



Furtwängler - Bruckner Symphonie n°4 - Welche Fassung?

Furtwängler Bruckner Symphony n° 4 - Which Version?

It is now possible to have free access to a certain number of Austrian newspapers from 1950. Among them, the *Oberösterreichische Nachrichten* (Linz) has a daily music half-page dedicated to surveys and critics of concerts.

In the September, 26 1950 issue, an article by Anton Bruckner specialist Ludwig K. Mayer¹ is simply titled "Um Bruckner Vierte" and thus dedicated to his Fourth Symphony. New pieces of information are given on the much disputed choice made by Furtwängler not to conduct the Haas Version published in 1936 and to carry on with the first printed Version published in 1889.

The present survey only aims at investigating the reasons of his choice, without taking side.

I- The Versions of the "Fourth":

To start with, let's remark that in this text, two Versions (" Fassungen ") are mentioned, on the one hand the "Originalfassung" (Original Version), and on the other hand the "Erstdruckfassung" (First printed Version).

Nowadays, what is called original Version (or Initial Version) was composed in November 1874, and it was neither performed, nor published during the composer's lifetime. It was published only in 1975 by Leopold Nowak.

In 1878, Bruckner revises the first two movements and he composes a new Scherzo, the famous "Hunt Scene", as well as a new Finale called "Volksfest".

In 1879/80, he composes a third version of the Finale. This Version, unpublished as it is, is used for the Première on February, 20 1881 with the WPO conducted by Hans Richter.

In 1881, further to the Première, Bruckner makes a new revision of the score. This Version, based on the manuscript has been published in 1936 by Robert Haas as part of the "Gesamtausgabe"(Complete Edition). In the text by Ludwig K. Mayer this Version is called "Originalfassung".

The impressive list of amendments to the score proceeds further with the new 1886 revision which is only slightly different from that of 1881. This score is for Anton Seidl who conducts it in New-York on April, 4 1888. It was rediscovered in 1952 and published by Anton Nowak in 1953.

Then, we come to the 1887-1888 revisions that led to the first publication of the work in 1889 by the editor Gutmann (followed by an amended edition in 1890). This is the one that is called "Erstdruckfassung" (or 1888 Version, although it was published in 1889).

It includes many amendments introduced by Bruckner with the assistance of Ferdinand Löwe and of the brothers Franz and Joseph Schalk, with a view to the publication.

Although after the public performance of this amended Version given on January, 20 1888 by the WPO, once more under the direction of Hans Richter, Bruckner has actually, in February 1888, handwritten (and dated, too) many corrections in the "Stichvorlage" (revised Version for the edition), the resulting "Erstdruckfassung" has given rise to controversy and Furtwängler has been much criticized for having still conducted it in spite of the publication of the "Originalfassung" in 1936.

Indeed, it might have been that the Schalk brothers and Ferdinand Löwe have dictated to Bruckner their own revision, making of it a compulsory condition for the publication, and that the latter could only bring handwritten corrections to a Version that did not correspond to his will. The hypothesis according to which Bruckner had so little confidence in himself that he was liable to be influenced has been introduced without serious proof by Robert Haas² who didn't know the existence of the "Stichvorlage", discovered only in 1940. Since then, things have evolved, without putting the controversy to an end, and the 1888 Version has, thanks to Benjamin Korstvedt found its place in the "Gesamtausgabe" in 2004.

Be it as it may, this Version had the composer's imprimatur, which was not the case for the Version worked out in 1895 by Gustav Mahler (re-orchestration of the 1888 Version and many cuts), but it allowed him to perform the work with success where promoting Bruckner's works was difficult, especially in New-York in 1910 (see [the press articles in the Exhibit pages 4 to 7](#)) where the March 30 performance lasted hardly more than 45 minutes (The Press March 31, 1910).



