ANTON BRUCKNER

Symphony No.8 in C minor

Orchestre de la Suisse Romande

Marek Janowski

PentaTone classics

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Anton Bruckner (1824-1896)

Symphony No. 8 in C minor (1890 Version)

Nowak Edition

1	Allegro moderato	14. 52
2	Scherzo. Allegro moderato	14. 44
3	Adagio. Feierlich langsam; doch nicht schleppend	26. 05
4	Finale. Feierlich, nicht schnell	23. 41

Orchestre de la Suisse Romande
conducted by
Marek Janowski

Recording venue: Victoria Hall, Geneva, Switzerland (April, June, July 2010)
Executive Producer: Job Maarse
Recording Producer: Job Maarse
Balance Engineers: Erdo Groot & Jean-Marie Geijsen
Recording Engineer: Roger de Schot
Editing: Roger de Schot

Total playing time: 79.47

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Pour les versions allemande et française des biographies,
veuillez consulter notre site.
www.pentatonemusic.com

ESPACE 2
RADIO SUISSE ROMANDE
LA VIE CÔTÉ CULTURE

With the Eight Symphony, Anton Bruckner completes a kind of sonorous apotheosis of the Romantic era. A summit resurrected by the haughty conducting of Marek Janowski at the head of the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande.

Partner of this grandiose project which looks increasingly like a current integral, Espace 2 welcomes this release perpetuating the action of a public service specifically mandated to relay the cultural and musical richness of the French-speaking Switzerland.

If the recording is –by definition- not central in the mission of a broadcaster, it nevertheless constitutes a kind of freeze-frame sealing again the long relationship between the OSR and "its" radio station. I recall that the Radio Télévison Suisse and the great Swiss orchestra are contractually linked for more than 70 years and that they nourish together, day after day, new projects, new exchanges that allow the sonorous immediacy lived at the Victoria Hall of Geneva to be propagated throughout Switzerland, and worldwide through the European Broadcasting Union (EBU)

Thus, this recording appears like a complementary and additional relay in our long common history ; and the Eight Symphony, brilliant sonorous celebration, is like the metaphor of this assiciation at the service of music.

Alexandre Barrelet
Director Espace 2

The fascination of a mystery

It took Anton Bruckner slightly more than three years to complete his Symphony No. 8 in C minor. Or, to be precise, to complete his *first* version of this symphony. Never yet had Bruckner spent so much time on a single work. And if one adds to this the revision process of the second version (as recorded here), then the creation of this composition covered a period of almost six years, namely from 1884 until 1890.

Thanks to the overwhelming success of his Symphony No. 7, Bruckner was in an exuberant state of mind. He had finally achieved the breakthrough for which he had longed! And in this mood he set to work with great intensity on his new composition, which progressed rather slower than usual. This was due to a number of reasons: for example, the impaired physical health of the 60-year-old composer, the unaccustomed strain caused by numerous performances, and the extra work surrounding the first publication of his seventh symphony. As is apparent from the chronological period of creation (without going into great detail), he did harbour various doubts concerning the concept of his Symphony No. 8, not in the last place due to the pressure of unexpectedly high anticipation: he wanted nothing more than to outdo his seventh symphony. Nevertheless, he managed to complete the score by August 10, 1887: and as we know that he began sketching his Symphony No. 9 just two days later, clearly he was not thinking about further revisions at that moment – let alone, about any new version...

Bruckner lay the success of his Symphony No. 7 mainly at the door of the conductor of the Munich première, Hermann Levi; and in September 1887, he sent the score of his eighth symphony to his "artistic father", full of cheer and hope, accompanying it with the following words: "May it find favour in your eyes! I cannot possibly describe the pleasure I derive from anticipating a performance of the work under the direction of the same maestro." However, as he replied, Levi was not able relate in the slightest to the new work – and Bruckner felt as if his world was collapsing. After having felt so elated, he now descended to the depths of despair. Yet Levi, who criticized in particular the "stereotypical structure" – as well as the instrumentation and the finale – concluded his letter as follows: "… a revision may prove highly worthwhile". Subsequently, Bruckner became obsessed with the revision (not for the first time): in fact, not only did he totally revise his Symphony No. 8, he also created a third version of his Symphony No. 3, as well as the Vienna version of his Symphony No. 1.

