



UNIVERSITY OF
THE THIRD AGE

Benalla & District Inc.



Programme Notes 9th August, 2019



A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Anton Bruckner', on a light purple rectangular background.

Anton Bruckner

Born Ansfelden, Austria, September 4, 1824

died Habsburg, Vienna, October 11, 1896

- "They want me to write differently. Certainly I could, but I must not. God has chosen me from thousands and given me, of all people, this talent.

It is to Him that I must give account.

How then would I stand there before Almighty God,
if I followed the others and not Him?"

In approaching Bruckner's music it may help if one understands two things about him. First of all that Bruckner was a deeply religious man – Roman Catholic by conviction – hence the above quote.

Second, that he earned much of his living as a church organist. Numerous things in Bruckner's music which puzzle listeners make more sense if we think of them as conceived in terms of organ performance. Oddly, Bruckner composed very little music for organ or any other keyboard instrument.

Melbourne writer and composer RJ Stove, in a paper given at the Caroline Chisholm Centre, Melbourne a few years ago, observed that "Bruckner is someone whose music people either love or loathe".

Much of the biographical content which follows is drawn from that paper.

It may also help to know in reading from his paper that Stove is a convert to Catholicism – having been reared in an atheist environment – and is also an organist. Stove suggests that with Bruckner's music there is no middle ground. "First impressions count for much more with Bruckner than they do for most 19th-century composers". "Those who recoil from Bruckner's music", Stove says, "often do not so much loathe it as look down on it, in a way that they would never dare to do to most other world-famous composers. It is strange how Bruckner, like Wagner, so often inspires not so much hatred as contempt".



The house where Bruckner was born, in Ansfelden, Austria, survives. In fact it has been turned into a Bruckner museum.

Very pretty. Very picturesque. Very charming. You could imagine it being used for an episode of Midsomer Murders.

Perhaps not quite so pretty and so picturesque and so charming when you learn what the life expectancy rate of kids there was. Anton Bruckner had 10 siblings. Of those 10, six died in infancy.

Bruckner's father, the village schoolteacher, doubled as the village organist. Soon the boy Anton helped out his father in the organ-playing department, and later in the school-teaching department as well. He duly completed the relevant teacher-training course, which, incidentally, qualified him to give instruction at boys' schools, in physics and other hard sciences as well as in reading, writing, and arithmetic, not to mention catechism classes. His teaching duties took him to Linz and nearby places.

In the classroom, alas, Bruckner was a disaster, again and again and again. No deficiencies of intellect or knowledge afflicted him. He just could not keep the kids disciplined. They would become feral at the very sight of him.



The Bruckner organ
at St Florian

More agreeable experiences came when he regularly visited the Augustinian monastery at St. Florian, approximately 11 miles outside Linz. This monastery had an organ in it.

The authorities allowed Bruckner to play the organ. A fairly impressive instrument, as you can see. Soon he was a regular in the job. At last, he had found a purpose in life. The pay, albeit dismal, could be relied on. Better yet, no kids lurked in the vicinity to torment him. As soon as he could afford to get out of the education system, he did.

Eventually Bruckner realized that he needed some serious composition training which the monks could not furnish. He sought out a formidable and ruthless polyphony professor by name of Simon Sechter – the most prolific composer known to the history of Western music. Mainly, he wrote fugues: 5,000 fugues.

Among the earliest compositions by Bruckner which is still performed regularly is his 1861 Ave Maria, which served as, so to speak, his doctoral dissertation under Sechter's tutelage. This is the piece where he stopped being a student and started being a master.

A turning point in Bruckner's compositional life came with a meeting with Richard Wagner. Bruckner showed Wagner the score of some symphonies he had written. Wagner was unimpressed until he came to what is now Symphony No.3 . Wagner was haunted by the opening of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony in the same key. Bruckner was too. : This was Wagner's favourite Beethoven passage and it was also Bruckner's. In Bruckner, Wagner recognized a kindred soul.



