



# The Bruckner Journal

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## TAMPERING WITH BRUCKNER

I recently had the experience of attending a concert where I heard and saw something that I thought we were finished with in these days of modern scholarship and performance.

After completing a critically-acclaimed 10 year period as music director of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra, Dutch conductor Jaap van Zweden began his new tenure with the New York Philharmonic in the closing weeks of September. Anticipation was high for opening concerts featuring new works and premieres, as well Stravinsky's Rite of Spring and the Eighth Symphony of Bruckner.

Although the New York ensemble has been hit-or miss with Bruckner over the years, van Zweden's Bruckner has been highly regarded, including a recorded cycle of the nine numbered symphonies with the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra – the ensemble he overlapped with his time in Dallas.

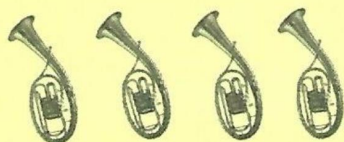
For all the merits of the performance (reviewed in this issue), it was troubling that van Zweden made some personal interpretative decisions that are hard to accept. My comments about these choices are provided in an addendum to that review. Suffice to say here that the opening notes of the Eighth followed, without pause or separation, an unrelated work by another composer that occupied a completely distinct tonal an atmospheric sound space. Additionally, the horns were instructed to play bells up during the larger moments in the first and last movements, a la The Rite leading into the Sacrificial Dance.

A similar moment occurred during the recent Carnegie Hall Bruckner Cycle with Daniel Barenboim and the Staatskappelle Berlin, where the conductor doubled all brass parts in the Fifth to enormous effect, to say nothing about over-powering sound.

Interpretative matters aside, should we really accept such tampering of the score? Certainly, matters of phrasing, dynamics, tempo, or even edition result in many opportunities for personal expression of these expansive works.

But perhaps conductors should stick to the score, since that is where the true magic of the music and composer's wishes exist – without the need for additional tampering and theatrics.

MC



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Silhouette by Otto Böhrer



## ST. FLORIANER BRUCKNERTAGE ST. FLORIAN BRUCKNER FESTIVAL - 2018



DER  
TRIUMPH  
ÜBER RAUM  
UND ZEIT  
*Bruckners Siebte*

12. - 18. August 2018  
AUGUSTINER CHORHERRENTSTIFT ST. FLORIAN

### Part 1:

This year's festival had the title "The Triumph over Space and Time", and had as its primary focus a performance of the Seventh Symphony. But it is a many-sided festival, not without a serious heart, but embracing a desire to explore the outlandish, and to have fun. It was a great success, immensely enjoyable and featuring first class performances every day of the week.

Unfortunately I was unable to attend the very first event, a **CHILDREN'S THEATRE** piece on Saturday 11 August, created after an idea from Victoria Wall, "Anton, in search of the Seventh". It was performed in the cellar beneath the monastery library, and by all reports it was a great success, enjoyed as much by the accompanying adults as the partaking children, from 4 years old upwards.

But I was able to attend the official **OPENING CONCERT**, *Britten, Brubeck and Bruckner*, composers probably connected more by alliteration and the predisposition of the performers, than any commonly held musical quality. The Provost of the Augustinian Monastery of St. Florian, Johann Holzinger, gave a welcoming speech, thanking sponsors and supporters, and mentioning John Proffitt who records many of the events and even giving some credit to this past editor of *The Bruckner Journal* - and then the European Brass Collective, a dozen or so brass players, many of whom had in earlier years attended the Guildhall School of Music, London, let rip with a *Fanfare for St. Florian*, written by their conductor Daniel Perpiñán (trombonist from Valencia) which opened with a mysterious fantasy on the rising dotted arpeggio theme of the Bruckner Seven finale - an opening reminiscent of the opening of *Das Rheingold* - and continued into a full blown transcription of the Scherzo from Bruckner's Seventh. The incorrigible trumpeter Bill Cooper (Guildhall School of Music, Royal Academy, Barmy Army) introduced the pieces in German, so clearly spoken that even I could understand it. The Brubeck *Blue Rondo à la Turk* was strong on rhythm, and the 81 year old Keiko Abe's *Prism Rhapsody* (originally for orchestra and marimba) was played with astounding virtuosity by percussionist Jürgen Leitner, a young musician from Upper Austria. We were warned it would be very loud - and at times it sounded as though Pacific 231 was thundering through the marble hall (Marmorsaal).