II- The article by Ludwig K. Mayer:

The debate on the authenticity or rather the legitimacy of the "Erstdruckfassung" is the chore of this article. It gives an incentive to analyze how Furtwängler's point of view evolved since the publication of the Haas Version (Originalfassung) in 1936.

To begin with, Mayer recalls that the complicated issue of the validity of the various autograph Versions of his symphonies exists since the beginning of the publication of the "Gesamtausgabe", especially for the Fourth and Fifth Symphonies.

He underlines an almost ignored fact: in 1943, Wilhelm Furtwängler abandoned the "Originalfassung" of the Fourth to choose the "Erstdruckfassung" he conducted ever since. The reason was that, as the conductor told him, the knowledge of some documents convinced him of the authenticity and of the ultimate relevance of this Version. But the war circumstances did not allow the author of the article to know more and he was no further in touch with Furtwängler before writing his article.

However, since a recent publication by Alfred Orel, Mayer believes he can determine what may have convinced Furtwängler: in 1940, the "Stichvorlage" for the "Erstdruckfassung" of the Fourth Symphony has been found in Ferdinand Löwe's papers, and this should be the proof of the validity of the "Erstdruckfassung":

"It is a copy prepared by Ferdinand Löwe, that was carefully re-read by Bruckner who brought many handwritten amendments. This discovery is completed by letters by Bruckner in which he mentions that he has on his own volition ("aus eigenem Antrieb") extensively modified ("gewaltig geändert") the "Fourth".

Alfred Orel (cited by Mayer) commented his discovery as follows " *The Stichvorlage (or revised Version for the edition) carefully prepared by Bruckner is to this day the most reliable known source for the Fourth. It represents, in the present state of searches, the ultimate clearly expressed Bruckner's will for the structure of the text of the Fourth Symphony, it is the last Version by his own hand ("Fassung letzter Hand"), and also represents for the future Bruckner's ultimate will".*

Orel's conclusion is: *"Anyway, it is clear that these new discoveries coming from a scientific approach - and we insist: from a scientific approach - do not challenge the "Gesamtausgabe" edition of the score from Bruckner's own hand; to the contrary, the more we know about Bruckner, the closer we are to him".*

Mayer ends his article by pointing out a mistake in Orel's text where it is written that by using the "Erstdruckfassung" during his Vienna concert of December, 21 1948, Furtwängler has helped retrieve Bruckner's explicit will. Mayer reminds us that Furtwängler had already made this change as early as 1943.

III- A response by Pr. Max Auer³:

The newspaper edition of September, 30 1950 brings this response which contradicts Mayer's approach. Firstly, Auer recalls that since 1887, when Hermann Levi rejected the Eighth Symphony as being unplayable, Bruckner was put under pressure by his pupils Joseph Schalk and Ferdinand Löwe who urged him not only to revise completely the already completed Eighth, but also to lighten the orchestration of his former works and to make cuts, and the Fourth was also a victim.

Then, Auer emphasizes the following points:

- 1) The letter mentioned by Mayer was in fact about the very first Version, named "Vierte Symphonie, Es Dur" which was never played in its entirety and was not yet titled "Romantic".
- 2) Bruckner has expressed himself in his 1893 Will in which he clearly demands the publication of all of his original scores without exception, which are stored at the Wiener Hofbibliothek.
- 3) If Bruckner, in a letter to Weingartner, wrote, concerning the Eighth, he might make cuts since it was too long, on the other hand, in the printed Version, the cuts should be identified, because the whole was for "*future times*" and for "*amateurs and connoisseurs*", we now think that these future times have come, and that Bruckner should sound as in the originals. This is also true for the "Fourth" which should be reconsidered.

