

Blomstedt Conducts Schubert and Bruckner

Friday, June 18, 2027 · 19:30 · Wiener Konzerthaus

Herbert Blomstedt, conductor

	TONIGHT'S PROGRAMME	MIN
1	SCHUBERT 1797–1828 <i>Symphony No. 8 in B minor, D. 759 ('Unfinished')</i>	25'
2	BRUCKNER 1824–1896 <i>Symphony No. 7 in E major, WAB 107</i>	70'
	TOTAL MUSIC	95'

Franz Schubert

1797–1828

Symphony No. 8 in B minor, D. 759 ('Unfinished')

THE COMPOSER

Franz Schubert (1797–1828) was born in a suburb of Vienna and spent nearly all of his short life in the city. He showed unusual gifts as a child, had his first lessons from his father and an elder brother, and at eleven became a pupil at the Stadtkonvikt school, where he got to know the orchestral music of Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven. He went on studying composition with Antonio Salieri while training and working as a schoolteacher. He wrote at great speed and left more than a thousand works, among them over six hundred songs, the song cycles *Die schöne Müllerin* and *Winterreise*, the 'Unfinished' and 'Great' C major symphonies, the 'Trout' Quintet, the String Quintet in C and the last three piano sonatas. During his lifetime his music was valued mainly by a circle of friends and admirers in Vienna, and he gave only one public concert of his own works, in March 1828. He died that November, aged thirty-one. In the decades that followed, musicians including Mendelssohn, Schumann, Liszt and Brahms discovered and championed his music, and he is now counted among the greatest of all composers.

ABOUT THE WORK

Herbert Blomstedt was born on 11 July 1927, and the Wiener Konzerthaus announces the first of these concerts, on 18 June, under the heading of his 100th birthday. Three more follow in the Musikverein: the Philharmonic's subscription concerts on 19 and 20 June and a concert of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde on 22 June. Blomstedt came to this orchestra late. He first conducted it in 2011, at the age of

25 minutes

eighty-three, and it made him an honorary member in 2019. The programme sets two symphonies side by side, one that stops after two movements and one that runs for more than an hour.

Schubert began his Symphony in B minor in 1822, when he was twenty-five. He wrote out two movements in full score, sketched a third, a scherzo, in piano score, orchestrated its first two pages, and stopped. He lived for six more years and never went back to it. Nobody knows why. The explanations that have been offered include illness, the pull of other work (the Wanderer Fantasy for piano followed immediately) and the difficulty of finding anything to set after two such movements. None of them can be proved.

What happened to the manuscript is nearly as odd. The score of the two finished movements passed to Schubert's friend Anselm Hüttenbrenner, himself a composer, who kept it for decades and let no one perform it. It was the conductor Johann von Herbeck who finally prised it loose, and by most accounts the price was a place on the programme for an overture by Hüttenbrenner. Herbeck conducted the first performance in Vienna on 17 December 1865, at a concert of the Gesellschaft der Musikfreunde, thirty-seven years after Schubert's death and forty-three after the music was written. The same society presents the last of these four concerts.

A word on the number. In English-speaking countries the symphony has long been known as No. 8. The revised Deutsch catalogue and the New Schubert Edition count it as No. 7, and that is how the Philharmonic and the Konzerthaus list it, which gives this programme two Sevenths.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Allegro moderato. The symphony begins very quietly, with a dark phrase for cellos and double basses alone. The violins then set up a restless murmur over plucked notes in the lower strings, and oboe and clarinet together sing the first theme above it. A brief link leads to one of the best-known melodies Schubert wrote, introduced by the cellos over a gently syncopated accompaniment. It does not get far. The tune breaks off into silence, and the full orchestra crashes in. That pattern, a song interrupted by violence, shapes the whole movement. The middle section grows out of the opening bass phrase and builds to a climax in which the three trombones are prominent.

Andante con moto. The second movement is in E major and moves at an easy walking pace, not much slower than the first. Horns, over a walking line in the basses, lead into a calm melody for the strings. The second idea, in C-sharp minor, is a long solo line passed from clarinet to oboe, and here too the calm is broken by passages of great weight, with trumpets, trombones and timpani. The music travels through several distant keys before E major is restored at the close. Bruckner's symphony begins in the same key.

Anton Bruckner

1824–1896

70 minutes

Symphony No. 7 in E major, WAB 107

THE COMPOSER

Anton Bruckner was among the most unlikely of great composers. Born in 1824 in the small Austrian village of Ansfelden, the son of a schoolteacher, he seemed destined for provincial obscurity. After his father's death, the thirteen-year-old Bruckner became a choirboy at the monastery of St. Florian, where he would eventually serve as organist. He trained as a schoolteacher, since the family was too poor for a musical career, and for years divided his time between teaching and organ playing in small towns.

Bruckner was a late bloomer. He did not begin serious composition studies until his thirties, spending some six years studying harmony and counterpoint with the Viennese theorist Simon Sechter, much of it by correspondence. He completed the course in 1861, at thirty-seven, with such mastery that one examiner, Johann Herbeck, remarked: "If I knew one tenth of what he knows, I'd be happy." Soon afterwards his next teacher, Otto Kitzler, introduced him to the music of Wagner, which Bruckner studied intensively from 1863 onwards.