It was a balmy evening outside, refreshments were available in the courtyard; we were called back to the concert after the interval by three solo trumpeters placed at the corners of an encompassing triangle, playing Benjamin Britten's *Fanfare for St. Edmundsbury*, to stunning effect. Light was failing, so the conductor was illuminated by the ad hoc provision of a torch from a handy mobile phone. Once back in the hall, we were treated to a composition by trombonist Paul Frost, a *Bruckner Fantasy*, a miniature tone poem describing the effect St. Florian had upon brass players, from nervousness and anxiety on the approach, through episodes in



the bar (suitably raucous) and in the crypt (suitably sombre), building to a triumphant coda, a celebration of the hero of St. Florian, Bruckner himself. After this came Britten's *Russian Funeral*, and Kurt Weill's *My Ship*, arranged by Paul Frost, played, so we were told, at the request of Dave Brubeck's son in return for more than a few beers. The final encore was an arrangement of Elsa's Procession to the Cathedral from *Lohengrin*, a piece of cumulative power, the brass players rising to their feet for the final overwhelming peroration, and we in the audience rising to our feet in stormy appreciation. It was a great night, and great way to open a festival.

The next concert, Monday 13 August, took place in the immense baroque Abbey, *MUSICA SACRA*. It began with a violin concerto by Estonian composer Andres Uibo, the soloist being his daughter, Mari-Liis Uibo - and she played immaculately throughout. The music is richly harmonised, quoting from Bach's Chaconne for solo violin and The Art of Fugue. It arose out of silence with the soloist alone, a slow-moving but disturbed melancholy pervading the music. Occasional shattering climaxes never undermined the solemn calm underlying the music. It closed with a women's choir intoning the Agnus Dei, their brief quiet melodic cell being taken up by the violin. The musical language was relatively familiar, not difficult, the content overtly religious and meditative, and it sought to find its way to deep and stranger regions of one's heart.

The main work was Bruckner's Mass No. 1 in D minor. This is a great and now-underrated work, but its first performances were very successful. Mahler chose to conduct it in Hamburg in 1892 (by which time symphonies 7 & 8 were available, but Mahler never chose to conduct them). It was shortly after this Mass that Bruckner made the choice to become primarily a composer of symphonies for concert halls - and the seeds of that decision would seem apparent in the musical language of this Mass. It was written in 1864, and soon after completing it he began work on the 1st Symphony, 1865-66. (An error in the programme note repeats the now discredited idea, from Nowak's preface and elsewhere, that Bruckner worked on the Symphony in D minor ('Die Nullte') over the period of the composition of the Mass, 1863-64. As Paul Hawkshaw<sup>1</sup> has shown, the symphony didn't appear until 1869, between the First and the Second Symphonies, and long after the Mass in D minor.)

Matthias Giesen (monastery organist, choir leader, joint artistic director of the Brucknertage) conducted the Altomonte Orchestra and the choir of the Choral Academy of St. Florian, and he set a fairly quick pace for the opening Kyrie, though still within Bruckner's marking ('mehr langsam' - 'rather slow'), and this together with the reverberant acoustic made for a somewhat agitated and anxious plea for mercy, the sudden fortissimos crying out above the wash of sound.



**Matthias Giesen, conducting the Mass No. 1**  
*Photo courtesy of: James McCallum*

<sup>1</sup> Hawkshaw, Paul - "The Date of Bruckner's "Nullified" Symphony in D Minor"  
*19th-Century Music*, Vol. 6 No. 3, Spring, 1983; (pp. 252-263)



The Gloria was tremendous, performed with real attack from the choir and orchestral strings. Amongst the soloists, the Austrian bass, Michael Wagner, was particularly strong and resonant. The Gloria built to powerful climaxes - *In gloria dei Patris* followed by a magnificent *Amen*, trumpets pealing about above it all. The opening 'moderato' of the Credo was again quite swift, the trumpets and trombones doing great work. The soloists introduced the Adagio *Et incarnates est* very effectively, the section building to a powerful and thrilling declamation for the *Crucifixus etiam pro nobis*, followed dramatically by the soloists quietly intoning *et sepultus est*, followed by a quiet chorale-like meditation from horns and trombones, beautifully played. The ensuing agitated build-up to the triumphant *Et resurrexit* was breathtaking, very powerful. The setting of the Credo always has a lot of ground to cover, but Matthias Giesen held it all together, the return to Tempo I for *Et in spiritum sanctus* providing a pivotal formal point, the *Et vitam venture saeculi, Amen* bringing the movement to a triumphal close.

The brief Sanctus was powerfully affirmative. The acoustic worked against the choir in the Benedictus, their contribution often sounding somewhat tentative, but the orchestral contribution from woodwind solos, a wonderful short passage for cellos, and the beautiful horn solo that closes the Benedictus before the final Hosanna, these were all splendidly accomplished.

