



Sir John Barbirolli

conducts Bruckner: Symphony No. 9



CONCERT REVIEW: After Mahler, Bruckner. At the Hallé concert in Manchester a fortnight ago, Mahler's unfinished 10th Symphony was played. Last night it was the turn of Bruckner's ninth, also an incomplete work.

Sir John Barbirolli treated Bruckner with equally distinguished consideration. The performance had generosity and opulence, for the Hallé and BBC Northern orchestras were in combination, but it was specially notable for its authenticity. A finale was sketched and almost finished, but only three movements were wholly put into shape by the composer himself, so last night's rendering very properly ended with the slow movement. Moreover, this was the original version of the music. Perhaps Ferdinand Lowe, who edited the first published score, was not quite so reprehensible as the Bruckner partisans would have us believe – for the composer, like Berlioz, has a coterie of admirers who rush to protect him from the cold, harsh world, and find evidence of sinister plots and deliberate hostility at every turn – but he certainly made unwarrantable and gratuitous alterations to a remarkable work.

It is undoubtedly Bruckner at his grandest. The old naiveté has gone, and if there is still no high degree of sophistication there are unequivocal pointers to the future. Even Wagnerian chromaticism is carried a stage or two further; there are positive hints of the early Schoenberg, and even probings beyond that point. The content of the symphony, as distinct from its style – in so far, that is, as the two can ever be separable – is purposeful and moving. In form it is expansive but not rambling, and there is a dynamic quality all too often missing from the earlier symphonies.

The performance was eloquent and revealing. Sir John controlled the big ensemble so effectively that there was no suggestion of inflation or over-weight.

J. H. Elliot, The Guardian, 14 December 1961 (*excerpt*)

Producer's Note

Sir John Barbirolli's recordings of Bruckner are exceptionally thin on the ground. Although his earliest known performance of music by the composer dates from 1940, it was only in the late 1950s that Bruckner's music started to creep more regularly into Barbirolli's concert repertoire, and he never recorded Bruckner commercially. The present recording marks both the first time that Barbirolli had ever conducted the 9th Symphony (records indicate two performances of the Fourth and four of the Seventh symphonies between 1940 and 1961) and the earliest known recording of Barbirolli conducting any Bruckner work. Two later live recordings, both from 1966, have surfaced, one with the Hallé, the other with the Berlin Philharmonic. Here we have two full orchestras playing together – itself an exceptionally rare occurrence – in a concert broadcast by the BBC from the Free Trade Hall in Manchester. My source here was a good taped, mono, FM-quality recording of a BBC broadcast of the concert, which I assume was transmitted some short time after the event (this is suggested by slightly different background hiss profiles during the announcements and a lack of audience applause). The tape, although slightly hissy, was generally in good condition bar one significant technical issue: repeated and persistent volume fluctuations throughout the first eleven minutes, akin to someone constantly fiddling with a volume control, but almost certainly due to tape deterioration. These thousands of semi-dropouts have been painstakingly corrected, one by one, and by ear, in multiple passes. The result is satisfying, the quality otherwise is excellent, and overall it conveys well a performance that is truly exceptional. **Andrew Rose**



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BRUCKNER SYMPHONY No. 9
BARBIROLLI, HALLÉ ORCHESTRA, BBC NORTHERN SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

barbirolli

conducts bruckner

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XR remastering by Andrew Rose

Cover artwork based on a
photograph of Sir John Barbirolli

Total duration: 57:43

1 Introductory announcement (0:46)

BRUCKNER Symphony No. 9 in D minor (original version)

2 1st mvt. - Feierlich, misterioso (22:43)

3 2nd mvt. - Scherzo. Bewegt, lebhaft; Trio. Schnell (9:52)

4 3rd mvt. - Adagio. Langsam, feierlich (24:07)

5 Closing announcement (0:15)

BBC broadcast, Free Trade Hall, Manchester
From the concert of 14 December, 1961

Hallé Orchestra
BBC Northern Symphony Orchestra
Sir John Barbirolli, conductor

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