In 1868 Bruckner moved to Vienna, where he would spend the rest of his life teaching at the Conservatory and, later, the University. But Vienna was hostile territory. The city's musical life was dominated by the critic Eduard Hanslick, a champion of Brahms who despised Wagner, and Bruckner, by aligning himself with Wagner, made a powerful enemy. His symphonies were mocked, rejected by orchestras, or subjected to humiliating premieres. The Vienna Philharmonic rehearsed his Third Symphony in 1874 and declined to perform it; when it was finally premiered in 1877, with Bruckner himself conducting, most of the audience walked out.

Recognition came late. Bruckner was sixty when his Seventh Symphony, premiered in Leipzig in 1884, brought him the first genuine triumph of his career. He died in 1896, aged seventy-two, leaving his Ninth Symphony unfinished. He was buried, as he had wished, beneath the organ at St. Florian.

ABOUT THE WORK

Bruckner wrote his Seventh Symphony between 1881 and 1883. In July 1882 he travelled to Bayreuth for the first performances of *Parsifal*, and it was the last time he saw Wagner, the composer he revered above all others. By his own account the main theme of the slow movement came to him with the thought that Wagner would not live much longer. Wagner died in Venice on 13 February 1883, while Bruckner was still at work on the Adagio, and the closing pages of the movement became what he called his funeral music for the master.

The connection is written into the orchestra. Bruckner calls for a quartet of Wagner tubas, the instruments Wagner had devised for the *Ring*, which are played by horn players. They are heard first at the opening of the Adagio, and it was their first appearance in a symphony.

The first performance took place in Leipzig on 30 December 1884, with Arthur Nikisch conducting the Gewandhaus Orchestra, and it is usually described as the greatest success Bruckner had known. He was sixty. The symphony is dedicated to King Ludwig II of Bavaria, Wagner's patron. Blomstedt has his own link with that first night: he led the Gewandhaus Orchestra from 1998 to 2005.

Listeners have heard Wagner in the music from the start. A reviewer of the Leipzig premiere found echoes of his operas throughout, and the symphony is still often described as Bruckner's memorial to him. It has remained one of the best known and most often played of his symphonies.

One detail of the score is still argued over. At the climax of the Adagio most performances include a cymbal crash, with triangle and timpani. In the manuscript the cymbal part carries the words "gilt nicht" (not valid), and it is doubtful that they are in Bruckner's hand. Robert Haas left the percussion out of his edition, and Leopold Nowak's later edition has it. Conductors still have to choose.

WHAT TO LISTEN FOR

Allegro moderato. Violins shimmer quietly, and the cellos, joined at first by a horn, play a long, spacious melody that seems unwilling to end. Two further groups of themes follow, a calmer one introduced by the woodwind and a more rhythmic third. Everything in the movement is built on this scale, in long paragraphs that gather slowly towards a blazing close in E major.

Adagio: Sehr feierlich und sehr langsam (very solemn and very slow). The Wagner tubas open the movement in C-sharp minor, and the strings answer with a broad phrase of their own. A second, more flowing theme brings relief. The opening music returns twice, each time more richly worked, and the third statement builds to the summit of the movement, a great arrival in C major (this is where the cymbal crash comes, if the conductor uses it). What follows is the passage Bruckner wrote in mourning, with a cry of pain from the horns before the movement sinks to its close.

Scherzo: Sehr schnell. In A minor, driven by a rhythmic figure in the strings, over which a solo trumpet calls out a theme that leaps an octave. The trio is slower and in the major, a singing melody for the violins.

Finale: Bewegt, doch nicht schnell (with movement, but not fast). A short finale by Bruckner's standards. Its lively first theme is the melody that opened the symphony, with the rhythm sharpened and the pace quickened. At the very end the theme returns in its original, solemn form.

FURTHER READING

ACCESSIBLE **The Life of Schubert**

Christopher H. Gibbs, Cambridge University Press 2000

A short, readable life that sorts fact from legend, which is what the story of the Unfinished and its missing movements most needs.

ACCESSIBLE **Bruckner**

Derek Watson, Oxford University Press 1996

A compact life and works in one volume, with a survey of the symphonies that covers the Seventh and the circumstances of its Adagio.

DEEPER **The Cambridge Companion to Bruckner**

John Williamson (ed.), Cambridge University Press 2004

Essays on the symphonies and on the tangled question of versions and editions, the background to the disputed cymbal crash in the Seventh.

SOURCES

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3. 10th Subscription Concert, 20 June 2027, Wiener Philharmoniker. <https://www.wienerphilharmoniker.at/en/konzerte/10th-subscription-concert/10873/>
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13. Symphony No. 8, "Unfinished": Schubert, The Cleveland Orchestra. <https://www.clevelandorchestra.com/works/symphony-no-8-unfinished---schubert>
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16. Symphony No. 7, Anton Bruckner, Los Angeles Philharmonic. <https://www.laphil.com/musicdb/pieces/4040/symphony-no-7>
17. Symphony no. 7 in E major, Hungarian National Philharmonic. <https://www.filharmonikusok.hu/en/?p=91571>
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20. The Cambridge Companion to Bruckner, Open Library. <https://openlibrary.org/isbn/9780521008785>



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<https://concertprograms.eu/concerts/wp-2027-06-18-blomstedt>

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