Towards the end of the Credo the Abbey had been lit up by increasingly frequent flashes of lightning; come the Agnus Dei the drum rolls were wonderfully augmented by the sound of heavy rain falling upon the roof. The steady tread of much of this movement, and the dialogue between bass soloist and choir for *miserere nobis* - these were very movingly performed, and another wonderful, mysterious quiet horn solo echoed the closing prayer, *Dona nobis pacem* - Grant us peace - bringing a fine performance to a moving close.

The following evening was the much-anticipated Fourth **INTERNATIONAL BRUCKNER ORGAN NIGHT**. Five recitals, beginning at 7:30 pm, and going on well past midnight, a large audience throughout, and a bar available to offer sustenance, including the ubiquitous Würstl (Frankfurter sausages, with mustard and a roll). These organ nights have become a fixture and a highlight of the Brucknertage. Even those not normally so keen on organ music are attracted by the venue, the variety and the 'visualisation' - a vast screen in front of the altar upon which views of the organists playing are projected. This year the music ranged from the overtly popular transcriptions of Italian opera highlights played by an organ duo, Giuliana Maccaroni and Martimo Pôrçile, making the grand Bruckner organ sound like a gigantic fairground organ; to the heights of organ composition in Arno Hartmann's stunning performance of Vierne's *Cathédrales, No. 3*, and Franck's *Grand Pièce Symphonique op. 17*, that brought things to a close at half past midnight, and Mariana Omelchenko's cumulatively powerful rendition of Bach's seemingly crazy *Pièce d'Orgue BWV 572*.

There were three Bruckner-related pieces: a short improvisation on themes from the 7th Symphony by Lutz Brenner, which took the opening string motive from the Scherzo and built it to a virtuosic climax, and then a similar treatment of the Trio theme; Mariana Omelchenko played a transcription of a Bruckner *Ave Maria*; finally, Kevin McGregor Clarke gave a powerful performance of a transcription by Eberhard Klotz of the Adagio of Bruckner's Ninth Symphony. Klotz commented that his transcription of the symphony is not intended as 'a substitute' for the orchestral performance, but rather 'an organ symphony in the style of late 19th century ... it aims to convey the music performed anew and alive for today's public.' Certainly it was alive and anew in this performance, the structure building steadily to the shattering dissonant climax. From my place in the Abbey some of the melodic detail failed to make the journey through the vast space and dense harmonic foundation to reach my ears. On the large 'visualisation' screen at the front of the church I could see the notes being played but not all of them could I hear. The result was that what I heard was essentially a harmonic traversal of the movement - which in itself was quite gripping - but often without strong thematic content. I understand from John Proffitt who was recording the performance that all these sounds were actually there, even it not for me! But even without hearing the full panoply of the sounds Clarke was playing, a starkly impressive musical structure was communicated. Kevin Clarke, with John Proffitt, has made a recording of the symphony performed on organ with Prof. William Carragan's finale completion, and I shall be keen to hear how that sounds. We also hear from organist Thilo Muster that he will be recording Eberhard Klotz's transcription of the symphony, but without any finale.

Wednesday 15th August was Maria's Assumption Day, and in the context of the Mass at 10 am, Bruckner's earlier *Ave Maria* (1856) was performed. On the way out we were treated to an extended but absolutely riveting organ improvisation by St. Florian organist Andreas Etlinger, doing what Bruckner was famous for, and earning long applause from the congregation.

In the evening was a **LIEDER RECITAL**, given by soprano Regina Riel, who had also sung in the Mass in D minor on Monday. She was accompanied by Matthias Giesen and began each half of her concert with a performance of a song by Bruckner - *Mein Herz und deine Stimme* and *Herbstkummer* - sung so persuasively, and indeed passionately, that you wondered why they weren't done more often. She sang a set of songs by



Clara Schumann, also well sung and good music to hear. But the highlight of her recital was really the second half where she sang songs of Liszt and Strauss, so sweetly as to break your heart, a creamy rounded and unforced soprano.