Richard Wagner & Anton
Bruckner in Bayreuth (1873).
Cartoon by Dr. Otto Böhler

Now that Bruckner had Wagner on his side, musicians who previously had ignored (or simply been unaware of) his music expressed enthusiasm for performing it.

These included Hans Richter, among Germany's leading conductors. Richter was the only maestro ever to give premieres of music by Bruckner and Wagner, championing especially the 4th Symphony.

Sadly for Bruckner, his detractors included Brahms, who stated, "Without craftsmanship, inspiration is a mere reed shaken in the wind."

Nobody is going to argue with Brahms's statement about craftsmanship. But Brahms might at least have appreciated that Bruckner was perfectly capable of craftsmanship himself. It was Brahms who referred with scorn to Bruckner's orchestral writing as "a colossal swindle", and who derided what he called Bruckner's "symphonic boa-constrictors".

But this did not upset Bruckner as much as might be assumed. He merely responded: "He is Brahms – and my profound respect. But I am Bruckner – and I prefer my own stuff." Clearly, Bruckner had appreciated one of the most profound truths in Aesop's Fables: "try to please all and you will please none."

A very different proposition was the all-powerful Viennese music critic Eduard Hanslick, who openly abhorred Wagner and who purported to be a friend of Brahms. When Wagner proved to be too big to crush and parodied Hanslick in one of his operas, the music critic took out his revenge on Bruckner, writing scathing criticisms of his music.

Some composers can console themselves for public humiliations by a comfortable domestic life. Not Bruckner, who spent most of his days in excruciating loneliness. Awkward by any standards (let alone Viennese standards) with women, he had a habit of proposing marriage to ladies whom he scarcely knew – none of whom accepted his offers of marriage – and he remained single throughout his life.

To make life more difficult still, Bruckner became one of history's clearest instances of what would now be called *Obsessive Compulsive Disorder*. Bruckner's nerves periodically overcame him, a severe breakdown in 1867 having confined him to hospital for three months. And he never lost a preoccupation with numbers, which led him not only to write down the prayers he said each day, but to count the turrets on buildings, the leaves on trees, windows, weather-vanes, church crosses, even buttons. His mind was tormented by 1,000 devils: or perhaps by one devil 1,000 times.



Eventually in 1875, the University of Vienna gave Bruckner (at his third attempt) a music lectureship. For the first two years he was expected not merely to work five days per week, but to do so absolutely unpaid. He proved a very good teacher of adults, as opposed to children. Those who had been his formal students continued to cherish his memory long afterward.

Bruckner died on October 11, 1896, and because Habsburg Vienna was one of the most gossipy cities in the world, the news travelled with amazing swiftness. Thousands attended his funeral. His body is buried beneath his beloved organ at St Florian Abbey.

In the silhouette department, Otto Böhler surpassed himself. (If you could see) the fine detail of Böhler's portraiture (of Bruckner's arrival in heaven), at the extreme left we have Bruckner, greeted by Liszt. Then from left to right, we have: Wagner, Schubert, Schumann, Weber, Mozart, Beethoven, Gluck, Haydn, Handel, and (sitting at the organ with his back to the others) Bach.



Today's Music Selections

Military March in E-flat major, WAB 116



Military band in Austria

Bruckner composed this work on 12 August 1865 during his stay in Linz, at the time when he was composing his first symphony. An occasional work, Bruckner composed it for the Military band of the Hunting Troop in Linz, as a gesture of appreciation for its participation in performances of two of his other works. However, it is not known whether it ever was performed by this military band.

In the Bruckner-Handbuch it is only noted that the march was presumably performed in Linz in 1865.

Note: "Hunting Troops" (German 'Jäger') in German-speaking states during the early modern era was a term used to describe skirmishers, scouts, sharpshooters and runners. Jäger came to denote light infantrymen whose civilian occupations made them well-suited to patrolling and skirmishing, on an individual and independent basis, rather than as part of a military unit.