IV- The answer by Ludwig K. Mayer:

Mayer says nothing about the letter to Weingartner, but he answers very clearly about the letter he himself mentioned as well as about Bruckner's Will:

- 1) It is a letter to Hermann Levi bearing the date of February, 27 1888⁴ in which the subject matter is the public performance of the work given one month earlier in Vienna under Hans Richter, and the score was already essentially the same as the "Erstdruckfassung". Further to this performance, Bruckner himself introduced in the "Stichvorlage" handwritten new amendments of the score with a view to its publication.
- 2) The cited sentence from the Will is from a period when not all the scores had been published: "*At the same time, I specify that the firm Jos. Eberle und Cie. should be allowed to borrow from the Hofbibliothek for a limited time the manuscripts of the works to be published, and that the latter should be obliged to lend to Mr. Jos. Eberle the original manuscripts for a corresponding time*". This sentence can by no means have the meaning given to it by Auer. Had Bruckner wanted to cancel the first Editions ("Erstdrucke"), he would most probably have mentioned it more clearly in his last Will.

V- Conclusion by Ludwig K. Mayer:

For the Fourth, there is an document which allows to understand how Furtwängler made his decision.

VI- Furtwängler's point of view:

1- In his 1939 conference given in Vienna within the "Deutsche Bruckner Gesellschaft", Furtwängler expressed himself on the problem of original editions ("Urfassung") and of the successive Versions of his symphonies:

Serious-minded and unbiased musicians like Schalk and Löwe, who knew, loved and respected Bruckner, believed it impossible at the time to present to the public his works in their original form, and were desperate about being able to make them readily understandable⁵. Thus, they tried to create bridges, to help as go-betweens. And these bridges and go-betweens gave rise to the revised Versions. What was the master's personal opinion? To what extent did he take part in these revised

editions? Or did he simply let things go? Or did he even protest? This question might never be settled.

To this day, it is not possible to know the importance for the future of the Original Versions now under publication. Indeed, the true fight and victory of Bruckner's music took place thanks to the earlier known Versions. For our knowledge of the Brucknerian musical language, style and sensitivity, the Original Versions are however very significant and full of teaching; the differences are to be found in the scoring as well as in the control of tempo; for both parameters, there is more simplicity, unity and linearity in the Original Versions which seem to meet more closely the wide horizons of the master's musical sensitivity. As to the many cuts that have been restored in the published Original Versions, one generally has the impression of a greater organic coherence, and not only in the details, so to speak in each bar, but above all, as regards the corresponding whole.

Precisely, where the cuts were the most drastic - the Finale of the Fifth Symphony had earlier one hundred and twenty two bars less than now - the superior powerfulness, clarity and efficiency of the original text are indisputable. So that this Finale, the most monumental of the world music, is simply given back to us. What an astonishing thing that the very existence of these various versions! With which other musician do we find such a perpetual modification of the same work? We know of Beethoven that he worked slowly and painstakingly. But when the creative process came to its end, the work was completed. On the contrary, don't we have the direct impression that with Bruckner, for him, inwardly, a work was never entirely completed! As if it were the very essence of this ever expanding and limitless music, in its yearning for going beyond itself, never to be totally completed, never definitive.

Later in his text, Furtwängler shuns the concept of Bruckner shown as being a "musician with an unalterably naive and childish faith" which is for him the result of more than dubious anecdotes, and assigns it to "a jealous attitude of the bourgeois mediocrity toward great men". He rejects as having "grown on the same tree" concepts like "Wagner's bad temper", Beethoven's "morbid bitterness", Brahms' "sententious mind" and to end with Bruckner's "intellectual mediocrity".

2- In 1941, Furtwängler, in one of his notes not meant to be published, wrote with a great freedom of tone (e.g. the name given to the Haas theory on the Versions by Bruckner's pupils Löwe et Schalk):

"It is said that a pre-print Version has been found. According to Haas, this changes nothing, the fact is the same: "violation" (Vergewaltigung) of Bruckner by his pupils (Schüler). This goes beyond: one should rather speak of a "violation" of the public by the Haas myth. The fact is that Bruckner's celebrity is not grounded on the Complete Edition, but on the earlier editions. One may even question whether Bruckner, with the Complete Edition, would have become famous that soon. What is important for me is not the literality of the notes as meant by the «Pharisees and scribes» but the authentic Bruckner. And I cannot consider only the Original Edition as authentic when there is a later Version revised for the edition (Stichvorlage)! Haas' theory on "violation" would be needed, and it is not authentic. It even contradicts the psychology of a Great Man. Only a non-productive mind can believe a great creator could let himself be manipulated when put under pressure for the time of a depression..... The falsification to Bruckner's character – Bruckner as a fool – which this thesis implies is much worse than the one the attempts by his first pupils ("Schüler") Löwe and Schalk achieved.