On Saturday 18th August there was a chamber music recital in the Altomonte Hall - a room covered in ceiling and wall paintings by the Altomonte brothers, but a stiflingly warm venue on this particularly hot summer's day. The performers were a group with the name **PLATFORM K+K VIENNA** - the K+K in this case being the initials of their leader, one of the first violinists of the Vienna Philharmonic, Kirill Kobantschenko, rather than the dual title of Franz Joseph 1st. They were performers of astonishing intensity and virtuosity. They played an impressive piano quartet movement, *Metamorphosis*, by Gernot Wolfgang. This was followed by a piano quintet movement, *Bruckner VII:2 shifted*, music by Bruckner and S. Punderlitschek, (cellist of the Spring String Quartet) which began with an opening tremolo writ large, but then revealed itself as a transcription of the Adagio from Bruckner's Seventh Symphony, which occasionally spiralled off into wild dance and jazz inflected fantasies before returning to Bruckner's score. The transcription of the Bruckner movement for these chamber forces was particularly impressive, though bereft of the first return of the main theme and the repeat of the moderato section, it coped unexpectedly well with the climax, extended by the insertion of some wild shenanigans by Punderlitschek, the emotional heart becoming the dirge for Wagner tubas, played here with extraordinary focus and passionate feeling by viola player Aurore Nozomi Cany, cellist Florian Eggner, back by chords from pianist Christoph Errner. It was quite an experience, hearing one of the most profound of Bruckner's movements treated with a mixture of reverence and - well, humour. Other works, by Piazzolla, Golijov and Kapustin, were performed with equal panache and virtuosity - Christoph Eggner's incredible piano playing featuring strongly.

To close the week, Sunday morning saw the most intrepid festival-goers, musicians and organisers on the patio garden at the rear of The Golden Lion, Gasthof Wimhofer, for the **FRÜSCHOPPEN**, an early-in-the-day partaking of refreshment, 10 a.m., entertained by the windband Musikverein St. Florian, conducted by Franz Falkner, playing marches, waltzes, polkas and the like, the pieces introduced by witty rhymes from St Florian cabaret star, Joschi Auer, and all washed down with beer such as Bruckner drank in this very place, accompanied by generous portions of food such as Bruckner would have delighted in. And so another warm-hearted and adventurous Brucknertage came to its end. I caught the 2 o'clock bus to Linz, but others were still there, celebrating and relaxing amongst friends, much later in the day!

Ken Ward



## Part 2:

Each August, the sanctified pastoral grounds of the Augustinian Monastery of St. Florian in Upper Austria bear witness to one of the most rewarding events a Bruckner enthusiast can attend. Founded by Austrian physician Klaus Laczika in 1997, the BrucknerTage has become a staple of the summer festival season – ever increasing in attendance and sponsorship such that most of the events are “sold out”, with many hopeful attendees queuing up before concert time yearning for last minute admittance. With co-artistic director, Matthias Giesen, and festival organizer, Julian Gillesberger, Klaus Laczika is an omnipresent spokesman on the grounds and at every occasion – a passionate driving force whose personality and direction has its mark in every event that takes place during the week of the “Bruckner Days”.

As in previous years, the 21<sup>st</sup> BrucknerTage featured one of the symphonies as its cornerstone – this time, the Seventh. Although the opening days of the weeklong event featured other works by Bruckner (reviewed by Ken Ward in this issue), the focus of the closing days concerned this most popular symphony of the composer's oeuvre.



On Thursday evening, the Sala Terrena was the venue for the recital, **BRUCKNER FOR TWO PIANOS**. As has been the occasion previously, the performance featured a two-piano transcription of the Seventh – in this instance, by Hermann Behn (1857-1927) [*the sheet music can be found here: [tinyurl.com/BehnVIIIPiano4H](https://tinyurl.com/BehnVIIIPiano4H)*]. Initially a student of law, Behn turned to music – studying with Bruckner, among others. As a conductor and pianist, his arrangements of symphonic repertoire were widely known, including Wagner operas, as well as Mahler's Second Symphony. Although not as widely known as the piano transcriptions of Grunsky, Stradal, and Singer, the Behn is comparably virtuosic. On this evening, pianists Elias Gillesberger and Dora Deliyska undertook the monumental task of capturing this grand symphony on 176 piano keys. Mr. Gillesberger has had a regular appearance at the BrucknerTage, including personal recitals and similar two-piano concerts such as a Brubeck suite with Klaus Laczika in 2016. Bulgarian pianist, Ms. Deliyska, has similarly appeared at the BrucknerTage and is also a Gramola recording artist, the same label that releases the symphonic recordings. Last year, she performed an innovative recital in this same room called the "B-A-C-H Project", featuring works by Bach, Shostakovich, and Chopin.

From the opening notes, it was clear this was going to be a piano performance based on the symphony expressed on the keyboard rather than an orchestra in a concert hall. As such, the interpretation required a detachment of what the listener expected to hear from what was being performed. Any quibbles about tempo, phrasing, and coloration were soon rendered meaningless once the virtuosic performance evolved. The technical prowess of both performers was without fault and the attention to detail expressed rendered musical lines and passages, often lost in the orchestral sound, to become noticeable – adding an element of enlightenment to the listener.

