Bruckner's Eighth Symphony – A Survey of Recordings
by Lee Denham

When the editorial team of MusicWeb International first encouraged its reviewers to support the readership during the COVID-19 lockdown with more reading material, I initially offered an old CD review I wrote of Mahler's Sixth Symphony a number of years ago for a private blog, now NLA. Upon further reflection, however, I did wonder about the wisdom of writing about a work that ends in total despair and desolation for a readership who themselves may have already felt somewhat desolated and in despair during a lockdown! So instead, I thought it would be a good idea to use an even older survey of Bruckner's Eighth Symphony instead – at least that ends triumphantly and should cheer you all up!

I now know that it was not a good idea. You see, fair reader, the problem with these things is that as soon as the ink dries, a new recording appears of the work that demands inclusion and assessment – and so it proved with my Bruckner 8 review. Originally it was in two sections, the second, main part being a running commentary of the work, interspersed with views on the recordings that I have to hand, a style UK readers may recognise as being adopted by BBC Radio 3's CD Review programme. The first part was merely a brief run through of the recordings I had dismissed before the review, with the reasons why. Now the problem with this, is that it is virtually impossible to adapt the bulk of the review whenever a new recording appears without resorting to a wholesale rewrite every time, which is of course impractical. Initially this was overcome by a Part 3 with brief comments on new and subsequent found recordings and how they would have rated had they been included in the original, main review - however, this isn't a fool-proof solution. For example, most readers would understand why Otto Klemperer's EMI/Warner recording of the work would have been dismissed at the starting line for containing his own "edition" of the score with a heavily cut last movement – but what do you do when you subsequently come across the same conductor's radio relay from a number of years prior with an uncut score? I have therefore done my best … there are still the three sections, heavily amended and expanded, plus this introduction, as well as a conclusion listing my preferred versions.

I have also tried to incorporate as many recordings as I could lay my hands on, with a focus on mainstream commercial releases, plus a limited number of live recordings mainly on commercial labels such as Hänssler and Testament, etc… inevitably there will be some omissions and no doubt plenty of moments when you will doubt my conclusions and therefore my sanity, but such is the nature of the game ! I fully intend to open up a thread on the Message Board once this is published where you will all be welcome to post your own views and comments, for while I am firmly of the belief that I am the greatest living authority on the recordings of Bruckner's mighty *Eighth Symphony*, you may rest assured that there are plenty who think I am also the worst. To this end, you will note that many of the recordings mentioned will have the following written next to them: (review), where if you click on the hyperlink in the brackets you can find the original review of the recording on MusicWeb International with perhaps differing conclusions. And this leads me to the second reason why this whole thing wasn't a good idea for, way back in 2004, MusicWeb did exactly the same exercise. If you are greedy for more, then you can find that earlier article here.

Throughout the following, I have kept references to the different editions of this work to a minimum (this article is long enough already), except to mention them when necessary; suffice it to say that there isn't an awful lot of differences between Nowak and Haas and certainly not enough to prefer one recording over another on this point alone.

However, most readers will also be aware that Bruckner's first draft of the symphony from 1887 was rejected by his long-term friend and champion, Hermann Levi, with the words:

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.

The work was revised and eventually published in 1890 and was eventually premiered in 1892 by Hans Richter and the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra in an edition edited by Joseph Schalk, which contained some minor, if unauthorised, amendments by the editor. The 1892 version occasionally turns up in recordings today by Knappertsbusch, Bruno Walter and variously with Furtwängler, who occasionally used the Robert Haas edition from 1939, a combination of the two, before finally reverting back to the 1892 score in his final years. However, in 1972 the original 1887 score was published and occasionally gets a performance and recording, so I am going to take a small detour and discuss this briefly, for unlike the 1892 version there are some significant differences between the original 1887 score and the one most listeners would be familiar with today, not least at the end of the first movement which ends in fortissimo glory, as well as in the Adagio whose final, great climax is achieved and resolved in a very different way than with Bruckner's final thoughts.

I'm often reminded when listening to the 1887 score of how similar it sounds to the final, now completed, fourth movement of the *Ninth Symphony* – the orchestration in both seem sparer than what we would normally associate with Bruckner, the sound-world somehow more 'modern'. I get a similar reaction to listening to Mussorgsky's original scores and then comparing them with the Rimskyfied versions we are more familiar with today. Suffice it to say that any reader with an interest in this work should listen to the original 1887 version at least once in their listening lives and I have on my shelves three recordings of this score, one by **Eliahu Inbal** with the Frankfurt RSO from 1982 on Teldec, another with **Simone Young** and the Hamburg Symphony from 2008 on Oehms Classics that contains the best orchestral playing and the finest sound of the three (review), as well as **Georg Tintner** with National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland on Naxos (review). I should point out at this point, that I part company with my esteemed MWI colleagues here, John Quinn and Ralph Moore, in preferring Georg Tintner's recording over Simone Young's. Apparently, Tintner was of the opinion that the 1887 score was better than Bruckner's original, which is why he opted to record that version instead of one of the more familiar ones and whenever I listen to his recording of it, I too am almost convinced that he is correct as well, a reaction I don't get when listening to either Inbal's or Young's versions. Now there is no doubt that the National Symphony Orchestra of Ireland Is not quite the equal of the bands from either Hamburg or Frankfurt and some have commented on Tintner's leisurely speeds, but to my ears he gets an electric response from his orchestra and the whole thing is hugely persuasive. In this regard, he would be my pick for the 1887 score, but in truth you wouldn't be going far wrong with any of these three.

There is also a further "in between" version that has been recently recorded by **Gerd Schaller** for Profil (review), sometimes referred to as the "Variant of 1888" and edited by the Bruckner scholar William Carragher, using Bruckner's sketches as they were midway through his revisions. It is an interesting exercise and listen, but of more interest to the completist and scholar, I would contend. Whatever your view, it could hardly have stronger advocacy than Gerd Schaller's.

Part 1

A few recordings can be dismissed quite quickly and easily. When the 1982 effort by **Carlos Paita** on Lodia with the Philharmonic Symphony Orchestra finally tumbled through my letterbox it was duly auditioned and then sent straight off to the charity shop - the less said about that one, the better. Likewise, **Mario Venzago's** cycle on CPO sought to "shine a different light" on this composer's work, in particular, stripping away "the noisy, the hefty, the pathos-laden, the ostentations …." (according to the booklet) – if Bruckner-Lite is your cup of tea, then maybe this *Eighth* (review) is for you, but it isn't for me, although I will concede that it is different. More conventionally, **Takashi Asahina** seems to have garnered something of a cult following in some quarters for his interpretations of Bruckner, but his 1983 taping on Exton with the Osaka Philharmonic didn't impress me much – vin ordinaire, no more. That said, I'm not quite sure what is in the bottle whenever **Niklaus Harnoncourt** conducts

Bruckner – certainly it is of a vintage different from every other conductor I have heard in this music, to the extent that I am convinced that if an alternative name were on the record cover, certain critics would be far less adulatory than they are otherwise. His recording of the *Eighth* with the Berlin PO on Teldec from 2001 is, well, at best unusual, at worse fussy. One wonders, given the Berlin Philharmonic's proud Bruckner tradition, why they ever invited him back, to be frank.