Talking of this, it has to be said: the Original Versions are different. Original manuscripts are extant only for the 4th and 5th symphonies. They don't exist for the 2nd, 3rd and 7th. Those for the 2nd and for the 3rd have been reconstructed by Haas, in a random way.

Original Versions built this way have no value.

For the 5th, the case is different. For it, the Original Version, is by comparison preferable.

Although similar, the case of the 4th is different."

N.B. Furtwängler challenges here as soon as 1941 the musicological faithfulness of some of the Haas Versions. Moreover, when later, at the beginning of the 50s, it will be confirmed that the Haas Version of the "Eighth" was problematic, he will come back to the Haslinger-Schlesinger-Lienau Version of 1892 for his 1954 concerts in Vienna.

3- In a letter to Paul Baur dated August, 21 1948, Furtwängler explains why he doesn't want to record Bruckner symphonies on disc: *"With Bruckner, if the free and improvised character of the performance is no longer there, then the best is lost".*

VII- Furtwängler and his performances of Bruckner's Fourth:

Furtwängler conducted this work between 1914 and 1951 (66 performances). Among Bruckner's symphonies it is the one he conducted most, more than the Eighth.

Karl Grunsky has measured the timings of the Fourth during the BPO concert given in Stuttgart on May, 17 1924:

I:19'; II:21'30; III:7'30; IV:17' in all 65', and he mentions: cuts ("mit Kurz.") in III and IV. (for the sake of comparison, Stuttgart WPO October, 22 1951: I: 17'45; II: 18'15; III:10'30; IV:19'30)

These cuts were made by Furtwängler and later abandoned.

Worth mentioning is that on April, 9 1930, Franz Schalk conducted his own Version of the work ("Erstdruckfassung" also called 1888 Version) with the WPO at the Vienna Konzerthaus, and then, Furtwängler toured the same month with the orchestra part and conducted this Version 4 times (Munich on the 23th, Stuttgart on the 24th, Cologne on the 25th and London on the 29th). Then, he conducted it in Berlin with the BPO on November 24, 27 and 28, 1932. Until 1932, it was always the 1888 Version, the only available one, that Furtwängler conducted.



In 1936, the Robert Haas edition, the "Originalfassung" is published. However, he does not seize the opportunity to inscribe the work on his concert schedule.

One will have to wait until 1941 for him to perform it again (22 performances until 1951):

- Berlin BPO December 14, 15, 16 and 17, 1941 (with an incomplete recording on the 14th⁶)
- Vienna WPO January 3 and 4, 1942
- Winterthur (Winterthur Stadtorchester) January 16, 1943
- Bern (Berner Stadtorchester) January 26, 1943
- Buenos-Aires (Orch. Teatro Colon) April 17, 1948
- Lucerne (Festspielorchester) August 18, 1948
- Vienna WSO December 21 and 22, 1948
- Tour of Germany with the WPO: 7 performances between October 14 and 29, 1951, among which two were recorded (Stuttgart on the 22th; Munich on the 29th)
- Berlin (BPO) November 30, December 2 and 3, 1951

VIII- Furtwängler from 1941 to 1951: which Version(s) for the Fourth?

We have two sources saying that Furtwängler dropped the Haas Version to perform the 1888 Version. Auer mentions 1948 as being the turning point, whereas Mayer says the change occurred in 1943, and the latter seems reliable since he talked about it with Furtwängler.