(Acknowledgement: Wikipedia)

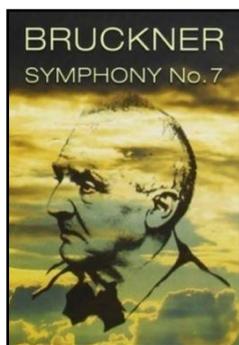


Jäger 1835-1843

The Orchestra we see and hear is the Tokyo Wind Sinfonia

and the YouTube link is: www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1JoNoAdoso

Symphony No. 7 in E major, WAB 107



In the context of history, Bruckner, the slightly eccentric Austrian symphonist and organist (at the monastic church of St Florian near Linz), links the worlds of Schubert and Mahler. Each of his nine mature symphonies represents a persistent attempt to pick up where Beethoven's monumental and enigmatic Ninth Symphony left off, a daunting task avoided by earlier composers. At the same time, Bruckner's symphonies, largely misunderstood by audiences when they were first performed, were a radical departure from anything which had come before.

Bruckner was at his most energetic and most confident when he composed the 7th of his symphonies. He began work on it in September 1881 - less than three months after completing his Sixth - and completed it two years later on the day after his 59th birthday.

Its premiere received mixed reviews but within three years had been received warmly in Vienna, Chicago, New York, London, Amsterdam and Berlin. In the 1920s the Seventh became the first of Bruckner's symphonies to be recorded; it was recorded three times, in fact, before any of his others was recorded in full. It continues to be the most favoured of Bruckner's works, both in recordings and in concert performances.

After finishing the first movement, Bruckner began work on the Adagio, and had it fully sketched by January 22, 1883. When he began to turn the sketch into the actual score he felt a strong presentiment of Wagner's death, which occurred on February 13. When the news reached him he extended the original design of the Adagio, ending the movement with a noble elegy which he labelled, so as to leave no doubt about his intentions, "In memory of the immortal and dearly beloved Master who has departed this life".

The Adagio was brought to completion on April 21, leaving the rest of the spring and the entire summer for the composition and orchestration of the finale.

(Acknowledgement: www.kennedy-center.org)

Though he wrote no major works for the organ, his improvisation sessions on the organ sometimes yielded ideas for the symphonies. Indeed, the orchestration in his symphonies often involves abrupt switches and call-and-response between multiple groups of instruments, much like switching manuals on an organ.



We listen to the first part and the finale of the Adagio movement, transcribed for organ by David Briggs – Artist in Residence at the Cathedral Church of St John the Divine, New York and played on the organ of that cathedral.

The YouTube link (for the whole adagio movement) is:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=xFIFReRCYyg

The Cathedral campus boasts six organs. The largest of them, The Great Organ, was built by the Ernest M. Skinner Company in 1910, rebuilt and enlarged in 1954, and painstakingly restored after a devastating fire in 2001.

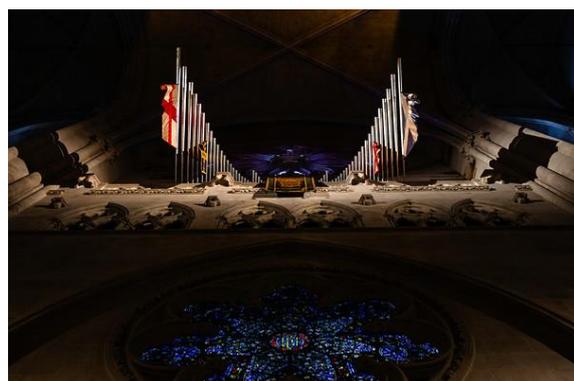
The Great Organ is widely considered to be the masterpiece of American pipe organ building and is an acclaimed national



treasure. It is a four manual and pedal, seven division, electro-pneumatic action instrument of 151 ranks and 8,514 pipes. The Great Organ has several extraordinary features, including the world famous State Trumpet above the Cathedral's West End, one of the most powerful organ stops in the world.