One conductor they did regularly invite back, quite rightly in my view, was **Hans Knappertsbusch.** Now, I have a soft spot for old Kna - in my collection he is conducting a Brahms 4 of rare individuality and distinction (Cologne RSO, Orfeo [Aug 1953]), as well as some superb Bruckner, the *Third* on an old Decca recording with the Vienna PO, as well as the *Seventh* with the same orchestra live at Salzburg in 19 49 (review), which is one of my most favourite versions of all. Yet just as this conductor's reluctance to rehearse is well known, I sometimes wonder if this nonchalance extended to his own private study, since he continued to use the old corrupt scores of these symphonies long after Robert Haas and others had introduced their own critical editions. And so there is a magnificent sounding *Fifth* on Decca, again with the Vienna PO, that is shelled beneath the waterline before a note has sounded with a butchered score. If anything his *Eighth* and *Ninth*, both live with the Berlin PO from 1950/51 (review**)**, are even worse, with hairpin crescendos and multi spurious cymbal clashes making them both a real curate's egg if ever there was one. This Berlin *Eighth* is however, generally to be preferred to his later studio account made with the Munich PO for Westminster in 1963, which has been most eloquently reviewed by my MWI colleague Ralph Moore only quite recently (see review), but in truth neither recording can be considered a front-runner in this survey though virtue of the discredited scores.

Some really rate **Otto Klemperer** in Bruckner and you would think this music would suit this conductor perfectly. I'm not so sure, although I quite like his *Fifth* with the same orchestra here, but prefer Jochum to Klemperer in his much-lauded account of the *Sixth*. For some reason, in this recording of the *Eighth Symphony* made right at the end of his life for EMI/Warner, he uses his own "Klemperer edition" with a final movement cut and shortened unconvincingly by the conductor himself. A total non-starter (review). So instead, if you do insist on Klemperer in this work, seek out an earlier radio recording he made of the piece in 1957 with the Cologne RSO (review) – the dry radio sound is not the most sumptuous you will encounter, but the performance is very fine. I have long been puzzled by Klemperer's Bruckner, at least on his commercial recordings where he seems to lumber his way in slow-motion through the scherzos (that 'hunt' in the *Fourth Symphony* on EMI isn't going to catch anything at Klemperer's speed!), whilst he often puts the pedal-to-the-metal in the Adagios which become something closer to Andantes as a result – not in this 1957 *Eighth*, where the Scherzo is noticeably swift and light on its feet, whilst the Adagio is unhurried, noble and ultimately, very moving. A must-hear for Klemperer's fans definitely, but also since it is a very good in its own right too – dare I say Klemperer's finest Bruckner?

I have some revelatory recordings with **Sergiu Celibidache** , a real dark horse of a conductor, which include Bruckner in his *Fourth* and *Sixth* symphonies, but this 1993 live version of the *Eighth* isn't one of them (review). Originally issued on EMI, but now available on Warner, this is a brilliant account if you are studying the score, where each motif and strand of the work emerges with a clarity and coherence that is second to none, but is only achieved only by adopting speeds that are slower than anybody else's - he uses the shorter Nowak edition, yet still clocks in at a few seconds under 100 minutes and this for a symphony which often occupies a single CD. For students and self-harmers only I would contend (N.B. I am informed there is another recording of this work with the same forces, this time live in Japan, where the music-making is altogether more involving, but I regret to say that I have not been brave enough to seek it out).

There are many who considered the Cleveland Orchestra under **Georg Szell** to be the finest orchestra in the world during their time – others, such as Otto Klemperer, merely considered them to be a machine, albeit a very good one. Happily, there is a recording of Bruckner's *Eighth* with this 'dream team', a two-fer CD that also contains the same composer's *Third Symphony* (review), something of a

plus for me, as I also think that is a very good version of the earlier work too. There is much I really like about this performance of the *Eighth* as well, except one crucial element. Szell's interpretation is fine, the recorded sound typical for its time (i.e. okay), but the actual sound of the orchestra, bright and brilliant, lacks that central European gravitas that, I feel, this work ideally needs. I appreciate this is a personal opinion and indeed in the electrifying account of the *Third* is one I'm almost inclined to overlook it, but with other versions with interpretations that are just as good, if not better and more idiosyncratic sounding orchestras, this is one I'm afraid I have dismissed.

When the fine Bruckner critic Richard Osborne reviewed this work on BBC Radio 3, he chose a recording by **Carlo Maria Giulini** to be his representative choice. There are actually three recordings available by this conductor, one from 1983 live with the Philharmonia Orchestra on BBC Legends (review), a further studio account with the Vienna Philharmonic for DG from the following year (review), plus a further live recording with the Berlin Philharmonic on Testament made the same year – it was the last, live recording from Berlin that was chosen by Richard Osborne to be his top choice. Now, there are some who consider the DG account -grand, noble, slow (not as extreme as Celibidache though) - to be the finest of all and it is of course better recorded than the live relay from the Berlin Philharmonie. Yet despite the similarities with the same team's recording of Bruckner's *Ninth Symphony*, which for me occupies top spot along with accounts by Karajan and Furtwängler, for me in the *Eighth*, the magic just doesn't work. In my opinion. it seems that in seeking the spiritual core of the work, the conductor loses a certain lack of fire in all three accounts which I find mutes the drama too much. This is of course, just a personal reaction and one that isn't shared by all, indeed some may welcome the warmth that Giulini infuses the music in place of the torque and power of others, but I find myself admiring all three of these accounts without being stirred as I am with other recordings. So, controversially I concede, Giulini does not make my shortlist on this occasion.

When I was first writing the original Review, the only version I had to hand by **Klaus Tennstedt** was his 1982 recording with the London PO made for EMI/Warner (review). I found it an excitable, yet big hearted, account, accelerating into climaxes and maximising the drama – almost as if Mahler was conducting. It is idiosyncratic, yet entirely convincing and enjoyable, even great in its own right, but I concluded that it could never be a central library recommendation. Since then a couple of live accounts conducted by Tennstedt have also appeared, one with the Berlin PO on Testament from November 1981 and better still, a further live account from the same year with the London PO on the orchestra's own label. My ever-fallible memory is reminding me that a group of friends attended the London concert, originally expecting it to be conducted by Jochum, but were thrilled instead to find his last minute "replacement" was Tennstedt. He was shortly to become this orchestra's principle conductor and he and the LPO were supposed to have had a special relationship which indeed, comes across thrillingly here. This is a fast 'n furious reading that takes no prisoners, but then, in typical Tennstedt fashion, is warm and big-hearted in the Adagio - they totally nail the great central climax in that movement, which I found quite overwhelming. If it had been available, I would have included this recording in my main survey below and it is certainly, in my opinion, one of the best recordings available.