For the December 1941 concerts with the BPO, we have a recording on "Decelith" discs. As it was made with only one cutting machine, there is an interruption of a few dozens seconds every 4'30 or so. This recording has been published⁶. It corresponds to the 1888 Version⁷, and there are no longer cuts.

For the Janvier 1942 concerts in Vienna, the WPO Internet site mentions explicitly the 1888 Version.

From the article by Mayer, it is certain that Furtwängler was convinced in 1943 at the latest that the 1888 Version represented Bruckner's last will.

Furthermore, Orel mentions 1940 as being the date of the discovery of the documents (the "Stichvorlage" and the 1888 letter to Hermann Levi) in F. Löwe's papers. Furtwängler, who hadn't performed the work since 1932, and who in his 1939 conference regretted that maybe it would never be known what Bruckner thought of the scores amended by F. Löwe and the Schalk brothers, new very quicky that the "Stichvorlage" existed and we may well say that he has definitely decided not to use the Haas Version and to go on conducting the 1888 Version for the concerts given in 1941 and 1942.

Indeed, in his note that is from that very year 1941, Furtwängler explicitly writes that he "*cannot consider only an Original Edition as authentic, if there exists a later Version revised for the edition ("Stichvorlage")*", and he even angry because Haas, in spite of the discovery of the "Stichvorlage" revised by Bruckner's own hand sticks to his view as to Löwe and Schalk. It seems that when he wrote his note, he had not yet consulted the "Stichvorlage", whereas it is likely that he already had access to it in 1943, when he discussed the matter with Mayer.

It is however not known what his reaction might have been, had he known the terms of the letter by Bruckner to Weingartner which is mentioned by Auer.

It is however likely that, although, he toured Europe for one month (September 25 - October 22) with the WPO, he had been informed of these two articles , and thus of the letter to Weingartner.

This is what seems to have been known at the time. Investigating the Furtwängler Archiv at the Zentralbibliothek of Zürich would perhaps allow to know more, in particular the precise date when Furtwängler has been able to read these documents.

Kurt-Victor Selge⁸ has analyzed the alterations Furtwängler brought in his concerts to the score of the 1888 Version. The changes were essentially modifications of the tempo changes mentioned in the score, which he follows only partially, but which also he completes to give a more linear and more singing character to the musical flow.

He also gives us highly valuable clues as to Furtwängler's motive:

Although after 1938, he used for symphonies V to IX, the newly revised Robert Haas «Original Edition», he has not been convinced by the amendments in the IVth. Why ?

During a 1951 debate with students of the Munich National Conservatoire of Music, Furtwängler adressed this issue. It stands out that for him Bruckner was more a "mystical" composer" than an artist who searches with the highest objectivity the expression of a "cosmical order" (as, later, Günther Wand did). The Furtwängler recordings of the Vth and above all the VIIIth symphonies testify an energetic hold of the score with accelerandi and retardandi and an emotional expressivity that goes beyond the simple rendering of the score, thereby rubbing out the "deficiencies" of the composition seen by Furtwängler. The preserved recordings of the VIIth and of the IXth (but also the three preserved movements of the 1943 VIth), show the same intensity of the interpretation, but they follow more closely the tempi indications of the score. In the IVth, it is already by the choice of the Edition that we notice that Furtwängler, while basing himself on the score, tries to free himself from it by creating a sound world that goes beyond and transcends the written text".

IX - Conclusion:

It is clear from the above that the 1888 Version is the only one Furtwängler ever conducted.

The article by Mayer informs us that Furtwängler told him that the knowledge of some documents convinced him of the authenticity and of the ultimate relevance of this Version.

Mayer's opinion is that his decision was based upon the following recently discovered documents, which establish that it was Bruckner's last conception of the work:

- the "Stichvorlage", namely the revised Version for the edition, which Bruckner took pains to amend after the Premiere of this Version while it was still a draft. If actually amendments may have been brought to some of his works without his consent, this is not the case for the "Fourth". Note that the "Fourth" is the only one for which there is a "Stichvorlage".