Pedal Board



State Trumpet above the West Door



Ave Maria WAB 6

After ending his compositional studies with Simon Sechter, Bruckner wrote this setting of the "Ave Maria" in 1861.

On 3 Oct that year he reported in a letter: "I was, in the end, splendidly applauded by my choir—twice."

In this very sound-oriented arrangement, Bruckner divides the seven-voice choir into groups with various combinations of voices and already achieves the harmonic effects of his later works.

We listen to the Norwegian Choir 'Schola Cantorum' directed by Tone Bianca Sparre Dahl.

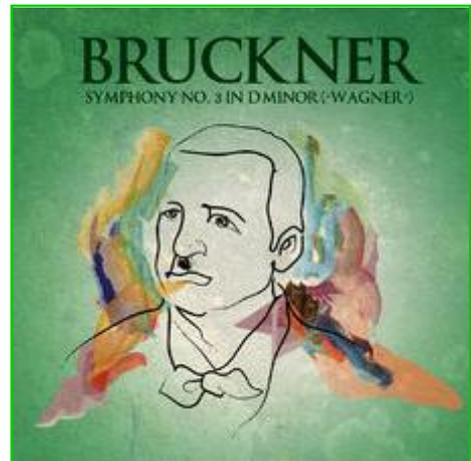
The album in which this particular rendition is recorded claims to have been nominated for the 56th GRAMMY Awards as Best Engineered Album 2013. In quoting St Thomas Aquinas: "Music is the exaltation of the mind derived from things eternal, bursting forth in sound", an inscription states: "The quotation most aptly describes the repertoire on the Norwegian chamber choir Schola Cantorum's recording of hymns to Mary, the Mother of God, in which tranquillity, eternity and 'bursting forth into sound' are encountered in many different guises.

The recording may be seen on YouTube at:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=LVBGGOSm4jc

Symphony No. 3 in D minor, WAB 103

Public ridicule, heckling and cat-calling. Not even the most avant-garde of contemporary composers playing to a jaded and obstreperous audience today would expect such a reaction. But that was the reception given on Sunday, December 16, 1877, to one of the 19th century's greatest composers. The premiere of Anton Bruckner's Third Symphony in D minor – the 53-year-old Austrian's first mature and monumental symphony – under the direction of the composer himself was an unmitigated disaster and was to prove to be the worst fiasco of his life.



So traumatised was he by the symphony's reception that Bruckner stopped composing for almost a year. As for the Third, it was to be revised several times until it reached the more familiar 1889 version.

And yet when Bruckner paid a visit to Richard Wagner in 1873 and brought along some of his early Symphonies, he wanted to dedicate one to Wagner, his musical idol, and he wanted to give the master his choice. As mentioned earlier, Wagner was unimpressed with all but the 3rd, especially the opening, because of its similarity to the opening of Beethoven's Ninth – Wagner's favourite Beethoven passage. Wagner later said that Bruckner was the only symphonist that came close to Beethoven.

For this reason and the allusions to Wagners music throughout, the symphony has become known as his "Wagner Symphony".



We listen to the second movement:- Adagio, Bewegt, quasi Andante (at ease, with agility, like walking pace) - which is built upon three themes. The serene opening theme is carried by the violins and slowly expands chromatically and in volume until it reaches yet more chromatic shifting.

It suddenly grows soft, then returns to intensity in the violins with underpinnings by the horns. Again it grows softer, the music expands once again until the woodwinds make a comment followed by the strings and the brass.

The second theme is first carried by the violas and expands to other instruments. The second theme ends with a pause, and the third theme begins softly in the violins. This theme is expanded and developed at length. The second theme returns and undulates in tension and volume until it reaches a huge climax. The first theme has to make several attempts to gain a foothold as the brass keep trying to shoo it away. But it finally prevails and reaches its own high point.