If with Tennstedt I thought that Mahler himself was conducting the music, with **Georg Solti** I often thought the conductor was still conducting Mahler. Certainly in his first recording with the Vienna Philharmonic in 1966 (review), my ears detected an underlying neurosis to the musical current, the likes of which I have not heard elsewhere. It goes without saying the playing of the orchestra and the sound of them as captured by the Decca engineers is first-rate, but I am not convinced Solti as a Brucknerian on this showing. He of course re-recorded the piece a number of years later with the Chicago SO, once more for Decca in 1990. This was recorded in St Petersburg whilst the conductor and orchestra were on tour - I know that when Decca recorded Shostakovich with Ashkenazy with the St Petersburg Philharmonic in the same venue, they would remove all the seats and place the orchestra in the middle of the hall during the sessions. I think this is a good idea, for you can sometimes sense a slight echo in this hall (I'm thinking of some of the later Mravinsky live tapings from the same venue);

at its best, for example in Ashkenazy's recording of the Shostakovich's Leningrad Symphony, it's spectacular. It's not bad on this Bruckner recording either, if not earth-shattering either. Nor is Solti's reading bad; indeed, in the first two movements, he's very good; however, his older self just cannot resist speeding up into the first climax of the Adagio and he attempts to do something a similar to Gunter Wand in the last movement (fast in the loud music, slow in the quiet), without quite the mastery of transition of his more experienced (in Bruckner) colleague. In summary, if this is your only Bruckner 8, you wouldn't be missing out on too much; it's just that you can do better.

The **Gunter Wand** recording mentioned above was one of his final recordings of all and was made with the Berlin PO in 2001 - it is included in the main survey below. I consider it slightly better than his previous ones made with the NDR Symphony Orchestra, one live from Lubeck Cathedral in 1987 (review), plus another from Hamburg during the mid-nineties (review), as well as a further one with the Cologne RSO (review), although some may argue that the lighter-toned radio orchestras were more suited to Wand's conception than the grander sounding Berliners. However, it is the final account that made the cut.

There are also several recordings by Wand's colleague, **Eugen Jochum**, including two from complete cycles, one for DG shared by the Bavarian RSO and Berlin PO, plus one from the late 1970's with the Dresden Staatskapelle for EMI/Warner. There is remarkably little to choose between Jochum's two accounts of the *Eighth* here, one from Berlin and the other from Dresden, but I included the Dresden account in my main discussion so will not dwell unduly, except to say there is true magic in the Adagio captured on the Dresden account which isn't quite replicated with the Berliners. However, much to my surprise, there is also an even earlier commercial account from 1949, again made for DG with the Hamburg Philharmonic State Orchestra in surprisingly good sound. Another surprise was, unlike recordings he made around the same time of Beethoven and Brahms symphonies, how unlike Furtwängler they were, far more disciplined in both execution and pulse, although the final movement almost saw normal service resumed with a little bit of Schalk thrown in here and there. However, this was one of the final versions I listened to as part of this article and with ears bleeding and my poor, long-suffering wife anxiously questioning my sanity, I can honestly say I was hooked from first bar to last – a real surprise.

My preferred choice of the various recordings by **Herbert von Karajan** is his 1975 account with the Berlin PO and that is the one I will use in the main discussion. However, all Karajan's recordings of this work have something to say. The first from Berlin in 1958 on EMI/Warner (review) is the slowest of the three but is remarkable for the sound of the orchestra, which is gaunter and darker to the more polished and brilliant Karajan sound of later years - I sense the shade of Furtwängler here, if not in the manner of the interpretation which is very fine. Karajan's last recording of the work with the Vienna PO from 1988 is very famous and some count it as his finest of all - the fact I don't is largely for similar reasons I don't respond to the Giulini made around the same time, with the same orchestra and record company (those were the days!); I find the 1975 Berlin version to have a brighter fire in its belly. That said, some of the string playing of the Vienna PO in the great Adagio beggars belief in its sheer beauty of sound - or at least it would have done had Karajan's very first recording of the piece, made with the Berlin Staatskapelle nearly half century beforehand, had not resurfaced on Koch Schwann some five years after the conductor's death. For some reason, at the end of the war the Soviet Army made off with the tapes of this recording along with others, including a [very good] live Bruckner VI with Furtwängler, only to return them both in the 1990's shorn of their opening movements. Without hesitation, I would say this Karajan is a must-hear recording for anyone who is serious about the history of recorded Bruckner. That a thirty-six year old could produce a performance of this symphony of such intensity, beauty and structural cohesion in a recording studio at any time would be a minor miracle; that it was achieved in the dark days of Berlin in 1944, with all the intendant problems and issues of that time, is simply jaw-dropping. Predictably enough, it is more or less the same very fine interpretation Karajan was to present in the recording studio and concert hall for nearly half a century thereafter. More unpredictable, perhaps, is the sense of humility that shines through here, a quality

largely absent from his subsequent recordings, as well as the formidable quality of the orchestral playing, especially the strings which have a depth and radiance in the Adagio that is quite astonishing. Add to that very fine sound, which is in a stereo for the final movement that fairly leaps out of the speakers, and you have a very fine recording indeed - if there was a first movement that came anywhere near as close to the technical and musical standards as everywhere else here, this would have been a front runner, even today. "Das Wunder Karajan" indeed.

If Karajan was a model of consistency over five decades of recording this work, **Daniel Barenboim** is a model on inconsistency over four. His three commercial recordings to date, with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra for DG (1980), Berlin Philharmonic for Teldec (1994 – review) and most recently in 2015 live with the Berlin Staatskapelle (2015) again for DG, are all different. The Chicago performance is the broadest, whilst the traversal with the Berlin PO is the fastest, indeed one of the fastest I've ever heard, often frenetic bordering on glib. The Chicago recording and the latest with the Staatskapelle both include bits of Schalk in the orchestration, whilst both Chicago and Berlin PO recordings have quite the most astonishing pedal-to-the-metal sprint finishes in the final movement coda, which are both hair-raising and bizarre. I think the latest Berlin Staatskapelle version is probably the pick of the bunch, but in truth I didn't find any of them to be distinctive enough to include below.

That said, Barenboim is a model of Karajanesque consistency compared to **Karl Bohm**. Now, I am aware of Bohm conducting and recording Bruckner Symphonies from the 1930's, but to the best of my knowledge he started conducting the *Eighth* only very late in his career, the earliest I'm aware of being with the New York PO in 1969. There are actually four available recordings – the first from 1971 with the Bavarian RSO, is followed by another from Cologne in 1974 and then by the more familiar studio recording for DG with the Vienna PO in 1976, with a final live concert performance in 1978 with the Zurich Tonnhalle Orchestra when he was 84 years young. You would have thought the older he grew, the slower the performances would become – and indeed, the penultimate recording in the studio with the Vienna PO is indeed the slowest. Except the final one from Zurich is the fastest, indeed some eight minutes faster than in Vienna and almost half an hour faster than Celibidache! This Tonnhalle performance has garnered much praise in some quarters – it is an example of a second-tier orchestra being galvanised by the presence on the podium of a great conductor and giving their all, and then some. It is all very exciting, except you will seek in vain for any mystery or pathos in the music making. The latter two qualities are there in spades in the Vienna studio recording, which is all very beautiful sounding, played and recorded – if ever so slightly staid at certain moments. You could do a lot worse, though and if they don't make the main survey, the fault is mine.

