radio and TV broadcast.

And then there is yet another aspect that marks out this orchestra from most others: the *genius loci*, the aura and acoustic of the former Cistercian abbey of Ebrach, where most of the Philharmonie Festiva's concerts are held and their recordings are made. It is here, in the depths of the Steigerwald, that one can make music away from the hurly-burly of the great cities, untroubled by everyday activities and freed from the routine that drains music-making of inspiration. And it is in this environment — in the 12th-century abbey church and amid the splendid Baroque ornamentation of the Kaisersaal of this secularized monastery — that a very special atmosphere surrounds Gerd Schaller and his musicians, making each project by Philharmonie Festiva into something quite special.

Gerd Schaller

studied conducting and held positions at various German state theatres until 2006 and since then has been a freelance artist in constant demand as a guest conductor with well-known orchestras and at concert halls and opera houses at home and abroad.

In 2008 he founded the Philharmonie Festiva, a symphony orchestra made up of exceptional musicians from top German ensembles, in order to pursue his own ambitious projects.

His insatiable thirst for knowledge and his unflagging interest in the new and unknown has inspired the conductor to the rediscovery and revival of neglected works and rarities in the concert and opera repertoire, such as Carl Goldmark's opera *Merlin*; having conducted the first performance in modern times, he has now edited the score for the publisher *Ries & Erler*. Gerd Schaller has also made quite a name for himself in opera as a conductor of Richard Wagner, Richard Strauss and Giuseppe Verdi. His wide-ranging repertoire encompasses seldom heard works and composers from Alban Berg to Francesco Cilea. Schaller has also built up a considerable concert repertoire in the course of his career, ranging from the Baroque to contemporary works.

The conductor was fascinated from his earliest youth by the music of Anton Bruckner on account of its immense complexity and intense emotional charge. In recent years, therefore, Schaller's work has been focused on a large-scale Bruckner project, with the aim of laying down on CD his own personal interpretation of all significant works by the master organist of St Florian. He began with the symphonies, which he has recorded in their entirety — sometimes in versions hitherto unknown — with the Philharmonie Festiva for *Profil Edition Günther Hänssler*, a series that has already won numerous awards. A highlight of Schaller's engagement with Bruckner's symphonic oeuvre was undoubtedly his expansion and completion of the final movement of the Ninth Symphony, which has also been released on CD and was published in 2018 in its revised version as a performing score.

Schaller has complemented this symphonic cycle with a number of Bruckner's sacred works such as the F minor Mass, the seldom heard 146th Psalm and the composer's complete organ works, played by Schaller himself on a historic instrument. The publication of his arrangement of Bruckner's String Quintet for large orchestra and its recording for CD together with the Overture in G minor represents a further landmark in his Bruckner project.

The conductor is also Artistic Director of *Ebrach Summer Music*, a festival he founded in 1990, which in recent years has attracted increasing attention at home and around the world on account above all of Schaller's magisterial readings of Bruckner in the cathedral acoustics of the Abbey Church in the former Cistercian monastery at Ebrach in Franconia.

Translation: Janet and Michael Berridge, London / Berlin