The movement ends with gentle strings, woodwinds and horns.

The orchestra is the WDR (West-German Radio) Symphony Orchestra of Cologne conducted by Jukka-Pekka Saraste, and the YouTube link (for the whole symphony) is:



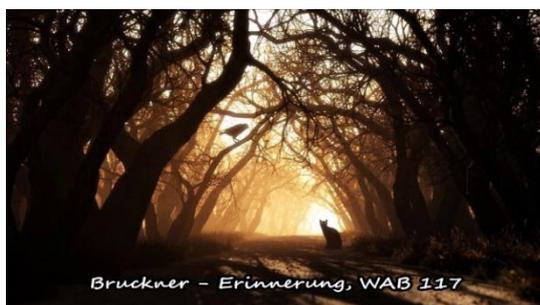
www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nvd-eEK5l7c&t=1186s

The adagio movement begins at 19 minutes 45' into the recording.

Erinnerung (Remembrance) WAB 117

Bruckner composed 25 small piano works, the earliest in 1850, the last in 1868. Most of the works were composed for his piano pupils during his stay at St. Florian (1845-1855) and in Linz (1855-1868).

His rare composition "Erinnerung" for the piano is masterpiece of the piano repertoire which displays Bruckner's approach to writing slow movements of his symphonies, where initial simple melody develops gradually, supported by ever-growing secondary lines.



The simple grandeur of this piece (the object of the title's remembrance is unknown) suggests that it might not be impossible to make an effective transcription of the symphonies themselves! (Hyperion CD H55109).

The performance we hear of this short work is by pianist Gottfried Hemetsberger.

The Youtube link is: www.youtube.com/watch?v=gpgrijMerlQw

Mass NO. 3 in F minor



Nothing came easy for Anton Bruckner, and habitually plagued by debilitating periods of low self-esteem, he was an easy target for music critics, journalists and composers alike. A particularly vicious critic accused him of “composing like a drunkard.” Given such harsh professional assessments, it is not surprising that Bruckner was prone to suffer from devastating insecurities that made him endlessly revise and correct his compositions.

By the age of 43 he had plunged into a state of deep depression and seriously entertained thoughts of suicide. Just in time he was admitted to a sanatorium at Bad Kreuzen and underwent a period of treatment that lasted several months. And giving thanks to the restoration of his mental facilities he set to work on his Mass No. 3. It took Bruckner an entire year to finish the first version of his longest and greatest Mass, a work injected with a newly found vitality and profound religious mysticism.

John Herbeck conducted the first rehearsals and found it “too long and basically impossible to sing.” After a number of substantial delays, the mass finally premiered on 16 June 1872 at the Augustinerkirche with Bruckner conducting. Herbeck eventually changed his mind and claimed that it “stood alongside Beethoven’s Missa Solemnis.”

Following a second and third performance in 1876, Bruckner made revisions on the Kyrie and the Gloria, and in 1877 on the Credo. Another revision followed in 1881, and still not satisfied, Bruckner revised it further between 1890 and 1893. At a November 1893 performance, Johannes Brahms apparently “applauded so enthusiastically that Bruckner personally thanked him.”

(Acknowledgement: www.interlude.hk)

We listen to the Agnus Dei (Lamb of God) sung by the Netherlands Radio Choir, accompanied by the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Edo de Waart in a performance recorded on the 8th of February this year in the music venue Tivoli Vredenburg in Utrecht.



The YouTube link for the complete Mass is:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=E8OzoOCpPcM&t=1360s

The Agnus Dei is the final part of the Mass and begins at the 47minutes and 5 seconds mark of this recording.