- and the letter to Hermann Levi dated February 27, 1888, in which he mentions that on his own instigation ("aus eigenem Antrieb"), he extensively modified ("gewaltig geändert") the "Fourth".

Furtwängler could not have known these documents in 1939 when he gave his conference on Bruckner, because they were only discovered in 1940.

Mayer's point of view is partly confirmed by the 1941 note by Furtwängler (which is however prior to the date, 1943, given by Mayer). Indeed:

a) Both Furtwängler texts (1939 conference and 1941 note) show that he was completely against Robert Haas' theory according to which Bruckner has let himself be subdued by his pupils Schalk and Löwe.

b) The 1941 note shows in its conclusion that Furtwängler was suspicious about the musicological faithfulness of some of the Haas Versions. He is even angry against Haas who sticks to his view and still relies on the "Originalfassung" published in 1936.

c) In this context, the note indicates without ambiguity, and even without taking the letter to H. Levi into account, that the existence of the "Stichvorlage" amended by the composer's own hand was enough to convince him, who considered Bruckner's work as being in essence *"never to be totally completed, never definitive"*, to go on conducting the Fourth in the 1888 Version, because it represented the ultimate point of its conception.

The difference between the 1888 Version and the "Originalfassung" essentially relates to orchestration and tempo changes.

If Furtwängler chose the 1888 Version, he has also, as in the symphonies V and VIII, freed himself of the written text, especially as to tempo changes and, as underlined by K-V Selge, to bring more linearity of the musical flow, which according to the concept expressed by Furtwängler in his conference on Bruckner, would draw it nearer to the spirit of the Original Versions.

¹ German musicologist Ludwig Karl Mayer (1896-1963) has recorded for Polydor in 1943 with the orchestra of the Städtische Oper Berlin the Overture in G minor (WAB 98) and 4 Pièces for orchestra (WAB 96 et 97) by Bruckner. He has published an history of music as well as a XXth century history of music.



² Furtwängler, (see later in the text) has quite clearly, even violently, shown that he was opposed to this concept that has been widely use to disparage the later Versions of the symphonies. Robert Haas's position, he was a nazi, was highly imbued with ideology.

³ The Austrian musicologist Max Auer (1880-1962) was one of the co-founders and the first President of the "International Bruckner-Gesellschaft". He is considered as one of the main Bruckner biographers. He has bequeathed his collection of Bruckner manuscripts to the "Österreichische Nationalbibliothek". Little wonder that he is in line with the official position of the Bruckner-Gesellschaft, which is Robert Haas'. The contreversy was not likey to end...

⁴ Since then, we know that, to this letter, the "Stichvorlage" was appended for a concert Levi was scheduled to give in Munich on Avril 24, and Bruckner even asked Levi to prepare orchestral parts at his costs.

⁵ Hermann Levi, Gustav Mahler and Felix Weingartner have encountered the same problems. As to Hans Richter, he took part very actively to the evolution of the "Fourth".

⁶ CD: The Wilhelm Furtwängler Center of Japan WFHC-018/20
Download: <https://www.abruckner.com/store/downloads/BSVD0113>

⁷ This was checked on the one hand by Kurt-Victor Selge (Wilhelm Furtwängler Gesellschaft e.V. Berlin) and on the other hand, Pr. Dr. Daisuke Hirose for the "The Wilhelm Furtwängler Center of Japan".

⁸Text of the booklet for the album WFHC-018/20

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Exhibit: [a downloadable file](#) (Furtwängler - Bruckner IV - Documents) comprised of in the original language both articles by Ludwig K. Mayer, the texts by W. Furtwängler and K-V Selge, as well as four reviews published in the New-York press in 1910 after the performance of the "Fourth" conducted by G. Mahler.

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