

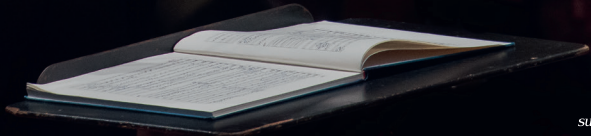
LIVE
RECORDING
NTR Saturday
Matinee
Series

ANTON BRUCKNER

Symphony No. 7

Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra

Bernard Haitink conductor



SUPER AUDIO CD

ANTON BRUCKNER

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ANTON BRUCKNER (1824 - 1896)

Symphony No. 7

- [1] I. Allegro moderato
- [2] II. Adagio. Sehr feierlich und sehr langsam
- [3] III. Scherzo. Sehr schnell
- [4] IV. Finale. Bewegt, doch nicht schnell

21:37

21:35

10:49

14:06

Total time 68:10

Live recording NTR Saturday Matinee Series, 15 June 2019.

Bruckner's major breakthrough

Anton Bruckner's symphonies now occupy a fixed place in the symphonic canon, although it took him a long time to gain this recognition. Bruckner's symphonic output is characterised by its programmatic elements, 'Romantic' experiments in form, quotations from Wagner and orgiastic crescendo passages. His works share this expansive and ecstatic nature with those of Beethoven, whose groundbreaking symphonies in the early 19th century had unleashed a musical revolution and which remained the gold standard even in Bruckner's time. Bruckner's attempts to take the symphony in new directions were, however, difficult to reconcile with the prevailing notion of what a symphony should be in the second half of the nineteenth century. The fact is that many of its proponents regarded the symphonic genre as a beacon of Classical balance, a healthy antidote to the musical modes of the moment in the form of Richard Wagner's musical drama and the programmatic music of Liszt, Berlioz and others. Brahms's four symphonies were regarded as the textbook example of this. Compared to the music of Brahms, Bruckner's works struck many critics as being disjointed, not to say formless. Nor did the audiences instantly embrace Bruckner, although his music did become extremely popular towards the end of his life. The premiere of the *Seventh Symphony* in 1884 gave him his major international breakthrough and it remains his best-loved symphony to this day.

Success certainly did not fall into Bruckner's lap. He was a doubter by nature, and his doubts endured even when he began to achieve greater success as a composer, to some extent because resistance to his art also burgeoned exponentially. These doubts can be seen from the multiplicity of revisions he

made to his symphonies. The simple fact is that he was a perfectionist. But his perfectionism meant that he only started writing after years of very extensive theoretical study, a period that the Bruckner scholar Robert Simpson described as the composer's 'voluntary artistic celibacy'. He studied traditional music theory for many years with the renowned Viennese teacher Simon Sechter. After graduating with flying colours in 1861, Bruckner took further lessons from Otto Kitzler who – in contrast to the arch-conservative Sechter – introduced him to the music of the future, in works by Berlioz, Liszt and Wagner. He saw his first Wagner opera, *Tannhäuser*, in 1863 and this was the overwhelming experience for him that finally started to drop the pieces of his puzzle into place. At this point, aged nearly 40, he was finally ready to devote himself entirely to writing music.

Anyone considering Bruckner's careful and well-considered learning process will recognise in him an individual of circumspection and synthesis; someone writing his music based on a deep-rooted knowledge of the past and a burning curiosity for the present, music both rooted and looking to the future. The result was an extremely personal style, not easy to classify, and the Vienna of his day had little patience for such subtlety. Bruckner was particularly harshly dealt with by the influential music critic Eduard Hanslick, who regarded music purely as an abstract art form and was scathingly critical of the poetical pretensions of the symphonic poem and music drama. The conflict between the two had a lot to do with Bruckner's adoration of Wagner; Hanslick had been moderately positive about Bruckner's music until the composer dedicated his *Third Symphony* to Wagner in 1873.