The following day, the **SYMPOSIUM "BRUCKNER DIMENSIONS"** took place in the Altomonte Hall. Featuring presentations by Dr. Klaus Heinrich Kohrs and Prof. Dr. Felix Diergarten from Germany, as well as Prof. Dr. Mario Aschauer from Texas, USA. As all discussions were in German, your language-challenged editor could only follow along with the powerpoint and musical examples. However, it can be noted that the hall was full and generated a lively discussion amongst participants. I had the opportunity to speak with Prof. Aschauer following the symposium and hopefully his presentation will be included in a future issue of this Journal.

Of course, the cornerstone of the week is the **SYMPHONY CONCERT** of Friday evening. Once again, Rémy Ballot continued his conducting association with the event – this year, leading the Altomonte Orchestra. Founded in 1996 on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Bruckner's passing by principal cellist, Thomas Wall (who also serves as the orchestras manager) and church musician Augustinus Franz Kropfreiter, this organization is considered the "orchestra in residence" at St. Florian – currently under the direction of organist and Stiftskapellmeister, Matthias Giesen since 2003. Named the ensemble's principal guest conductor in 2013, Maestro Ballot has now performed and recorded Symphonies 3-9 – employing the Oberösterreichs Jugendsinfonieorchester in the Sixth and Eighth. The plan is to complete the cycle in future BrucknerTages, with the Second symphony scheduled for 2019.



**Rémy Ballot, conducting the Seventh Symphony**

*Photo courtesy of: James McCallum*



One of the advantages of attending the entire weeks events is that one is able to wander the grounds, be it the Abbey and its gift shop containing all sorts of Bruckner items including books, music, videos, and medals; the resident cafe, the Stiftskeller, for cordial food, drink, and camaraderie including the infamous "gillesburger", named after the events festival organizer. But also, attendance at the rehearsals that take place on the final days in the Stiftsbasilika. This allowed for hearing the evolution of the performance, as well as discussion with fellow attendees and organizers about practical and artistic matters.

This performance of the Seventh benefitted from the latest research, including changes that will appear in the new published edition of the ABG, anticipated to be released next year. With guidance provided by New Edition editor, Paul Hawkshaw, these changes were integrated into the current performance, representing a "premiere" of sorts. This included the loss of caret accents over the string theme in the Adagio, rendering what Klaus Laczika referred to as a "softer, non-violent sword". Also contributing to the scholarship of the performance was Prof. William Carragan, who was present as part John Berky's periodic "Bruckner Tour of Austria" [here: [tinyurl.com/BrucknerTour2018](http://tinyurl.com/BrucknerTour2018)].

If there has been one consistent analysis of Maestro Ballot's performances in St. Florian in previous years it is the slowness of the tempos he adopts - his recording of the Eighth lasting over 103 minutes. The personality of Sergiu Celibidache is often mentioned in relation to Ballot's performances, the latter often stating the Romanian conductor was a mentor of his. Also, Klaus Laczika has a strong passion for Celibidache, who had been present at St. Florian. In association with the spacious acoustic of the Stiftsbasilika, regular attendees have grown accustomed to expansive performances of Maestro Ballot.

This was not to be the case for this year's Seventh, coming in at about 74 minutes. As has been customary in previous years, the Friday rehearsal was a "run-through" of the complete symphony. And if truth be told, that performance was in many ways finer than the evening concert. The Altomonte played wonderfully throughout - the Wagner tubas could be singled out as truly exceptional. The sound of the Adagio in the acoustic of the Stiftsbasilika is a wonder to behold, with the climax (complete with cymbal and triangle) marvelous [a video captured by your editor of this moment can be found on the Journal Facebook page: [tinyurl.com/BT2018VIIAdagio](http://tinyurl.com/BT2018VIIAdagio)]

Although the timings of the movements were very similar from rehearsal to performance, there was some necessary expansion of the evening concert, simply due to the change of acoustic from an empty to full hall - where decay times of 10+ seconds are anticipated. As an isolated event, the evening concert can only be described as exceptional and the attendees were rewarded with a performance that was memorable in every way. However, the rehearsal was even more exceptional - no doubt due to the fresh playing of the members of the Altomonte. No doubt, the final recording - to be released on Gramola and produced by John Proffitt, as in previous years - will contain a performance of the Seventh that should go to the very top of the preferred list, and be on every Brucknerian's wishlist.

One of the unique aspects of the BrucknerTage is the informal quality of the interaction by all in attendance. One can enjoy lunch or dinner - or just a beer - with fellow attendees, just as easily as the conductor, the orchestral members, and the event organizers. This was never more evident than in the patio of the Abbey with the Stiftskeller Thursday evening, after the Two Piano Concert. A makeshift stage was setup with a spontaneous blues concert, featuring one of the waiters on guitar, the Altomonte concertmaster on violin, as well as Julian Gilleberger, an accomplished violist. Not the typical "stuffy" audience and members usually associated with a classical event!