There are also several recordings with **Bernard Haitink**, which together show an evolving interpretation, if perhaps with a little more consistency than with the aforementioned Karl Bohm. His first from 1969 made with the Concertgebouw has long been considered a weak link in his complete cycle of the symphonies – it is extremely swift (at just under 74m) and there were moments in the final movement which I felt were almost 'jaunty', not a word I would ordinarily expect to use when writing about this piece. When he re-recorded the work with the same orchestra in 1981, he had clearly radically rethought his interpretation to the extent that it then ran to over 85 minutes. This is by and large the same interpretation the conductor has performed many times since then all over the world, that has also been re-recorded with the Vienna PO in 1995 (review) as well as on a live taping in 2005 once again with the Concertgebouw, this time on their own label (review). Haitink's way with Bruckner is somewhat high-risk – by eschewing the majesty of Karajan, or the spirituality of a Giulini, his objectivity and willingness to 'let the music speak for itself' can sometimes result in performances that aren't above the charge of being bland and faceless – and certainly this was my impression with the two later Concertgebouw performances. The Vienna recording was an improvement on them both, especially in the last two movements, even if ultimately I concluded it was one of those readings which was very good rather than great and so I had eliminated Haitink from my survey at this point. Except he made a come-back – well, of sorts: in 2009, Profil issued another recording of Haitink conducting the work, this time live with the Dresden Staatskapelle from 2002 (review). Of course, it is by and large

the same interpretation as presented since 1981 and it goes without saying that the Dresden orchestra are one of the great Bruckner bands of the world and more than equal to their counterparts in Vienna and Amsterdam. However, this performance was a special occasion, a commemorative concert marking the return to the orchestra's home after it had been flooded during terrible storms of 2002 and indeed, there is a special magic in the air that results in inspired music-making, the orchestra sounding at times almost 'elemental'. Without hesitation, I would say this is by far and away the best of all of Haitink's Bruckner *Eighths* and indeed deserves to be mentioned amongst the very best of all recordings of the work. And yes, it should have been included below.

So there you have the end of Part 1 – some notable names falling in the first furlong and some subsequent 'discoveries' that I wish I could have carried-forward into the main survey below.

Part 2

So, these are the recordings that have "made the cut":
Karajan - Berlin PO (DG 1976 - review)
Furtwängler - Vienna PO (live 1944 – review)
Jochum - Dresden Staatskapelle (EMI/Warner - review)
Thielemann - Dresden Staatskapelle (Profil - review)
Boulez - Vienna PO (DG - review)
Maazel - Berlin PO (EMI)
Mravinsky - Leningrad PO (Warner)
Horenstein - LSO (BBC Legends - review)
Wand - Berlin PO (BMG - review)
Janowski - Suisse Romande Orch (Pentatone – review)

Movement I - *Allegro Moderato*

Timings	
Jochum	13.51
Janowski	14.52
Mravinsky	14.57
Furtwangler	15.06
Boulez	15.08
Horenstein	15.45
Thielemann	15.45
Maazel	16.19
Karajan	16.47
Wand	17.03

The symphony opens with pianissimo horns balefully sounding out in C Minor, not a shimmering string within earshot. Cellos and double basses intone a broken melody rising up out of the gloom only to disappear again and already we can sense differences in interpretation; some conductors' phrasing here is clipped and terse (**Horenstein, Jochum, Mravinsky, Janowski and Maazel)** whereas others are softer edged, more mysterious. The theme is gradually built up by cellos to be answered by violins until the brass suddenly take it up and the whole orchestra rises to a climax; this quickly dies away, but the orchestra is still restless, unsettled, and the music moves forward to a further two thunderous climaxes. **Karajan and the BPO** open the work superbly, his cellos and basses emerging from the C minor gloom of the horns, the climaxes suitably thunderous and crucially, the second set more so than the first, which in some hands can sound too rushed.

Although the symphony has well and truly started, it seems uncertain which path to follow next and there follows a linking passage where basses and cellos murmur over a questing solo oboe as the music

slowly unwinds down to the second subject. **Boulez, live with the Vienna PO** in St Florian's Cathedral, conducts this movement swiftly, often broadening out in the climaxes which isn't indicated in the score, but still sounds convincing in its own right. However, he rushes this linking passage, as he does with many others throughout the work, robbing the music of its sense of mystery and sounding for all the world uninterested. This is a pity, for this account, in modern sound, superbly played by the VPO and on a single disc, has lot going for it, for when Boulez appears to be fully engaged with the music, it is indeed very good.

The second subject, a noble melody initially heard on strings initially indicates calmer waters, but is soon punctuated by heavy brass**. Karajan** is a little too serene here for my tastes - I do like a certain "edge" to this movement, a sense of danger; Karajan hints of great things, but of great, noble things. His great Brucknerian contemporary, **Eugen Jochum** is the fastest of all in this movement, clocking in at under 14 minutes to Karajan's 16 and a half. He and the marvellous Dresden Staatskapelle never sound rushed, as **Barenboim** does above at a similar speed with the Berlin Philharmonic, and there is that all important sense of "edge", but the impact of the music making is muted by poor sound and recessed drums.

The music tries once again to establish its serenity by repeating the noble theme once again on strings, only to lead onto questing probing woodwinds; as the tension builds, trumpets ring out and the whole orchestra is brought to a climax, only to quickly die away with muted trumpet fanfares. The work of **Jascha Horenstein** is often overlooked, although he does deservedly have a devoted cult following; his account of this symphony is with the LSO, live at the Proms in August 1970. The BBC engineers at that time were an expert bunch and this is a fine sounding recording; when we reach this aforementioned climax, the third such time the orchestra has broken out into a full tutti already after 6-7 minutes in this work, Horenstein and his players seemingly give it their all, as they did on the previous two occasions. But this isn't the way to perform this piece - each climax needs to be carefully differentiated from the other, or else the music is in danger of sounding repetitive, which it occasionally does here in this version.

