

Hans Knappertsbusch (1888–1965)



Hans Knappertsbusch was one of the most renowned and beloved conductors of the middle twentieth century. Although he grew up playing and loving music, his parents objected to the notion of a musical career. Thus Knappertsbusch studied philosophy at Bonn University. In 1908, however, he entered the Cologne Conservatory and took conducting courses with Fritz Steinbach. Knappertsbusch began his career as a staff conductor at the Mülheim–Ruhr Theater (1910–12) and then as opera director in his home town of Elberfeld. Equally important to his development were his forays into the music of Wagner.

He spent several summers as an assistant to director Siegfried

Wagner and conductor Hans Richter at the Bayreuth Festival. During the Nazi years he refused several demands made by the Nazis and was fired from his lifetime post in 1936. He conducted a memorable Salome in Covent Garden in 1936 and 1937, and made some guest appearances elsewhere in Germany, but was content to maintain a low profile during the Nazi regime. Knappertsbusch gained a reputation for broad, magisteral performances, and became famous for his unhurried readings of Wagner's scores. He was famous for disliking rehearsals, often cutting them short. When the Bayreuth Festival reopened in 1951, Knappertsbusch worked closely with Wieland Wagner on orchestral matters (though the conductor was known to dislike the director's spare, revolutionary stage productions). Perhaps Knappertsbusch's most notable recording is his stereo account of Parsifal from the Bayreuth stage..

# ANTON BRUCKNER: SYMPHONY NO. 8

MUNICH PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA

## HANS KNAPPERTSBUSCH

CONDUCTING



Anton Bruckner's Symphony No. 8 in C minor is the last symphony the composer completed. It exists in two major versions of 1887 and 1890. It was premiered under conductor Hans Richter in 1892 in Vienna. It is dedicated to the Emperor Franz Joseph I of Austria.

Bruckner began work on the Eighth Symphony in July 1884. Working mainly during the summer vacations from his duties at the University of Vienna and the Vienna Conservatory, the composer had all four movements completed in draft form by August 1885. The orchestration of the work took Bruckner until April 1887 to complete: during this stage of composition the order of the inner movements was reversed, leaving the scherzo second and the Adagio as the third movement.

In September 1887 Bruckner had the score copied and sent to conductor Hermann Levi. Levi was one of Bruckner's closest collaborators, having given a performance of the Seventh Symphony in Munich that was "the greatest triumph Bruckner had yet experienced". He had also arranged for Bruckner's career to be supported in other ways, including financial assistance from the nobility, and an honorary doctorate from the University of Vienna. However the conductor wrote back to Bruckner that:

I find it impossible to perform the Eighth in its current form. I just can't make it my own! As much as the themes are magnificent and direct, their working-out seems to me dubious; indeed, I consider the orchestration quite impossible... Don't lose your courage, take another look at your work, talk it over with your friends, with Schalk, maybe a reworking can achieve something.

By January 1888 Bruckner had come to agree with Levi that the symphony would benefit from further work. He began work on the revision in March 1889 and completed the new version of the symphony in March 1890. Once the revision was completed, the composer wrote to Emperor Franz Josef I for permission to dedicate the symphony to him. The emperor accepted Bruckner's request and also offered to help pay for the work's publication. Bruckner had some trouble finding a publisher for the work, but in late 1890 the Haslinger-Schlesinger-Lienau company agreed to undertake publication. Bruckner's associates Josef Schalk and Max von Oberleithner assisted with the publication process: Schalk prepared the musical text to be sent to the printer while Oberleithner corrected the proofs and also provided financial support. The symphony was eventually published in March 1892. It was the only one

of Bruckner's symphonies to be published before its first performance.

By the time the 1890 revision was complete Levi was no longer conducting concerts in Munich: as a result he recommended that his protege Felix Weingartner, Kapellmeister of Mannheim, lead the first performance of the symphony. The premiere was twice scheduled to occur under the young conductor's direction during 1891, but each time Weingartner substituted another work at the last minute. Eventually the conductor told Bruckner that he was unable to undertake the performance because he was about to take up a new position at the Berlin Opera. However, Weingartner admitted, in a letter to Levi, that the real reason he was unable to perform the symphony was because the work was too difficult and he did not have enough rehearsal time: in particular, the Wagner tuba players in his orchestra did not have enough experience to cope with their parts.

After a Munich performance by Levi was canceled because of a feared outbreak of cholera, Bruckner focused his efforts on securing a Vienna premiere for the symphony. At last Hans Richter, subscription conductor of the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, agreed to conduct the work. The first performance took place on 18 December 1892. Although some of the more conservative members of the audience left at the end of each movement, many of Bruckner's supporters were also present, including Hugo Wolf and Johann Strauss.

The well known critic Eduard Hanslick left after the slow movement. His review described the symphony as "interesting in detail, but strange as a whole, indeed repellent. The peculiarity of this work consists, to put it briefly, in importing Wagner's dramatic style into the symphony." (Korstvedt points out that this was less negative than Hanslick's reviews of Bruckner's earlier symphonies.) There were also many positive reviews from Bruckner's admirers. One anonymous writer described the symphony as "the crown of music in our time". Hugo Wolf wrote to a friend that the symphony was "the work of a giant" that "surpasses the other symphonies of the master in intellectual scope, awesomeness, and greatness".

The symphony was slow to enter the orchestral repertoire. Only two further performances occurred during Bruckner's lifetime. The American premiere did not take place until 1909, while the symphony had to wait until 1929 for its first London performance.

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1. Allegro moderato 15:56
  2. Scherzo. Allegro moderato - Trio. Langsam 16:00
  3. Adagio. Feierlich langsam, doch nicht schleppend 27:42
  4. Finale. Feierlich, nicht schnell 26:03
- Total Time: 1:25:41

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