As mentioned previously, next year's BrucknerTage will feature the Second Symphony, using the latest performing edition by Prof. Will Carragan. No doubt, Bruckner enthusiasts should mark their calendars and start their travel plans for what will surely be a wonderful week, beginning August 18, 2019.

*Michael Cucka*

## **Symphony Concert** **The Seventh - The Triumph over Space and Time**

***Programme Note by Founder & Artistic Director Klaus Laczika - August 2018***

### ***"RESOLUTIONS"***

Anyone allowed to experience them, those resolutions of all superfluous and disabling expectations, when such things are suddenly discharged in the flow and take on their own positive momentum, those who have experienced this themselves find in the VII Bruckner a crystallization of this phenomenon, which is inherent



in all human life. In colour psychology, yellow is often referred to as the colour of the resolution. Van Gogh, freed from all earthly things, keeps his last pictures in bright yellow. Bright yellow, sunrises (Grieg), Schubert in the "Unfinished", in E major in the Adagio of his String Quintet, Bruckner in the Adagio of his IX. ("The most beautiful thing I've ever composed") in E major.

**A journey through time to the VII. Symphony:** Bruckner seems to float in 1881 in a completely resolved condition. He waits for no feedback or successes/failures, but composes unrelentingly in one go. His "contrapuntal masterpiece," the V., he never hears live. Perhaps this is a good thing: At the beginning of 1880, at the age of 56, there are signs of his heart disease. Bruckner cannot play the organ because of leg swelling. Outrage over the "impairment-improvement of the V." (expanded instrumentation, addition of an offstage orchestra, etc.) by the Schalk brothers, his heart might not have endured. Or he would have fallen into boundless astonishment at the sounding result of his symphonic mastery in a fascinated "navel-gazing creative pause" and a rage of reworking. After the V, *en passant*, he radically changes his compositional style. He throws overboard what had hitherto been his recipe for success, the strict counterpoint, and in this new compositional style and modified formal concept he creates his apotheosis of humour, the VI.. This he also hears only briefly and abbreviated in a "Philharmonic Trial", he does not hear it properly during his lifetime. Onward. Onward unbridled, untrammelled by complicating and perplexing reflections. On September 3, 1881, the VI. is finished. Just 20 days later, Bruckner can write down (long previously completed in his head) the 1st movement of his new symphony, the VII in score form. He chooses the key of E major. Ventures the longest (24 bars) and the most spacious, floating over 3 octaves, main theme of symphonic history.

His often fragile state of mind is in turmoil due to the traumatizing experiences of the Ringtheater fire of 8 Dec 1881. The Ringtheater fire, with its estimated figures of more than 1000 dead, its chain of multiple catastrophic human failure, can only be compared in its importance and its effect on the soul of that time with the Twin Towers of September 11, 2001. Any sense of security and trust in technology and protective authorities had been lost. Bruckner himself has already purchased tickets for that "fatal" performance of *The Tales of Hoffmann*, but cannot experience them "on account of ailments". Inwardly aghast, he feels a sense of death about his "master of all masters" Richard Wagner and begins one of the greatest pieces of funeral music of our musical culture, the "Adagio of VII". Not without having already in the first movement - did he compose in a trance? - established new architectural dimensions of space and time in music. This would lead to his world breakthrough as a composer, though he is not aware of this, perhaps even temporarily indifferent. At the same time as the funeral music, Bruckner's ultimate and eternally valid message of confidence emerges, his "Te Deum": "*In te, Domine, speravi: non confundar in aeternum.*" - "On you, Lord, have I hoped. That's why I will never perish." The three ascending tone sequence "Non Confundar" could be described as a Bruckner signation,[making the sign of the cross], it is at the same time the highlight of the Te Deum and fundamental formal motif of the Adagio of the VII Symphony. The human subconscious also contributes its part: the "Schubertesque" Adagio subsidiary theme is 1:1 identical in its rhythmic structure to the subsidiary theme of the adagio of the IX. Beethoven, as later, the main theme of the Eighth Symphony will be rhythmically identical to the main theme of the 1st movement of the IX. Beethoven.

Bruckner's premonitions prove true, the news of Wagner's death arrives from Vienna. In terms of composition, Bruckner has just arrived at the resolving climax of the Adagio, the "Breakthrough Chord", following a build up from the "Non Confundar" motif. To which later the brothers Schalk would add cymbal and triangle, which meets with Bruckner's approval. Bruckner needs no more than 8 bars to bring us from the climax into the mood of stunned, almost dumb, 'deep tearless grief' (to quote Wilhelm Furtwängler), despair, the deepest loneliness. This mental and existential state of emergency would become his most famous symphonic movement.