Prelude and Fugue in C minor WAB 131

Even by his twenty-second year, Anton Bruckner's reputation as an organist, especially in improvisation, was growing in his native Upper Austria. It would seem that the twain was not to meet with his being a composer, although many scholars and writers have pointed out that the organ-like qualities in his orchestration. At any rate, the handful of organ works which he left behind are mostly early works and well written, yet reveal little of the imagination and daring of the symphonies and choral works.

The Prelude and Fugue in C minor is one of the most important of these works. In form it is patterned on the models of the Baroque masters. In flavour however, some of the then-fresh influence of Mendelssohn may be detected. The opening prelude is extroverted and festive. The following fugue, although somewhat featureless, is nonetheless done correctly, even succinctly. This is no mean feat considering it predates Bruckner's intense theoretical studies with Sechter by a decade.

(Acknowledgement: www.allmusic.com)

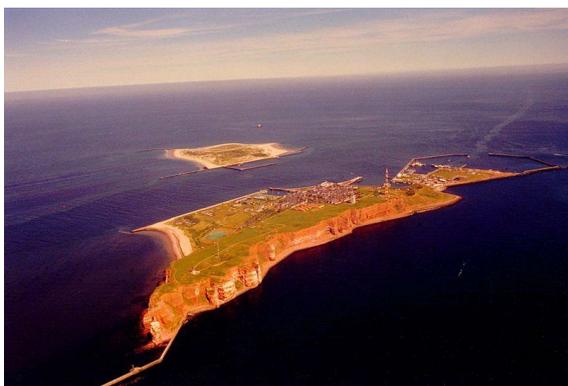
We listen to and watch John Scott playing Bruckner's Prelude and Fugue for organ from a recording taken from the BBC Proms in the mid 1990s. It's thought to be very unusual for the BBC to show the organ being played on TV, so this is rare footage! This was part of a proms concert of Bruckner's choral music, the organ piece was merely an opener, which is why there was no applause at end, it moved seamlessly into the 2nd item on the programme.



The Youtube link is: www.youtube.com/watch?v=vJLGfhhbapSc

Helgoland WAB 71

Helgoland was composed in April 1893 for the Men's Choir of Vienna to celebrate its 50th birthday at the time he was starting to write his 9th, and final, symphony. The text was written by August Silberstein, who had already provided poems, which Bruckner set to music. Bruckner composed Helgoland for male chorus and symphony orchestra in 1893, The work, though, strangely, has rarely been recorded.



A bird's-eye view of the Island Heligoland

Helgoland is a small German island in the North Sea near the mouth of the Elbe River and today a popular holiday location. The setting is a case of interest, as the Frisian island of Heligoland had just been given to Germany in 1890 by Great Britain (in exchange for Zanzibar). The text, however, from August Silberstein's "Mein Herz in Liedern" focuses on the Saxon people of the island who are threatened by the invasion of the Romans, but are saved by divine intervention.

The substance of the text is:

“On the North Sea's most distant horizon Ships appear that resemble clouds; In billowy waves with tension on the sail, the Romans approach the Saxons' isle. Alack! The holy lieus, hitherto preserved, The peaceful homes surrounded by trees! The settlers are aware of the adverse armada! Everyone being worth living, as they also steal life! Even those who hesitated now rush to the shore For looking with tears in the eyes is of no use; Thus, from the most valuables' bosoms A prayer is sent to the sky:

Thou who art enthroned in the clouds, Who hast thunder in thy hand And who demandest tempests, Help us! Let dreadful storms bluster, Lightning's fire, And smash yonder foes! Lord! Our saviour from death and bitter hardships! Father! And look, the wave, that was billowing Turns into froth-like foam, The winds arise and they bolt fiercely, Even the brightest sails are darkened! The horrors of the ocean are relinquished, They burst the masts and the bows; The all-igniting arrows of lightning Strike them while thunder accompanies their flight. Now, enemy, looter, you stay as a loot, Sunk to the ocean's depth, dashed to the sand, Your ships' wreckage floats towards the island! O Lord, the free Heligoland praises thee!”

