

The following adagio is perhaps the longest in the literature and it unfolds in visions of religious ecstasy, reaching a climax similar but structurally surpassing that of the Symphony No. 7. The serenity of its coda is jarringly contrasted with the opening of the finale in which the opening urgency of the first movement returns with even greater intensity. Militant fanfares hammer out the main theme against a jabbing ostinato; a meditative second theme and a rhythmic third are worked out on a vast scale; the sudden return of the opening theme in the recapitulation is one of the most terrifying moments in all of Bruckner's music. The coda to the entire symphony is perhaps Bruckner's greatest orchestral achievement. Over a slow, inexorable build-up the main theme of each movement is reworked in a major key and played in counterpoint with the others, bringing this titanic work to an awe-inspiring close.

SYMPHONY No 8

Bruckner

HERBERT VON KARAJAN
BERLIN PHILHARMONIC

In 1887, an elated Anton Bruckner sent the score of his eighth symphony to his newly found champion, conductor Hermann Levi. The accompanying letter read, "To my artistic father. Alleluia! May it find grace!" Nevertheless, this immense symphony, dwarfing anything in history before it, was greeted with trepidation by the conductor. After the recent breakthrough success of the Symphony No. 7, Levi was reluctant to hurt the composer's feelings, so he sent a friend to break the news to Bruckner. The result was a nervous collapse on the part of the sensitive, self-doubting composer -- and, upon recuperation, an extensive revision of the symphony. In its new form -- somewhat pruned and with many dramatic new features (including a different ending to the first movement and a new trio) -- the still imposing work was premiered in 1892 under Hans Richter with the Vienna Philharmonic. A more complete triumph could hardly have been hoped for. Bruckner's rival Brahms heartily joined in the long ovation, while the critic Hanslick, the bane of Bruckner's existence,

fled the hall amidst jeers and hisses from the audience.

Even in its revised form the work was the longest symphony on record, with a performance time of roughly 80 minutes. The stern character of the work earned it the nickname "Apocalyptic" (a subtitle which has largely fallen by the wayside), and indeed there is the impression of an eruption as the highly chromatic opening theme thunders out in the full orchestra. A complex of solemn themes unfolds, and an almost cosmic battle occurs in the development section; the recapitulation reaches an awesome climax against an obstinate brass figure; the grim, fading coda, appended in the revision, was described by the composer as a "wake."

The immense scherzo, one of Bruckner's best, is constructed around an infectious carillon-like figure, and was said by the composer to represent the German national figure "Cousin Michael." The trio is expansive and dream-like in quality.

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I: Allegro Moderato 17:00

II: Scherzo: Allegro Moderato - Trio: Langsam 16:02

III: Adagio. Feierlich Langsam, Doch Nicht Schleppend 27:35

IV: Finale. Feierlich, Nicht Schnell 26:17

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Engineer - Horst Lindner Producer - Fritz Ganss



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