

During the early 1930s, René Leibowitz studied composition and orchestration with Maurice Ravel in Paris, where he was introduced to Arnold Schoenberg's Twelve-note technique by the German pianist and composer Erich Itor Kahn. He subsequently studied with Schoenberg's pupil Anton Webern. Many of the works of the Second Viennese School were first heard in France at the International Festival of Chamber Music established by Leibowitz in Paris in 1947. Leibowitz was highly influential in establishing the reputation of the Second Viennese School, both through activity as a teacher in Paris after WWII and through his book *Schoenberg et son école*, published in 1947 and translated by Dika Newlin as *Schoenberg and his School* (US and UK editions 1949). This was among the earliest theoretical treatises written on Schoenberg's 12-tone method of composition. Leibowitz's advocacy of the Schoenberg school was taken further by his two most gifted pupils, each taking different paths in promoting the musics of Schoenberg, Webern and the development of serialism, namely Pierre Boulez and Jacques-Louis Monod. His American students include the composers Will Ogdon, Janet Maguire, the conductor David Montgomery, and the avant-garde film director-animator John Whitney.

As conductor, Leibowitz was active in many recording projects. One of the most widely circulated and most notable is a set of the Beethoven symphonies made for Reader's Digest Recordings; it was apparently the first recording of the symphonies to follow Beethoven's original metronome markings. In choosing this approach, Leibowitz was influenced by his friend and colleague Rudolf Kolisch. Leibowitz likewise made many recordings for Reader's Digest in their various compilation albums.



Schubert Symphony No.9

“The Great”

René Leibowitz

The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra



This work wasn't performed in its entirety until March 21, 1839, at Leipzig, with Mendelssohn conducting. After composing six complete symphonies between 1813 and 1818 in the manner of Haydn and Mozart, Schubert completed only one more in the remaining decade of his brief life. This was The Great C major, written during 1825-1826 (rather than 1828 as was supposed until quite recently), and thus is the allegedly lost "Gastein" Symphony. Although he dated a copy of the score "March 1828," it really is No. 9, despite an army of scholars that variously tagged it No. 7, 8, and even 10.

By 1818 the Viennese had typecast Schubert as a vocal composer, and the label stuck. His keyboard, chamber, and orchestral works were hardly known despite their excellences. Older brother Ferdinand hoarded the manuscript of No. 9, which Robert Schumann finally saw in 1838, and took to Leipzig. Orchestras in Vienna and Paris flatly refused to play it, however, and London musicians laughed derisively during rehearsals in 1844, when Mendelssohn tried without success to perform it there as he had in Leipzig ("with cuts" -- big ones). Strings in particular hated playing its endlessly repetitive patterns: their pre-Wagner and pre-Bruckner bow arms were not ready for Schubert's "heavenly lengths." When all repeats are observed, the Ninth lasts over an hour, with almost no let-up in momentum. Three of Schubert's four movements employ sonata form -- the first, the finale, and the song sections in an ABA scherzo. Only the slow movement is written in expanded song form (ABABA).

A soft but accented horn theme in the slow introduction foreshadows others to come in the exposition; it returns triumphantly in a long coda. The main body of the movement, marked "not too fast," is rhythmically so powerful and relentless that an unmodified Allegro tempo would have risked destroying it (and us).

Dotted rhythms characterize the A minor Andante, whose con moto qualification keeps it from dragging or sounding sentimentally sorrowful. Schubert's subsequent transition to A major is breathtaking, and his quiet writing for horns magical. As the movement began, it ends in A minor.

Beethoven-like, the Song parts of the Allegro vivace scherzo feature a miniature exposition-development-reprise (maybe Schubert knew the elder master's Ninth after all), full of dance melodies. C major yields to A major in the trio, with its broader tune for winds, before the song-sonata repeats.

Allegro vivace, again in C, this finale begins with a churning subject in triplet rhythm that stubbornly fights resolution (it is the grandest and most famous compositional trap in all music). Schubert finally must stop before he can introduce a new theme on clarinets and horns. Development and recapitulation follow on a titanic scale, capped by a coda in kind -- a movement, altogether, just short of 1,200 measures!

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1 Andante - Allegro Ma Non Troppo 11:43

2 Andante Con Moto 12:51

3 Scherzo (Allegro Vivace) 9:21

4 Allegro Vivace 10:33

Recording Info: Recorded by RCA for Readers Digest 1962
Engineer – K.E. Wilkinson Producer – Charles Gerhardt



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info@highdeftapetransfers.ca
or visit our website:
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