Once again, the music dies away with murmuring basses and questing woodwind, but this time almost completely to pianissimo shimmering strings and solo horn and oboe. The music seeks to find consolation, warm brass over pizzicato strings, however this quickly dies out to be replaced by a variation of the second subject on full strings again, this time though, not serene, but agitated, soon disappearing into pianissimo and working their way out faster and faster, punctuated by timpani, until there is a brazen fanfare for all brass leading to a full tutti for orchestra and roaring timpani with desperate horn calls. With no resolution, the music immediately repeats itself, the horns ringing out across the plains once more, this time without timpani; with still no resolution, the music convulses and there is a terrible climax for full orchestra, baleful trombones almost sounding a terrible surrender as the orchestra dies away, to leave a plaintive flute solo to cry for help, only to be answered by ominous muted trumpet fanfares. **Wilhelm Furtwängler's** in his 1944 live recording with the Vienna PO, works his way up to that first climax super-fast, the music at once intense and agitated, with that all-important sense of danger and edge. It is hard to compare Furtwängler to any others in this survey – although he gave the premiere of the Haas score, he reverted back to the 1892 later on in his life. In 1944, what we have is a "Furtwängler-edition" with a kind of mix of the two, without the wholesale butchering employed by Klemperer in his edition. So at this point in the first movement, he restores the timpani to the second climax, something Daniel Barenboim does in his first and third recordings with the Chicago Symphony and Berlin Staatskapelle. Furtwängler's conducting style is also of an art that has largely disappeared too, the tempo constantly fluctuating but always sounding convincing, if uniquely individual. This is more than I can say for **Christian Thielemann** and his recent live recording with the Dresden Staatskapelle, who also adopts very flexible tempi; from all accounts this guest performance was the one which persuaded the orchestra to appoint him as their next principle conductor - they follow him devotedly, sound utterly magnificent under his baton and the performance is captured in wonderful sound by the Hänssler Profil engineers. Thielemann too accelerates into these

climaxes like Furtwängler, but unlike his great predecessor, his slams on the breaks unconvincingly just before the first orchestral tutti is reached. Maybe it was different in a live concert setting, but repeated listening at home has not persuaded me of its interpretive merits in this movement.

For the next few minutes, the music tosses motives around the whole orchestra seeking to establish a melody, only for it to disintegrate, until like a sun breaking over the horizon, the woodwind choir rises in hope from tremulous strings and the listener thinks that the battle may at last be won, only for it to stamped out by a terrifying outburst by the whole orchestra, followed by urgent fanfares on trumpets and trombones, repeated over and over again, until just the fanfares, not in celebratory C major but its darker C minor guise, are just accompanied by timpani thundering underneath. For some reason this is the moment **Horenstein** chooses to vary the way he approaches climaxes, the first one rather than stamping out the woodwind's optimistic hymn of hope, is an uncredited crescendo; normal service is restored for the others, but then the trumpets and trombones are drowned out - this isn't good. Predictably**, Karajan** and his orchestra roar across the heavens here; at the other end of the spectrum, **Mravinsky** and **Furtwängler** are more a desperate call to arms as the gates of Hell swing open - both ways are different, but all three conductors are light-years better than Horenstein here.

So, as the trumpets and trombones fade into silence and the timpani rolls quietly, but menacingly on the horizon, the strings try to offer benediction. A solo clarinet joins them, but the damage has been done and the movement starts to disintegrate; first the solo clarinet stops playing, then violins just leaving low strings punctuated by pizzicatos and the timpani dying away. **Gunter Wand's** recording with the Berlin PO was made when he was an astonishing 89 years old; it is a fine account, as superbly played as any and beautifully recorded. Yet, contrary to his reputation of a devoted servant to the score, Wand allows the clarinet to draw out his solo, before reverting back to original tempo for the closing bars, thus totally disrupting the pulse of the music; I wasn't convinced.

Bruckner made it clear he felt this ending represented Death in some way and whilst the music is grim, it is a very difficult ending to bring off convincingly; **Karajan** maintains those dying moments on lower cellos and basses in strict tempo, whereas Furtwängler gets slower and slower, virtually grinding to a halt. Most other conductors choose a middle way, slowing down right ever so slightly at the end. Best of all is **Marek Janowski**: his recordings of various Bruckner symphonies on Pentatone have rightly received mixed reviews, but I think his account of the *Eighth* is superbly conducted - although this does come with a caveat, since his light-toned Suisse Romande Orchestra, dedicated though their playing may be, lacks some of the heft of their central European counterparts. However, I am prepared to overlook this with moments of penetrating brilliance such as the way he closes this movement - as soon as the solo clarinet starts his lament, Janowski sets a constant underlying pulse and rhythm that follows the music all the way through to the end, and it works, stunningly.

Movement 2 - *Scherzo. Allegro moderato - Trio. Langsam. Scherzo da capo*

Timings	
Mravinsky	13.12
Boulez	13.44
Jochum	13.52
Furtwangler	14.13
Maazel	14.18
Janowski	14.52
Horenstein	15.03
Karajan	15.05
Thielemann	15.45
Wand	16.08

Terse horn calls over spectral strings announce the beginning of the second movement with the first subject almost immediately launched by violas and cellos. As ever, **Furtwängler** and **Karajan** are polar opposites in the way they treat this melody, Karajan taking it in one long singing phrase, whereas Furtwängler, far faster, jabs at each note, almost staccato-like. Most other conductors are somewhere in between the two; more are closer to Karajan's example, although **Jochum** and **Horenstein** indicate they have been influenced by Furtwängler's thinking. This theme is now examined sardonically by the orchestra, bits of it being articulated by each section before being spat out and tossed to another, until it is finally hammered out by the timpani and immediately taken up by the whole orchestra topped by jubilant horns and answering woodwinds. It is at this point **Thielemann's** reading enters the realms of the bizarre, for just after the timpani takes up the theme and before the whole orchestra repeats it, he implements an enormous diminuendo and crescendo; at first I thought my CD was faulty, or maybe a sound engineer had inadvertently leaned on the volume control button, but no, every time it is repeated Thielemann pulls the same trick. Which is a shame - the Dresden Staatskapelle sound glorious on this recording and are superbly captured in wonderfully warm, natural sound by the engineers. Thielemann's reading is notable in the phrase immediately after his unique diminuendo and crescendo, when he is able to bring the woodwinds to the fore, whereas too many conductors allow them to be drowned out by the rest of the orchestra. Not so **Janowski** - his orchestra may not be the most powerful of this group, although he brings plenty of power to the music in this movement, yet he still brings out the woodwind at this point to wonderful effect.

The music then winds down, until pizzicato violins over a rumbling timpani usher in the horn calls again and the whole section is repeated. This winding down episode brings out some interesting interpretive points from some conductors. **Wand**, who is the slowest of all in this movement and sounds it, effects an enormous crescendo and diminuendo on the timpani here - it sounds mightily impressive, but this isn't indicated in the score. **Furtwängler**, living up to the legend of not being able to give up transitions, once again virtually grinds to a halt. **Horenstein** slows down very slightly and makes the woodwind phrases just before the pizzicato violins sound questioning and unsettled - I liked this.

Repeated again, the movement then moves to its trio, marked "Langsam." **Boulez** is the fastest but one of our group of conductors in this movement (only **Mravinsky** is faster) and credit has to be given to conductor, orchestra and engineers for the results they have achieved in the difficult acoustic of St Florian's in Linz, for the music is wonderfully articulated and played, far better than the often garbled rush of **Furtwängle**r here. The Trio though is supposed to be an adumbration of the third movement Adagio, but Boulez is just slightly too fast here for the point to be effectively made. He's far better though than **Lorin Maazel** in his 1988 recording with the Berlin PO on EMI though, who despite being slower overall, refuses to take his foot off of the accelerator at this point - quite weird and plain wrong. The orchestra sounded much better under Karajan in 1975 - he may be a leisurely guide, but he is also an expert one who knows the terrain well and his Trio is more achingly beautiful than any. As the solo flute, horns and harps bring this section to an end, the first subject is once more reprieved, only for this time to bring the movement to a close.