Wagner's appreciation was a considerable boon to Bruckner, but the 1877 premiere of the *Third Symphony* was not a success. Bruckner had better luck with the 'Romantic' *Fourth*, a work that was emphatically programmatic in nature and offered its audiences the safety net of some picturesque, romantic tableaux. Bruckner extended his experiments in form in the *Fifth* and *Sixth Symphonies*, but his melodic inspiration spoke less to the imagination. In the *Seventh Symphony*, he once again succeeded in clothing an ingenious musical architecture with attractive melodies. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that this symphony remains his best-loved work in the genre today, along with the 'Romantic' number 4. Following a sympathetic reception of the premiere, in the more traditional city of Leipzig, a further performance in Wagner's home city of Munich raised the roof. This marked the start of a triumphal procession for both the piece and the composer.

Like many of Bruckner's symphonies, the opening movement of the *Seventh* starts with tremolo strings. Celli, horns and violas then overlay an expansive theme made up of broken chords, in contrast with the often more measured themes used in his earlier symphonies. The broken chords also return in most of the thematic material used by Bruckner in this first movement. The climbing broken arpeggio figures that open the movement recall links to Wagner's famous *Rheingold* Prelude. These links to Wagner's *Ring des Nibelungen* are further entrenched by the majestic soundscape of the E major chords that draw this first movement to its close. An attentive listener may also perceive the similarity to the conclusion of Wagner's opera *Die Walküre*, also written in E major, with idyllic horns and pentatonic string figures.

Bruckner continues the link to Wagner in the second movement, the *Adagio*, not just through the opening theme being played on Wagner tubas, but also in some of the decorative comments. He confessed to having gained his inspiration for the theme when he discovered that the Bayreuth master could not have much longer to live. His idol died shortly thereafter, in fact, in February 1883 and Bruckner marked the funeral fanfare that sounds out towards the end of the movement – following the enormous climax – as a homage. Bruckner also incorporated a quotation from his own *Te Deum* in the passage for strings that comes immediately after the opening theme. It seems that he was employing this quotation, “*non confundar in aeternum* (let me not be confounded into eternity)”, as an appeal to preserve Wagner’s musical legacy.

The *Scherzo* is relatively conventional, compared to the complex forms of the other movements. The opening motif is minimalist in terms of melody, starting with a falling fifth that relates back to the broken triads in the first movement, although here it appears in the minor key. This motif is followed immediately by some other fairly elementary musical ideas, set out as foundation stones for the remainder of the movement. It is precisely the minimalism of these motifs that allows Bruckner to stress the compositional *Arbeit*, or labour, involved in his refined transformation of these musical ideas. The lyrical melodies in the *Trio* section are all the more strikingly beautiful, set against this ‘elementary’ background.

The finale opens with a melody that strikes the audience as being a slightly less monumental version of the opening theme in the first movement, once again featuring broken chords. This finale is relatively compact and less of a *tour de force* than in many other of Bruckner’s symphonies. Bruckner ingeniously adapts the symphonic form to his own personal style by reprising the themes in reverse order in the recapitulation. One consequence of this mirror symmetry is that the finale concludes with its own opening theme. And – as if this regression was not ingenious enough – he provides an extra layer to the opening theme when it returns by blending it with the very opening theme from the symphony’s first movement. Once again, the finale draws to its close in the soundscape of E major, referencing the close of the first movement and allowing Bruckner to seal two rings at a single stroke; an excellent example of formal awareness from a composer who is so often and so wrongly accused of ‘formlessness’. Bruckner’s arch-enemy Eduard Hanslick was not particularly impressed by what he felt to be an ‘unnatural, inflated, sickly and pernicious’ symphony, comparing it to a ‘symphonic python’, writhing aimlessly hither and thither. Hanslick unwittingly hit the nail squarely on the head with this insult. The fact is that Bruckner’s *Seventh Symphony* has a great deal in common with Ouroboros, a mythological snake consuming its own tail in the closing measures; an eternal symbol of unity, balance and perfection.

