

Max Auer in his famous Bruckner biography states that "for grandeur and loftiness the Ninth Symphony surpasses all its predecessors" and that, in this work, "the master left us his most sublime work". Well may Auer write this; for indeed, in structure, contents and expression the Ninth ranks high even above the preceding Bruckner symphonies — incredible as a progress may have seemed to the friends of the master after the towering perfection of his Fifth, Sixth, Seventh and Eighth.

The draft of the first movement of the Symphony No. IX dates back to the spring of 1889. The orchestration of this movement was made between the end of April, 1891, and October 14th, 1892. The Scherzo was completed on February 15th, 1894, the Trio of that movement one year earlier, on February 27th, 1893; it replaced an earlier Trio, which contained a viola solo. The beautiful Adagio was finished on October 31st, 1894. The composition of this symphony, demanded a considerably longer space of time than was customary with Bruckner: the hardships of increasing age and Bruckner's ill health during the last period of his life account for this fact. Even on the day of his passing (October 11th, 1896), Bruckner was still working on his last symphony. His death prevented the completion of the work which was to have been crowned by a powerful Fugue. Death befell the master in the midst of his work on this Fugue. Extensive sketches for a grandiose instrumental finale of the Ninth remained at the time of the composer's passing.

Bruckner occasionally expressed his fears lest death might prevent the completion of this symphony and provided that in this case the Te Deum should be substituted for the Finale movement at the first performance of his Ninth — which he had dedicated

"to his Lord". For this emergency he planned an Interlude of big proportions to connect the third movement with the Te Deum. This Interlude, however, remained a fragment. Perhaps it was Bruckner's strong sense of tonality which made him shrink from the idea to join a piece in C major key (the Te Deum) to a symphony the principal tonality of which was that of D minor. Ferdinand Löwe, enthusiastic pioneer and interpreter of Bruckner's music, writes, in his Preface to the piano arrangement of the Ninth: "Fidelity towards the intentions of the composer prompted the promoters of the first performance to close it with the Te Deum. It would seem perfectly justified, however, to omit the latter, especially since the Ninth, in its present form, may well be regarded as a work complete in itself." Löwe's suggestion has since been generally accepted. It is today quite customary to perform the symphony without the Te Deum, closing it with the Adagio movement.

Bruckner's custom of interspersing quotations from earlier works among his symphonies — a procedure first practised in the Second symphony — is particularly noticeable in the Ninth. The introductory theme of thirds sounded by the horns in the first movement is taken from the Kyrie of the Missa solennis, in B flat minor, written in 1854. This reminiscence from his youthful Mass may have been an involuntary one; the frequent occurrence of earlier motives in the Adagio, however, is palpably well calculated and intended. The inversion of the Secondary theme (at letter N, and later at letter S) is clearly a quotation from the Mass in D ("Misereatur"); in the fourth measure preceding P we find a reminiscence from the Benedictus of the F minor Mass, similar to the Adagio from the Second symphony. Preceding

letter V there appears, in the Tubas, a suggestion of the Adagio theme of the Eighth; and at the close, in the horns, a faint reminiscence of the Principal theme of the first movement from the Seventh symphony. The inversion of the first theme (at letter F), incidentally, is identical with the theme of the Fugue from the Finale of the Fifth symphony. Thematically, the Adagio thus constitutes, in a manner, a survey of Bruckner's life work, and an intended one: Bruckner himself has termed this Adagio his "Farewell to Life". And indeed, it is often said that one about to pass away in his last hours holds harvest of his past life. One cannot but be touched and gripped by the wonderful Adagio of the Ninth at every hearing. It conveys the vision of one who fights his last earthly struggle presently to resign in devotion to the eternal will: it is indeed a "Farewell to Life".

The first performance of the Ninth symphony occurred on February 11th, 1903, at a concert of the Wiener Konzert Verein, Vienna, under Ferdinand Löwe's baton. The effect which it created upon the spellbound audience, is indescribable. Next to the Fourth, Seventh, and Eighth symphonies and the Te Deum, the Ninth counts among the most frequently performed of Bruckner's compositions.

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