The work is full of strength and enthusiasm, and carries the mark of Wagner's influence. The orchestral introduction depicts already the atmosphere of storm and fate, which hangs over the text.



The first part (first three strophes) depicts the approach of the enemies and the announcement of the prayer, the mid-part (next two strophes) depicts the invocation of the deity, and the third part (reprise with development) depicts the storm and the sinking of the enemies. The coda on the last verse "O

Herrgott, dich preiset frei Helgoland!, with a cymbal crash near the end is a hymn to the deity.

(Acknowledgement: www.revoly.com).

The performance we hear is by the Berlin Radio Chorus & Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, conducted by Daniel Barenboim. The YouTube link is:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=kM3bbrYtA6o

String Quintet WAB 112

Although the idea of composing a string quintet was not Bruckner's (It was the famous Viennese violinist Joseph Hellmesberger who suggested that Bruckner should consider writing such a composition), Bruckner was flattered by the idea and produced a magnificent work that is unique within the literature.

Writing in his Chamber Music Handbook for String Players, music critic Wilhelm Altman claims that: "If the only thing Bruckner had ever written for string instruments had been the slow movement to his string quintet, his reputation would have been secured for all time. The entire work is so admirable that it is hard to believe that its creator had little familiarity with string chamber music.

Though true, it is hard to credit that Bruckner did not know Beethoven's late string quartets at the time he wrote this work. Its harmonies are quite unique and characteristic of Bruckner's love of harmonic seconds and half-tones. As a result, the intonation is at times quite difficult to get right but even amateurs need to overcome these so as to make the acquaintance of this magnificent work.



The first movement, *Gemäßig* (moderato) entirely avoids the usual Allegro mood one expects to find in a first movement. The plastic main theme is full of yearning and developed at great length until the entrance of the lyrical second theme, which conveys almost unimaginable bliss.

The second movement, *Scherzo*, is highly syncopated though here, as opposed to its appearance in his symphonies, it is gentler and has a melancholy, contemplative mood to it. The trio section is closely related to the old-style minuet though it is full of feeling.

The aforementioned slow movement, *Adagio*, takes one directly to heaven. This is music of affirmation and there is no sense of resignation to an inevitable and unwished for fate. The tonal color is quite unique, especially when the cello falls silent.

The main theme of the finale, *Lebhaft bewegt*, has a staccato motif over an organ-like underpinning. The slower delightful second theme is a real piece of Austrian folk music and the variations on it are very pleasing”.

We listen to the *Adagio* performed by Alina Ibragimova, Amihai Grosz, Anne Gastinel, Gijs Kramer and Liza Ferschtman at a recent music festival in the Western Netherlands city of Delft. The YouTube Link (for the complete Quintet) is:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=iEXYebQ-TwQ&t=944s

The *Adagio* movement begins at 21 minutes 40' into the recording.

Symphony No. 8 WAB – Finale

Lots of works have big endings. Some of them might be labelled “Epic” including those of some of the Bruckner symphonies. Bruckner's 8th Symphony is the last he would complete. He never lived to finish his Ninth (although he came agonisingly close to completing the finale, music that's still shamefully little heard in concert halls), so the Eighth is the summation of his symphonic journey. And what a summit the Eighth is! Bruckner himself said when he finished the work's gigantic, revelatory finale: "Hallelujah!..... The Finale is the most significant movement of my life”.

Themes from all of the work's huge movements sound together at the end of the symphony, a moment that burns with what one commentator calls a "blazing calm".

(Acknowledgement: www.theguardian.com).

The version we hear is from the Munich Philharmonis Orchestra conducted by the renowned Interpreter of Bruckner's symphonies – Sergiu Celibidache.

The YouTube link (for the whole symphony) is:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=e/VHvTrEM34

The finale (3½ minutes worth) occurs at the 1 hour 36 minute mark.