Kasper van Kooten

Translation: Bruce Gordon/Muse Translations

The Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, founded in 1945, plays a vital role in Dutch musical life. Besides major symphonic repertoire, it performs – more than any other Dutch symphony orchestra – the music of today, often including premieres of works specially commissioned for the NTR Saturday Matinee and AVROTROS Friday Concerts broadcasting series. Innovative programme concepts such as *Pieces of Tomorrow* and *Out of the Blue* reach out to a conspicuously young audience. Almost all concerts are broadcast live on NPO Radio 4, naturally implying that the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra performs for a live audience dozens of times larger than any concert hall could ever accommodate.

The American conductor Karina Canellakis started her position as chief conductor of the orchestra in September 2019, being the first female chief conductor of a Dutch symphony orchestra. Her fellow American James Gaffigan, principal guest conductor since 2011, has prolonged his engagement until 2023.

Markus Stenz has been chief conductor of the orchestra from 2012 to 2019. His illustrious predecessors include Bernard Haitink (patron), Edo de Waart (honorary conductor), Jaap van Zweden (honorary chief conductor), Jean Fournet and Hans Vonk. Guest conductors have included Leopold Stokowski, Kirill Kondrashin, Antal Doráti, Charles Dutoit, Valery Gergiev, Mariss Jansons, Michael Tilson Thomas, Gennady Rozhdestvensky, Peter Eötvös, John Adams, Christoph Eschenbach, Vasily Petrenko, Vladimir Jurowski and Pablo Heras-Casado.

The Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra was awarded an Edison Classical Award in 2014 for its contribution to the musical life of the Netherlands, and in 2017 it was awarded the Concertgebouw Prize (with the Netherlands Radio Choir).

www.radiofilharmonischorkest.nl



Bernard Haitink was born and educated in Amsterdam. His conducting career began at the Netherlands Radio, where he took part in their intensive conductors' courses, and where in 1957 he became the Chief Conductor of the Radio Philharmonic Orchestra. He went on to become Chief Conductor of the Concertgebouw Orchestra for 27 years. He is now Patron of the Radio Philharmonic and Honorary Conductor of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra.

He has also held positions as Music Director of Glyndebourne Festival Opera, The Royal Opera, Covent Garden, and Principal Conductor of the London Philharmonic Orchestra, the Staatskapelle Dresden and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra. He is an honorary member of the Berlin Philharmonic, the Chamber Orchestra of Europe and in 2019 was made an honorary member of the Vienna Philharmonic.

Bernard Haitink has received many awards and honours in recognition of his services to music, including Musical America's Musician of the Year and the Gramophone Lifetime Achievement Award. He is a Commander of the Order of the Netherlands Lion, and an honorary Companion of Honour in the UK, and has received honorary doctorates from the University of Oxford and the Royal College of Music.

The links between Bernard Haitink and the Radio Philharmonic Orchestra have withstood the test of time, even when his career was taking him all over the world. One fine example of this was Berlioz's *Damnation of Faust* in 1998, later issued on CD. When in 2010 the Dutch government was proposing to

abolish all radio ensembles, including the Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, Bernard Haitink immediately got in touch with the management of the orchestra, asking what he could do. The result was an open letter in which he berated the government's policy, resulting in the decision to abolish the ensembles being partially reversed, thanks in part to this initiative. As a gesture of its thanks and to confirm the old ties, the Radio Philharmonic Orchestra offered to make Haitink its Patron, and plans were set in motion for him to make a return to the orchestra. His 60th anniversary as a conductor was celebrated with the orchestra in 2014 (Mahler *Symphony no. 4*) in the NTR Saturday Matinee Series in the Concertgebouw, and he returned in 2016 (Bruckner *Symphony no. 9*), 2018 (Brahms *German Requiem*) and finally on 15 June 2019, when he gave his very last concert in Amsterdam, with Bruckner *Symphony no. 7*.

How close to his heart both the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra and Radio Choir were, was evident in 2017 when he gave the awards speech for the prestigious *Concertgebouw Prize*, awarded to both ensembles at a gala concert in the Amsterdam Concertgebouw. Yet again he reaffirmed the huge value of these ensembles, combined with an urgent appeal to the Dutch government to exclude them from any future cuts!



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