Bruckner would not be Bruckner, if he did not constantly confound our expectations. Whoever expects a dark scherzo and an extensive finale à la IV. or V. after the substantial weight of the first two movements, will not get their money's worth: Scherzo and Finale are dedicated to the most daring harmonic experiments, above all the condensation of the "nuclear mass", the compositional overcoming of gravity through immediate succession of "most distant harmonies", i.e. harmonic "shortening processes", the boldest postulation of completely new harmonic laws, subtlest play with rhythmic intensifications and loosening, tensions and relaxations that make the comparatively short finale (the conductor Georg Tintner likens it to the experimental laboratory of a Haydn symphony) the epitome of boldness. Maybe it describes the then bitter Bruckner opponents Richard Heuberger ("Bruckner is stubborn to the point of total implacability!") And the Nemesis Eduard Hanslick ("It remains a mystery how this most peaceful of all people at the moment of composing becomes an anarchist. He writes high treason, insurrection and tyrannicide!") who in their destructive intention - though not so intentionally - were at their most truthful. Because Bruckner's music knows no compositional compromises, Bruckner is truly "implacable".



Sometimes I imagine a scene in heaven: there was a second great man whose stubbornness has saved for us a life of freedom and democracy: Sir Winston Churchill. I imagine: Churchill with his all-day diet of champagne, brandy and port, he talks to Bruckner about the advantages of stubbornness. As always, Churchill teaches by monologue. Bruckner, who always takes his first Seidl of beer in the evening, is a good and patient listener. As an interested onlooker Albert Einstein chats along and would like to know more about Bruckner's musical space-time concept, for Bruckner composed the VII. 1881-1883, Einstein didn't present the theory of relativity until 1916. Einstein is privately a passionate violinist, so curious in both physical and musical matters. Bruckner's fragile self-esteem enjoys the talks with Churchill and Einstein, but he remains modest in conversation and, above all, even inquisitive. Over the shoulder God listens with interest and a sympathetic smile. Who knows ...

Sometimes one tries to approach the magic of true greatness by means of playfulness: the timeless modernity of the VII by means of access to modern jazz harmony: the composed chords are so marked in the score of VII as is customary in today's jazz harmony, that is, all harmonic ingredients are labelled with modern symbols (e.g. "Em 13, <5, # 11") so one finds oneself unexpectedly in the cosmos of Miles Davis, Theolonious Monk or Quincy Jones. All great music is timeless; one is usually also aware of the time of its creation. Bruckner is not only timeless: when one is studying or playing his scores Bruckner often proves to be so "of the present".



Looking back to the biography of the VII, in 1883, immediately after its completion, Franz Schalk travels to Leipzig with Bruckner's score and Schalk's own piano version for the 29-year-old conductor Arthur Nikisch, who just got the top job at the Stadttheater. Nikisch was a student of Bruckner's in Vienna and played in the premiere of the II. as a second violinist. To address the head of the legendary Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra, the conservative Carl Reinecke, would have been presumptuous and unsuccessful. But the young Nikisch, although heavily occupied by his upcoming Leipzig debut with "Tristan and Isolde", is immediately enthusiastic about the VII. After several postponements, it finally comes to the successful world premiere in Leipzig on 30 Dec 1884. Bruckner's first international success. Again the VII seems to follow its higher purpose. The reviews in Leipzig were positive, respectful, but not eulogistic. Without much hope, Bruckner had also sent a copy of the VII to Hermann Levi in Munich. Levi, Jewish conductor, entrusted by Wagner in 1882 with the premiere of "Parsifal", then injured by Wagner himself, his anti-Semitic contempt. Wagner's perfidious interplay with Levi is only surpassed by the targeted meanness of Cosima. Levi nevertheless remains an idealist, lifelong placing the

importance of music above human perfidy or any personal sensitivities. (Because of Levi's commitment to Wagner, Brahms rescinded years-long personal friendship).

And Levi is (in contrast to the rising Nikisch) as Munich Hofkapellmeister with the legendary King Ludwig II already a conducting "Big Shot".

The Munich premiere of VII on 11.March.1885 became the ultimate triumph. Not only musically, but also or more especially, socially: Bruckner meets King Ludwig II personally, who accepts the dedication of the VII Symphony, and bears the printing costs. The Hofopernorchester in Munich contributes something extra of a very special kind: after a performance of The Valkyrie, long after the audience has left the opera, the Hofopernorchester remains in its place and at midnight plays the funeral music from the Adagio of the VII Symphony for Bruckner and King Ludwig exclusively. Bruckner is portrayed by the prominent painter Hermann Kaulbach, we see a confident Bruckner who, incidentally, begs the court painter not to present his prominent nose too naturalistically. "Celebrity Photo Shop 1885".