Movement 3 - *Adagio. Feierlich langsam, doch nicht schleppend*

Timings	
Mravinsky	23.06
Boulez	24.52
Furtwängler	25.12
Horenstein	25.52
Maazel	25.55
Janowski	26.05
Karajan	26.07
Thielemann	27.09

Jochum	27.25
Wand	27.37

The Adagio marks a change of pace from the terse angry first movement and rumbustious second, some 25 minutes of calm which slowly builds to an ecstatic climax in E flat major. **Karajan** is predictably very beautiful in this music and his grip on the architecture of the movement powerfully convincing. **Mravinsky** is again the fastest of our group; I like his reading and there is a kind of "fierce passion" in his Adagio that really engages my attention, even if the 1959 brass section of the Leningrad PO do sound somewhat primitive next to their Central European counterparts. **Boulez** again is the next fastest, but once more one doesn't really notice this. What one does notice though, in spite of the warmth of the Vienna Philharmonic and the bloom afforded by the church acoustic, is a certain coolness from the podium; I sometimes wonder with a different orchestra and location if this recording would be anywhere near as good as it has in fact turned out. The contrast is most markedly made when one turns to **Jochum** - there is a rare magic at work in Dresden with this movement, the warmth and depth of the strings at the opening quite wonderful, Jochum opting not to clearly articulate the phrases on lower strings to wonderful effect. While I feel he does accelerate a bit too fast into that great climax near the end, everywhere else is leisurely paced and has a special glow that is really memorable and for me makes this recording a must-keep for this movement alone. **Wand** is once more the slowest, but I enjoyed his performance more in this movement than the two previous ones - he holds a steady pulse and brings out the best from the BPO's strings, particularly relishing the cellos and basses. Although this is a live concert, you wouldn't think so, such is the hushed concentration of the audience. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said of **Horenstein's** at the Royal Albert Hall in 1970 - even though it's August and so presumably summer, you can still hear the coughs and shuffles in this movement, which Horenstein shapes very well. Indeed, as the movement dies away, the theme played by the violins for a final time, Horenstein affects a gentle slowing down which may be unauthorised, but is most moving.

Movement 4 - *Finale. Feierlich, nicht schnell*

Timings	
Jochum	20.44
Furtwängler	22.17
Boulez	22.19
Mravinsky	22.21
Thielemann	23.26
Maazel	23.39
Janowski	23.41
Karajan	24.07
Horenstein	25.22
Wand	26.21

In a letter to the conductor Felix Weingartner, Bruckner wrote the following about the last movement:

At the time our Emperor received the visit of the Czars at Olmütz; thus, strings: the Cossacks; brass: military music; trumpets: fanfares, as the Majesties meet. In closing, all themes ... thus as deutscher Michel arrives home from his journey, everything is already gloriously brilliant. In the Finale there is also the death march and then (brass) transfiguration.

It is hard to understand, with this in mind, why the symphony is occasionally labelled "The Apocalyptic", since it doesn't finish in the destruction of civilisation, but in a triumphant blaze of C Major. Before we get to that point though, it is time to start to let some of our conductors go, the first of which will be **Christian Thielemann**. When I got to the final movement of this symphony in his

performance, I had already begun to lose interest, having been far too distracted by this conductor's unidiosyncratic fluctuations of tempo and that weird trick on the second movement. So much to my surprise, he then proceeds to play this last movement straight - and it is all the better for it, indeed very good, using a swiftish tempo that combines tremendous forward momentum as well as suitable grandeur. To my ears, everyone sounds a little too tired to do full justice to the coda, which doesn't quite hit home with the thrilling impact it really should have done and I was puzzled by the inclusion of 90 seconds of applause on a double CD set lasting only 82 mins, 57 seconds (surely its exclusion would have allowed it to be presented as a single CD?). A mid-price double CD is still expensive, £16 on Amazon UK and this finale although very good, doesn't really do enough to excise some of the weirder interpretive decisions from the earlier movements.

I've also heard some weird Bruckner from **Lorin Maazel** in my time, including a *Third Symphony* with the VPO at the Barbican in London which was quite wrong-headed. This recording, superbly played by the BPO, well captured by the EMI engineers on a single budget priced CD is a fine bargain and, trio of the second movement apart, is well conducted. That there's nothing special about it would explain how it was (rightly) eclipsed by the Giulini and Karajan versions from Vienna which came out around more or less the same time and although this recording has its fans, it doesn't make my shortlist.

Nor, in spite of some interesting felicities of detail in the inner movements, does **Horenstein**. His last movement has climax after climax hammered out by the orchestra, whose cumulative effect by the end I had found somewhat relentless. It is only fair though to point out that this CD come coupled with the same composer's *Ninth Symphony*, a generous coupling which doesn't flatter the Thielemann release above, but since this review is limited to the *Eighth*, this memorable night from the Proms all those years ago doesn't quite make the cut.

Much to my surprise, neither does **Eugen Jochum**, although actually he stays on my shelves by default. Of his collection of the *Nine Bruckner Symphonies* from Dresden, available in a very cheap box set from both EMI and Brilliant Classics, I would say this account of the *Eighth* is the weakest performance. His last movement, along with **Barenboim** and **Bohm/Zurich**, is one of the fastest of all, but does not sound convincing, nor is it in very good sound - Karajan in 1944 is better! However, since his performance is in a box set, it stays in my collection, although I concede I would still probably keep it anyway for his magical handling of the Adagio alone.

Continuing with the music, the last movement opens with a powerful chorale, initially given over a march, in which the rhythmic thundering of the timpani recalls certain passages of the opening movement. I didn't know until recently this passage has a rather slow metronome marking which only **Karajan** in his first Berlin recording and **Celibidache** truly observe, neither of which have made this detailed review. The slowest of our conductors is the (1975) **Karajan** and **Janowski**, but they are not the slowest overall - that is **Gunter Wand**. His interpretive template for the last movement is to play the martial episodes quite fast, with the more peaceful inter-linking passages played slower than usual, although they are invested with meaning and detail and played with superb dedication by the Berlin Philharmonic. This movement does not really relate to any particular musical form, but rather as a series of blocks of musical material. Once the opening march theme has died away, the music becomes at once more solemn, almost ecclesiastical, until some 6-7 minutes into the movement, when the opening martial idea suddenly reappears. This has excited some controversy down the years, since performances in the 1940's tended to typically present this passage [the reprise of the third subject group in the finale] as a grand accelerando-rallentando, with a tempo increase of as much as 20 percent. Karajan's 1944 performance preserves perhaps the first occasion on record where the pulse is kept perfectly steady, although one has to point out the publication of the Haas edition in 1940 was probably the catalyst for this rather than the conductor. Of the recordings under review, it is only Furtwängler who implements the accelerando; others hint at it (Wand, for example) by taking this passage at a faster pulse than the noblimente music which preceded it. **Boulez**, who adopts a fairly even, yet fast pulse consistently throughout this movement, consequently sounds fast anyway; when

this martial outburst ends, the music resumes to its more noblimente self, but with Boulez' speeds it still sounds restless and I too often get the nagging feeling that it is as if the conductor just wants to get certain parts over and done with. This, I concede may be a personal reaction, but I'm not so sure; **Thielemann** and **Mravinsky** are only marginally slower in this movement and I don't get the same impression with them, so this version, in spite of the magnificent contribution of the orchestra and sound engineers, is for me no longer a contender.

