

BERLINER PHILHARMONIKER

Marek Janowski conducts Bruckner's Eighth

Thursday, December 10, 2026 · 20:00 · Philharmonie Berlin

Marek Janowski, conductor

approximately 80 minutes

Anton Bruckner

1824–1896

Symphony No. 8 in C minor, WAB 108

80 minutes

ABOUT THE WORK

Anton Bruckner began his Eighth Symphony in the summer of 1884, at the age of sixty, and worked on it mainly during the holidays from his teaching duties in Vienna. The four movements were drafted by August 1885, but the orchestration took him until 1887. That September he sent the finished score to the conductor Hermann Levi in Munich, whom he called his “artistic father”. Levi had just given Bruckner one of the great successes of his life with the Seventh Symphony, and Bruckner hoped he would conduct the premiere of the new work as well.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

First movement (Allegro moderato). The symphony begins in near-darkness: a quiet string tremolo and a short, rising and falling figure in the low strings whose rhythm recalls the opening of Beethoven's Ninth. A warmer second theme uses Bruckner's signature rhythm of two beats followed by a triplet. The development builds to huge statements of the main theme on the full orchestra, and near the end the music breaks off to leave trumpets and horns hammering out the rhythm over the timpani. Then, instead of a triumph, the movement sinks into a bleak, pianissimo close in C minor.

Second movement (Scherzo: Allegro moderato; Trio: Langsam). Unusually, the Scherzo comes second. It is built almost entirely from the figures heard in its first bars: a restless pattern in the upper strings over a heavy theme in the basses. The slow Trio, in A-flat major, brings the harps in for the first time and looks ahead to the mood of the Adagio.

Third movement (Adagio: Feierlich langsam, doch nicht schleppend). The heart of the work, lasting around 25 minutes on its own. Over throbbing strings a broad, solemn theme unfolds, answered by harps and a passionate melody for the cellos. Bruckner builds wave after wave

toward a single enormous climax in E-flat major, crowned by a clash of cymbals, before the music settles into a long, glowing coda with the Wagner tubas.

Fourth movement (Finale: Feierlich, nicht schnell).

The Finale opens with a pounding march rhythm in the strings and a massive brass chorale, with the timpani thundering beneath. It is a long and complex movement that gathers up material from the whole symphony. In the coda, listen for the main themes of all four movements sounding together as the key finally turns to a blazing C major.

CONCERT PROGRAMS

<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/bp-2026-12-10-janowski>

Version 2, 30 September 2026