As far as his Symphony No. 8 is concerned, it does appear that there were a number of outside influences, primarily Levi – clearly, Bruckner wanted to have him conduct the première. Thus, in February 1888, he wrote to the conductor as follows: "Admittedly, I have good reason to be ashamed of myself – at least, for the last time – with regard to my eighth symphony. What an ass I was! It now looks very different." Bruckner, an ass? This much-quoted passage from a letter refers to a previously mentioned occurrence, which gains significance in reference to the new version: whilst working on the Adagio of the first version, Bruckner had once again completely revised his already finished sketches – perhaps an indication of the first doubts the composer was beginning to harbour with regard to the concept of the first version? And indeed, after the completion of the work in 1890, it did look "very different" – the first three movements had been entirely rewritten in new manuscripts, whereas changes in the finale had been incorporated into the existing score. Leopold Nowak, general editor of the two versions in the context of the complete Critical Edition, pointed out that there were differences – albeit at times minimal, or just barely audible – in virtually every measure. In particular, Bruckner made massive changes to the instrumentation, which Levi had criticised as "impossible"; and in his second version he clearly homogenized the sound by introducing triple woodwinds and extra horns (ranging from five to eight) in all movements; furthermore, he included three harps in the Adagio in the Scherzo-Trio, a most distinctive feature. Research into the "character" of the sound demonstrates that the more individual sound of the first version made way for the ideals of the "popular Wagnerian sound characteristics" (Manfred Wagner) in the second.

In addition to these changes in the "inner spirit" of the work, Bruckner also rethought his concept of the work, with far-reaching consequences. Apparently, he had experienced a special problem with the end of the first movement – and a special problem demands a special solution. He came up with a solution that was unique in his oeuvre: instead of as usual allowing the main theme to explode in *fff* into the coda, he did the opposite and ended the movement in *ppp*, gradually decomposing the main theme up until the final chromatic phrase of the opening motif. The usual apotheosis fails to materialize. The movement now – in the second version – almost fades away, thus resolutely referring to the beginning of the work, which struggles up from the deepest of abysses in utter tonal suspension. For the first time in his Symphony No. 8, Bruckner also juggles the inner movements: he first presents the remarkably timid, yet at times thematically "stiff" Scherzo; then he follows on with the highly expansive Adagio, full of tremendous intensifications. Due to this interchange, the scales are tipped towards the end of the symphony – thus, the second part of the work (the Adagio and Finale) gains not only in length, but also in significance. Ultimately, Bruckner develops here his idea of a *Finalsymphonie* (= finale symphony), with which he had first experimented in his Symphony No. 5. He concentrates on the finale, utilizing all his compositional strengths and developmental skills. And at the conclusion of this movement, the symphonic cycle of the eighth is finally brought full circle: here, the main themes of all four movements are gathered together simultaneously and presented once again; however, now in radiant major. The apotheosis, at first denied to the opening movement, is now allotted almost superhuman dimensions. Here, absolute music comes to terms with itself.

Undoubtedly, Bruckner's mightiest and most monumental work is his Symphony No. 8. And yet it is full of doubts and dark abysses. Bruckner himself described the work as a "mystery": thus, keeping this in mind, whereas one might enjoy his strange, if not abstruse "commentaries on the substance" of the Eighth, one should still approach them with some caution. After all, far better to search for doubts, dark abysses or meanings in the score itself – for that is where one can hear the true voice of a composer – than in any "programmatic" proclamation.

Ultimately, in his Symphony No. 8, Bruckner demonstrates both his perfection and conquest of the symphonic genre: for instance, by making radical progress in hitherto unheard-of terms in the harmonic realms, transporting the work to the limits of tonality and beyond. (Only Mahler was to take this a logical step further.) He contrasts these unstable harmonic structures with extremely powerful rhythmic elements, in order to create a "counterpoint between stability and instability" (as aptly described by Mathias Hansen), which tosses the audience about in a vexing manner. The tremendous development of the complex themes, and thus the resolution of their classical-romantic duality, exceeds the limits of the genre.

Can we perhaps discover, behind this crossing of borders, the abysmal depths and fears of the composer? And if so, how does one link the common image of Bruckner held by both contemporaries and later generations – namely, that of the dim fool, the uncouth country bumpkin, the unworldly provincial – to this music? After all, Bruckner does not compose in an obsequious manner; rather as an anarchist, or a commander in battle, leading his imaginary orchestral armies seemingly without effort through various situations and emotions such as powerlessness, belief, desire, happiness, loneliness and fear. One might even hear a *Zusichselbstfinden* (= coming to terms with himself) in the coda of the Finale. Or perhaps not. That is exactly why the Symphony No. 8 is a true "mystery"; not just to its audience, but also to its creator.

On December 18, 1892, Hans Richter led the Vienna Philharmonic in the première of the work. The performance must have been overwhelming, and was described by Hugo Wolf as follows: "The symphony is the creation of a giant, and in spiritual dimension, prolificacy and volume, it towers above all other symphonies written by the master. [...] It was a complete victory of light over darkness, and a storm of enthusiasm broke loose as if powered by elemental forces." Reactions nowadays are not that different.