Bruckner is now relieved of any material worries, the VII spreads within a year to all major European cities and also smaller cities. Predominantly Bruckner is called "the greatest symphonist after Beethoven".



The VII begins its triumphal procession across the ocean and is (120 years before the "new media") triumphantly played in Boston, Chicago and New York in 1885/1886.

Bruckner's doubts about a performance of the VII in disdainful Vienna, doubts justified by repeated public humiliations, are recorded by Karl Kraus: "... in no history of nineteenth-century Viennese culture will it be missing. In no history that tells of times when malicious dwarfs ruled over good-natured giants."

But even Vienna, thanks to the now benevolently enthusiastic Vienna Philharmonic under Hans Richter, helps the VII to a triumph, Bruckner already after the first movement called to the stage five times by the rapturous audience. Who cares about the devastating biased professional and humanly inferior criticisms in the light of this telegram "The biggest impression of my life !! Your Johann Strauss! "? Johann Strauss - still today the most played composer in world history - and Bruckner meet each other for a pleasurable drink with Viktor Tilgner, the creator of the famous Bruckner bust.

Much that is enlightening has been written about the VII, but Bruckner's character still succumbs to problematic attempts at description, indeed sometimes ruthless attempts at interpretation are revealed. Yes, Bruckner is lonely and enjoys the nightly company of his students. And consumes (as currently do 1,200,000 Austrians) alcohol in unhealthy quantities. Alcohol is poison for the human heart muscle. Thus a cause of the first occurrence of Bruckner's heart disease in 1880, and thereby his death. The carefully guided and documented medical history of Bruckner and the memoirs of his highly valued personal physician Richard Heller prove all this. Almost criminally beside this, lost is the fact that Bruckner was a valued friend and interlocutor of contemporary intellectuals. Next to the "students" table Bruckner had another "regulars" table in the Café Riedhof and associated there especially with doctors such as the anatomist Karl Rabl and the famous Professor Paltauf (the first describer of lymph node cancer in medical history) who will later conserve Bruckner's body. Although he was content in this circle mostly with the role of purposeful and precise questioner and very active listener, it attests to his lively and many-sided interest in current scientific and intellectual concerns. The conferral of an honorary doctorate from the University of Vienna in 1891 is therefore no accident and one of the happiest events in Bruckner's life. From now on he signs with "Dr A.Bruckner mp".<sup>1</sup> The traditional dubious image of Bruckner's intellect is thus no longer tenable.

Every help has its price and helpers often cast long shadows, as in the case of the VII, that of the brothers Josef and Franz Schalk from 1884 to today. The Schalks have devoted their lives to Anton Bruckner, but with total conviction for the Janus-headed prize, "to help" Bruckner musically always and everywhere. Which leads to brutal cuts (Finale III. & IV.), re-orchestration (in order to accommodate the Wagnerian orchestral sound ideal of that time), changes in the musical text, manipulation of the prints behind Bruckner's back, to incorrect playing instructions and articulation markings. To date, these "cuckoo eggs" can be found in Bruckner's scores. The edition of the Bruckner scores, as intended by the composer, bears the imprint of the great figures of Robert Haas, and Leopold Nowak after World War II. Both try to help bring Bruckner's original back to the surface in the jungle of entries made by other parties. This has not been totally achieved to this day. Since 2017 the American musicologist, Paul Hawkshaw (Yale / USA), and one of the leading Bruckner specialists, has been working on a new, even more refined edition of the VII. Symphony using state-of-the-art forensic methods, commissioned by the Musikwissenschaftlicher Verlag Wien (MWV), which should appear in 2019. Paul Hawkshaw is a friend of the St. Florian Bruckner Festival and informed us in advance about his latest research results. Thanks to this invaluable help, our Festival Orchestra, the Altomonte Orchestra and our "Conductor in Residence" Rémy Ballot, can guarantee a performance of the VII according to the most advanced musicological knowledge.

For Brucknerians the symphonies become lifelong friends, they meet each other again and again, and from these symphonic encounters and messages via concert, CD or score, they are rewarded anew and go with renewed strength into life ahead. Ernst Kurth (1886-1946), a musicologist, one of the earliest and most important Bruckner researchers and biographer writes in 1917: "For Anton Bruckner, the world will not be ready until it has to flee to him."

If Friedrich Nietzsche says: "A life without music is a mistake." - it remains to add: "A life WITH your symphonies, dear Dr. Bruckner, confirms that certainty."

(translated: Ken Ward)

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<sup>1</sup> Bruckner often signed with the abbreviation 'mp' appended - *manu propria*, 'in his own hand'. "Dr." is the significant addition that Prof. Laczika refers to here. (kw)