This leaves **Karajan**, **Wand**, **Janowski, Furtwängler and Mravinsky**, three of which are live recordings. Although it would be wrong to suggest the 1944 Furtwängler and 1959 Mravinsky concerts are sonically comparable to the Wand in 2001, the ear soon adjusts and they are both better balanced than the more modern studio recording EMI gave to Jochum. However, even though it would be wrong to classify them as anything other than "historical", they will both be kept on my shelves. Mravinsky was the first recording which alerted my ears to the possibilities of a faster paced first and second movements and he brings a real sense of danger to the former and joy to the second, compared to the more sedately paced Wand and Karajan. The sound of his orchestra, more primitive perhaps than what we are used to hearing today, but fiercely committed nonetheless, of course helps here as well. And it is the sound of the Vienna PO in Furtwängler's performance which I remember as well - it just seems so instinctively right for this music. I do not consider this recording as essential to a collection of Bruckner symphonies as the same conductor's recording of the *Ninth* is from around the same time in Berlin, not least since the account of the second movement is often too fast, almost hysterical, but it is a worthy adjunct, a reminder of how Bruckner was once conducted by one of the composer's most important early champions.

So do I really need three modern recordings of the symphony in addition to my historical choices (which includes the first Karajan) as well as the Dresden Jochum? You may recall I had reservations with Gunter Wand in the first two movements, although I enjoyed his third very much and remember it was his account of the fourth movement which really caught my ears when I first encountered it - his method of contrasting those enormous "blocks" of sound, increasing the pulse for those loud martial episodes and then relaxing for the more noble episodes in between, is exciting and makes a lot of sense. Strange then that he plays the entire coda of this symphony very slowly; to my ears, it just doesn't quite "take off" as it should. So with that in mind and in light of the first two movements, plus that I have Wand's Bruckner represented in other symphonies in my collection, this one, as excellent though it is, just doesn't quite make it to the final cut.

Much has been made of Bruckner being a humble and deeply religious man, yet he seems to have no qualms in dedicating his works to the most high and mighty, ranging from Wagner in the *Third*, to God in the *Ninth*. The *Eighth* is dedicated to a mere Emperor (of the Austro-Hungarian Empire), so it is only fitting that it ends in a suitably grandiose manner. However, the coda opens deceptively, muted horns reminding us of the uncertain way the whole symphony began, except this time instead of being underpinned by the darkness of the cellos and basses, violins hint that maybe after all the battles we've been through in this symphony, triumph may yet be achieved. Janowski does this coda superbly; throughout this movement he had made a virtue of the lighter toned Suisse Romande Orchestra by uncovering a wealth of detail and colour in the music which not even the over-analytical Celibidache matches. As the music here builds to a climax, topped by trumpets, it suddenly stops, with woodwinds quietly questioning, then trumpets, underpinned by muted violins, until there are three tremendous chords from the whole orchestra, followed by an anguished discord without percussion, to which trumpets respond in blazing C Major - triumph at last! At this point, trumpets and drums evoke a kind of "galloping" theme, before the whole orchestra steams into the final pages. I do not know how Janowski achieves, let alone how I can begin to describe, his mastery of the transition here; it just all sounds so "right", conjuring a sense of darkness into light. Ulrich Schreiber has aptly described this majestic hymn of triumph in radiant C Major, which brings together the symphony's four essential themes, in this way: "Fight and desperation, victory and resignation are united in a unique apotheosis which for the last time in the history of the symphony reconciles God and the world, art and life." While

I will not give up the Janowski for his unique insights into this work, I do sometimes wish he was in front of one of those great Bruckner orchestras of Berlin, Vienna and Dresden, so indeed for those final pages I also cannot forgo Karajan and his great orchestra from Berlin, who pull out all the stops and with colossal power sound as if they are truly uniting God and the world, as they bring this mighty symphony to an end. So it is Herbert von Karajan's recording from 1975 that I would nominate as my "Library Choice", for the powerful playing of his orchestra and for the sense that from that first baleful horn call which opens the work onwards; his is a journey which truly has those majestic final pages in its sights from every vantage point.

Part 3 (2020)

As usual with these things, even before the ink had dried on the final draft, wise friends were pointing out all the recordings I had somehow unaccountably missed. One recording I certainly was disappointed not to have included was with **Edward van Beinum** with the Concertgebouw (review), first issued by Philips in 1956. There is a rare alchemy with this recording, marrying fire and ice, logic and passion, all conveyed through the prism of the olde-worlde sound of the great Amsterdam orchestra in the 1950's. No, the sound isn't wonderful (although it has now been cleaned up as best as possible on its latest issue on Beulah), but the music making certainly is and the ear quickly adjusts – hugely recommended.

Not far behind Beinum would be **Carl Schuricht** with the Vienna PO in 1961 for EMI/Warner. I have fond memories of this conductor's oft-overlooked Beethoven cycle with the Paris Conservatoire Orchestra, well worth anyone's time seeking out, so I'm quite pleased that the "coupling" for this Bruckner *Eighth* is indeed all of those Beethoven symphonies (review) ! As for the Bruckner, this is a fiery reading, at times almost 'Furtwänglerian' in the way it surges into climaxes, but always engaging – I enjoyed It very much, if not so much as van Beinum's.

I was a little less enthusiastic about **John Barbirolli** though, live from 1970 on BBC Legends (review), taped barely weeks before the conductor's untimely death at 70. It isn't a bad reading by any account and as a memento of a one-off occasion it is more than suitable, but with the occasional slips of ensemble and a coda which almost crumbles under sheer exhaustion, I'm not sure if it is one for repeated listenings. Likewise with **Reggie Goodall's** with the BBC SO also on BBC Legends (review) from the previous year: this is a very slow reading, pretty much in the manner of his Wagner I suppose, but without the insights those performances/recordings had due to long and patient rehearsal, which I suspect wasn't possible on this occasion. I've seen some reviewers on Amazon who have said they were actually at the concert and that it was an epoch-making moment for them, but then admit this hasn't quite come across down the years to these CDs; I would agree with that.

Another wise friend was also hugely enthusiastic about **Kent Nagano's** reading with the Deutsches Symphony Orchester Berlin (Arthaus - DVD only); I quite liked it myself too, whilst preferring something speedier to this conductor's near Celibidachian direction (my friend is a conductor, so I wonder if it was the *logic* of this reading that comes through at such measured tempos, is what excited his enthusiasm).