Franz Steiger
English translation: Fiona J. Stroker-Gale

Marek Janowski

Marek Janowski has been Artistic Director of the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin since 2002 and in 2005 he was also appointed Musical Director of the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande in Geneva. He is in demand as a guest conductor throughout the world, working on a regular basis in the USA with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra (where he holds the Otto Klemperer Guest Conducting Chair), the Boston and San Francisco Symphony Orchestras, the Philadelphia Orchestra, and in Europe with the Orchestre de Paris, the Orchester der Tonhalle Zürich, the Danish National Symphony Orchestra in Copenhagen and the NDR-Sinfonieorchester Hamburg. Born in 1939 in Warsaw and educated in Germany, Marek Janowski's artistic path led him from Assistant positions in Aachen, Cologne, Düsseldorf and Hamburg to his appointment as General Music Director in Freiburg im Breisgau (1973-75) and Dortmund (1975-79). Whilst in Dortmund, his reputation grew rapidly and he became greatly involved in the international opera scene. There is not one world-renowned opera house where he has not been a regular guest since the late '70s, from the Metropolitan Opera New York to the Bayerischer Staatsoper Munich; from Chicago and San Francisco to Hamburg; from Vienna and Berlin to Paris. Marek Janowski stepped back from the opera scene in the 1990's in order to concentrate on orchestral work and was thus able to continue the great German conducting tradition in the symphonic repertoire. He now enjoys an outstanding reputation amongst the great orchestras of Europe and North America. He is recognised for his ability to create orchestras of international standing as well as for his innovative programmes and for bringing a fresh and individual interpretation to familiar repertoire. Between 1984 and 2000, as Musical Director of the Orchestre Philharmonique de Radio France, Marek Janowski led the orchestra to international fame as the leading orchestra in France. From 1986 to 1990, in addition to his work in France, Janowski held the position of Chief

Conductor of the Gürzenich-Orchester in Cologne, and between 1997 and 1999 he was also First Guest Conductor of the Deutsche Symphonie-Orchester Berlin. From 2000 to 2005 Janowski served as Music Director of the Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo, and from 2001 to 2003 he also held the position of Chief Conductor with the Dresdner Philharmonie. Marek Janowski has made many recordings over the past 30 years, including many complete operas and symphonic cycles, many of which have been awarded international prizes. To this day, his recording of Richard Wagner's complete tetralogy *The Ring Cycle* with the Staatskapelle Dresden (1980-83) remains one of the most distinguished and musically interesting recordings that has been made of this work.

Orchestre de la Suisse Romande

The Orchestre de la Suisse Romande was founded in 1918 by Ernest Ansermet, who remained principal conductor until 1967. The orchestra employs 112 permanent musicians and performs a series of subscription concerts in Geneva and Lausanne, the symphony concerts of the city of Geneva, the annual concert for the United Nations as well as playing for opera performances at the Grand Théâtre de Genève.

Marek Janowski has been the orchestra's artistic and music director since 1 September 2005.

The Orchestre de la Suisse Romande achieved world renown under its founding conductor and under its successive music directors: Paul Kletzki (1967-1970), Wolfgang Sawallisch (1970-1980), Horst Stein (1980-1985), Armin Jordan (1985-1997), Fabio Luisi (1997-2002), Pinchas Steinberg (2002-2005) and continues to make an active contribution to music history by discovering or supporting contemporary composers of prime importance whose works were first performed in Geneva. These include Benjamin Britten, Claude Debussy, Peter Eötvös, Heinz Holliger, Arthur Honegger, Michael Jarrell, Frank Martin, Darius Milhaud, Igor Stravinsky and others. Since the year 2000 the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande has given the world premieres of about twenty works in cooperation with Radio Suisse Romande. The orchestra also supports contemporary music in Switzerland by regularly commissioning works from the composers William Blank and Michael Jarrell.

Working closely with Radio-Télévision Suisse Romande, music performed by the Orchestre de la Suisse Romande was very soon broadcast on radio and on short wave and was thus received by millions of listeners throughout the world. Thanks to the partnership with Decca, which gave rise to several legendary recordings, the orchestra's renown continued to grow. The OSR has also recorded for Æon, Cascavelle, Denon, EMI, Erato, Harmonia Mundi, PentaTone and Philips and many of these recordings have been awarded major prizes.

The Orchestre de la Suisse Romande has undertaken international tours and performed in prestigious concert halls in Asia (Tokyo, Seoul and Beijing), in Europe (Berlin, Frankfurt, Hamburg, Vienna, Salzburg, Madrid, Barcelona, Brussels, Amsterdam, Budapest, Istanbul, London, Paris etc.) as well as in major American cities (Boston, New York, San Francisco, Washington etc.). During the 2009/2010 season the OSR performed in Montreux, Gstaad, Zurich, Bucharest, Prague, Turin, Zagreb and Budapest.

The orchestra has also performed at various festivals, for instance, since 2000 the Budapest Spring Festival, the Chorégies d'Orange, the Festival de Musica de Canarias, the Lucerne Festival At Easter, the Festival of Radio France and of Montpellier, the Menuhin Festival in Gstaad, the Robeco Zomerconcerten, at the Septembre Musical Festival in Montreux, at the Bucharest Festival.

The Orchestre de la Suisse Romande is supported by the canton and the city of Geneva, by Radio-Télévision Suisse Romande, friends associations as well as by several sponsors and donors. For the concerts performed in Lausanne the orchestra also benefits from support by the canton de Vaud.

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