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Bruckner: Symphony No. 8

Anton Bruckner's Eighth Symphony (1890), one of the great Romantic symphonies, is a grandly complex masterpiece. Its critical reception has been fascinatingly contentious. Its music, at once extensive and distilled, directly confronts the problem of the symphony after Beethoven and after Wagner. This book explores this many-faceted work from several angles. It documents the complicated and often misunderstood history of the symphony's composition and revision and offers an accessible guide to its musical design. It demonstrates, by means of a study of well-known recordings, how performance styles have evolved in this century. It also revisits the conventional wisdom about the various versions and editions of the symphony and comes to some provocative new conclusions.

BENJAMIN KORSTVEDT is Assistant Professor of Music at the University of St. Thomas, St. Paul, Minnesota. He is currently writing a book on Bruckner and musical culture in the decades around 1900.

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For Paula and Sam

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Preface and acknowledgments

Scholarly writing about Bruckner typically follows certain well-worn paths; in particular, it tends to grant great emphasis to the notorious editorial problems that attend this composer's works. This book does undoubtedly devote more attention to text-critical concerns than do most others in the Handbook series, partly because the textual history of the Eighth Symphony is complex and important, and partly because modern understanding of it is, as I hope to show, somewhat mistaken. Editorial issues can, if approached with a critical spirit, open out into regions of broader significance, such as hermeneutics, reception history, and performance practice; yet I believe that the "Bruckner Problem" is ordinarily framed too simplistically, and that a reductive concern with textual authenticity has come to loom too large in the imagination of most Brucknerians. For these reasons some parts of this book, notably Chapters 3 and 4, are deliberately unburdened by text-critical concerns.

Books that are apt for teaching advanced courses on late nineteenth-century music are not thick on the ground. I have borne this in mind while writing this volume, and will be gratified if it finds use in the classroom. I have tried to provide enough variety amongst the chapters to offer some small methodological range (from critical analysis and reception history, to textual history, with even a hint of the history of ideas in the chapter on the sublime) for an enterprising teacher to build upon.

I owe great thanks to my wife Paula for her staunch support and help, and for her patience in hearing great gusts of and about the Eighth Symphony. Our son Sam was, like Paula, a constant, glowing beacon of light and love.

Many other people earned my gratitude by offering me assistance of various kinds. Laurence Dreyfus generously shared with me the text of a crucial letter from Levi to Bruckner he had uncovered in Munich.

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Morten Solvik, Derek Scott and Juan Cahis gave me copies of then-unpublished articles. Henry Lea and Lionel Tacchini aided me with some knotty problems of translation. Dermot Gault, Gunnar Cohrs, Paul Hawkshaw, and John Phillips helped me with some details about manuscript sources. Amie McEvoy of *The Musical Quarterly* responded with courtesy and promptness to an importune request, as did the Music Division of the Library of Congress. Thomas Christensen and David Aldeborgh lent me copies of rare scores. The conductor Georg Tintner shared with me some perceptive thoughts about the different versions of the symphony. Lani Spahr and Dave Griegel gave me invaluable discographic assistance, as did Mark Kluge. He and William Carragan both read portions of the manuscript and generously shared with me insights and ideas about textual issues and the history of Bruckner performance. I also thank Julian Rushton for his many helpful editorial suggestions, and Penny Souster for suggesting the project to me. Thanks, too, to the Bruckner Gang.

Throughout the course of my work I was thankful to be dealing with a symphony of such superb depth and complex satisfaction.

My final months of work on the book were supported by a Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Humanities, for which I am grateful.

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A note on editions and terminology

Four distinct editions of the Eighth Symphony have been published: the first published score (Berlin and Vienna: Haslinger-Schlesinger-Lienau, 1892 [plate number 8288]; later reprinted by Eulenburg, Peters, and Universal Edition), Robert Haas's edition (Leipzig: Musikwissenschaftlicher Verlag, 1939), and Leopold Nowak's critical editions of Bruckner's 1890 and 1887 versions (Vienna: Musikwissenschaftlicher Verlag, 1955 and 1972, respectively).

Nowak's two editions are primary. These scores, which are based closely on Bruckner's manuscript scores of the symphony, are widely accepted by scholars as definitive and are easily available. They are generally identified in this text as simply "the 1887 version" and "the 1890 version." Nowak's edition of the 1890 version is the central source of the Eighth Symphony, and unless otherwise noted, the discussions in this book are based on it.

The edition published in 1939 by Nowak's predecessor, Robert Haas, is not a reasonably faithful representation of either of Bruckner's versions, and is not therefore of primary concern in this study. See Appendix A for a commentary on Haas's edition.

The text of the Eighth Symphony contained in the 1892 edition differs in some ways from the text of Bruckner's manuscript score of the 1890 version. It raises special questions, and is discussed in detail in Chapter 6. It is referred to herein as "the 1892 edition."