So if the work is to be done this way then, **Giuseppe Sinopoli's** version with the Dresden Staatskapelle on DG is more beautifully realised, mainly due to a superior orchestra and what must count as one of DG's most successful recordings in the digital era. Running to just beyond 86 minutes, this is definitely one of the slower accounts, perhaps even more than you would realise since he doesn't hang about in the second movement, but the concentration of the performance and the beauty of the playing, all captured superbly by the sound engineers, elevates this one to the top category, very close to the top of pile.

Of course, **Stanislaw Skrowaczewski** did not have the luxury of a top orchestra and recording team when he set his account down, live with the Saarbrucken RSO, more is the pity. I remember seeing "Stan the Man" (as he was affectionately known by the orchestra during his Hallé days, apparently) only a few years ago, conducting Bruckner's *Third Symphony* with the LPO at the Royal Festival Hall in London. What was astonishing was the vitality of a man just about to celebrate his 90th birthday – I wouldn't quite say that he hopped-skipped- and-jumped his way to the podium that night, but I'm sure he could have done had he wanted to – and he conducted the whole concert standing up. That concert has since been released on the LPO-Live and is well-worth seeking out. As is this recording of the *Eighth*, which I remember hearing as part of a bargain-priced box sets of all 11 Bruckner symphonies (i.e. including the two study symphonies) – see review . This is Bruckner as guided by a wise podium master, inspiring his orchestra to deliver their all in a performance that is ultimately sane and satisfying. Of course the competition in this work is formidable and so maybe ultimately this must yield to other more high-powered accounts, but if it was the only version you had in your collection, or indeed if this was the version from which you first encountered the work, I would not say you'd be much disadvantaged.

Although Bruckner is not perhaps the first composer who springs to mind with the late **Mariss Jansons** , he conducted many of the symphonies in the final few years of his life and indeed, I remember seeing him conduct the *Fourth* at London's Barbican Hall only a few years back with the Concertgebouw, a performance notable for the first horn deciding to have a nightmare evening (not the best work to have an off-night with) ! This recording of the *Eighth* on BR Klassiks is with Jansons' 'other' orchestra, the Bavarian RSO in 2017 (review) and happily nobody has any nightmares at all. Actually, structurally, this is an exceptional reading from the conductor – the long journey is navigated unhurriedly and with a wise guiding hand, plus the orchestra respond in a big, warm-hearted way. That said, do the end results add up into a reading that distinguishes it from the many other readings that are also 'very good', rather than special? In my view, not really, no.

With the same orchestra and on the same label, albeit from 1999, is a second recording by **Lorin Maazel.** Truth be told, his recording with the Berlin PO mentioned in the main survey was despatched to the Charity Shop not long after I had completed the survey, so I didn't exactly hold up much hope for this later reading from Bavaria. And as usual, I was proved wrong! Fascinating to compare it to Jansons with the same band – of course, the orchestral response is excellent to both, as is the Bavarians' slightly lighter touch when compared to the heavy torque of their rivals in Berlin, Vienna, Amsterdam and Dresden. What differed was the conducting where, unsurprisingly, Maazel is more of an interventionist than Jansons. Usually for me, these 'Maazelerisms' result in me holding my head in my hands in despair, but happily not on this occasion, for they are few and far between. Indeed, perhaps the most notable, was the great final climax of the Adagio which, when it arrives, sees Maazel slowing down and stretching the musical line out. In the context of what has gone before, for me it did not jar, nor seem like unnecessary point-making – rather it is a point that I remember as differing the performance from many others in a positive way. It helps too, that there is a palpable warmth and affection to the playing in the whole of this movement, qualities that I don't usually associate with this conductor. A distinguished account, if not a great one then maybe.

I'm not sure how much Bruckner **Simon Rattle** will eventually end up conducting. An indifferent *Fourth Symphony* with the Berlin PO was preceded by a *Seventh* made with the CBSO that I felt was fitfully impressive, albeit very much work in progress. His recent recording of the *Sixth* had a controversial first movement, but I do have to say his Berlin recording of the four movement, completed *Ninth Symphony* with the Berlin PO was very good indeed, not least in the first three movements too. It seems as if he has now turned his attention to the *Eighth Symphony*, with two recordings currently available, both of live concerts, one from July 2015 with the Australian World Orchestra on ABC Classics, plus another with the LSO on the orchestra's inhouse label from the following year (review). I have not heard the later London performance, but it was warmly welcomed by my MWI colleague Terry Barfoot in the review indicated, however I have heard the Australian broadcast. This was clearly

a special occasion at the concert hall of the Sydney Opera House and there is no doubt that Rattle paces the work well and gets a very fine response from the Australian World Orchestra. Unsurprisingly, the latter cannot compete with the heavy-weight Bruckner bands of yore either in depth of tone or intonation and my final thoughts was once again that of "work in progress". Still, you could do a lot worse than hearing Rattle conduct this work in the concert hall, even I'm not about to take any of his recordings to my proverbial desert island.

Bruno Walter made some notable recordings late in his career of Bruckner for CBS/Sony, mainly with the Columbia SO, which included Bruckner's Symphonies 4,7 & 9. By chance, in the 1990's a recording of a broadcast given of the *Eighth Symphony* in 1941 with the New York PO was found in a New York shop. All things considered, the sound is not bad at all and is more than listenable (at least it is on the Memories CD I own) – indeed, one can hear quite clearly just how good this orchestra was in those days and how superbly they respond to Walter's reading, fierier than you may expect if you are familiar with the later Columbia recordings, even if there are moments when the sound almost crumbles away completely. Unsurprisingly, in 1941 he is also using the largely discredited 1892 score edited by Schalk (as did Knappertsbusch), although some leeway does need to be given there in light that it was barely a few months old at the time. To my ears, the performance veers between uncertainty, as if the orchestra were unfamiliar with the music and moments when it all comes together and catches fire, but ultimately, this is a fascinating glimpse of a major conductor in a work he otherwise did not record, but hardly a mainstream recommendation.

Conclusion

So there you have it: if you are still reading, bravo, and let me you know your views on the Message Board. If you've scrolled down and missed out huge chunks, I'd be most interested to read your views on the controversial bit in the middle. As ever, these are just my thoughts, my personal reactions to all the various recordings that have come my way down the decades of listening to this mighty symphony - it is interesting to note that of my final recommendations below, over half are recordings I have discovered since the original review was published in 2012, such is the beauty of our hobby. Finally, if I have insulted any fans of Carlos Paita or others on my journey with my views and recommendations, forgive me; it was not intentional!

Final Recommendations

1887 version	Tintner
Historical live	Furtwängler/VPO, Mravinsky
Historical studio	van Beinum, Jochum/Hamburg, Klemperer/Cologne RSO
Modern studio	Karajan 1975*, Janowski
Modern live	Haitink/Dresden, Tennstedt/LPO, Wand/BPO

*Overall top recommendation