

The music of Bruckner is *sui generis*. Its links with the music of Beethoven and Schubert are tenuous and it spawned no followers. It certainly has virtually nothing in common with the works of Brahms, Mahler and Wagner, which in the case of the latter led to a good deal of the trouble with Bruckner editions that now exists.

It was Bruckner's ill fortune to have a number of fervent supporters: Franz and Josef Schalk, Ferdinand Loewe, Hermann Levi and others, for they are largely responsible for the plethora of different versions of Bruckner's works. Under their influence Bruckner developed a preoccupation with revision from the Second Symphony onwards which became almost obsessive after the composition of the Eighth. His supporters, acting with a genuine desire to be helpful, wanted to make the works more accessible to the public - more like Wagner, less like the product of a "simple, upper-Austrian peasant" as Bruckner to all appearances was. Not content with merely giving advice, they even went to the extent of producing their own "revised versions", true bastardizations that were at least tolerated, if not condoned, by Bruckner.

What is remarkable is not so much the ignorance and arrogance of these people, as it seems to us now, but the extent of Bruckner's lack of self-confidence which allowed him to be so influenced. (It should be remembered, however, that Bruckner gave his original scores to the State Library "for later times"). Bruckner wrote nine symphonies, excluding the student work now called "No.0"; they exist now in no fewer than thirty-four different versions.*

It is too easy, however, to dismiss the advice given to Bruckner as useless meddling. Bruckner's revisions were often genuine improvements, and this is certainly true of the Eighth Symphony. It was written in 1884-87 in the afterglow of the success of the Seventh Symphony. Full of optimism, Bruckner sent the score to the man he termed his "artistic father", the conductor Hermann Levi, hoping that it would "find grace". Levi, however much he admired the Seventh, was unable to fathom the work and gave to Josef Schalk the unpleasant task of breaking the news to Bruckner. Bruckner was so distraught that he underwent a sort of mental breakdown; nevertheless, he began to revise the work under the guidance of Franz Schalk and this was completed three years later. The alterations are substantial; the most important included altering the tonal shape of the Adagio, a recomposition of the Trio, the addition of woodwind instruments, and the excision of a total of 164 bars (the 1887 version takes over ninety minutes to play, the Adagio alone over thirty) including the deletion of the entire *fff* ending to the First Movement.**

This, however, was not the end of the story. This 1890 version was further doctored by Schalk, and used in this form for its first performance, though it can at least be said that the alterations were relatively minor and a far cry from the sort of damage done to the Fourth, Fifth and Ninth which were totally "Wagnerized". This version was published as the First Edition of 1892, and reprinted by various publishers during the subsequent few decades.

It was not until 1939 that any attempt was made to restore Bruckner's intentions, as far as they could be determined. Robert Haas, in his Bruckner Society edition, departed from his usual editorial policy of religious adherence to Bruckner's originals and published a composite of the 1887 and 1890 versions. He attempted to include the genuine improvements of the later score with the original thoughts that Haas surmised Bruckner would have retained from the 1887 score had he been left to his own revisions.

This policy was vigorously attacked by Leopold Nowak, the current editor for the Bruckner Society, as being unacceptable in a critical edition, but there are many conductors and musicologists who consider the Haas edition to be the musically soundest option. Nowak himself published the 1890 version (in 1955) and the 1887 original as late as 1972.

Thus in 1941 at the time of this recording, only two of the four editions were published. Bruno Walter always used original editions where possible, but as wartime conditions would have prevented access to Haas' new score the version presented on this disc is Schalk's of 1892.

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* An excellent explanation of the Bruckner editions is given in Deryck Cooke's articles "The Bruckner Problem Simplified" in *Musical Times*; January, February, April, May, August 1969.

** A full comparison, including a summary in table form, of the 1887 and 1890 versions can be found in "Die Fassungen der Achten Symphonie von Anton Bruckner" by Constantin Floros in *Bruckner Symposium: Die Fassungen*, ed. Franz Grasberger, Anton Bruckner Institut Linz 1981.