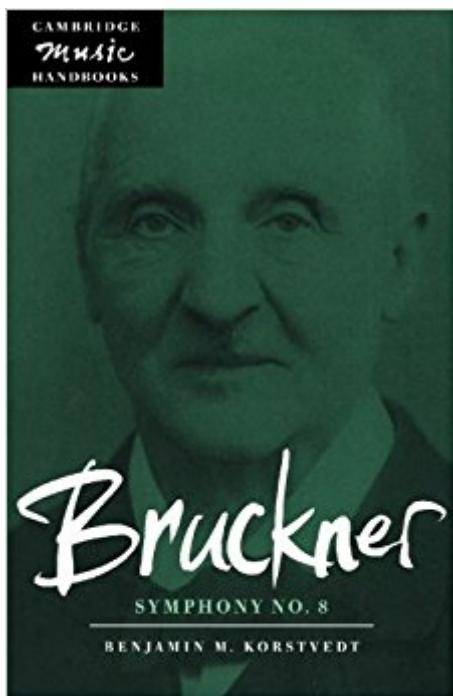


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# Bruckner: Symphony No. 8 (Cambridge Music Handbooks)



## **Synopsis**

Anton Bruckner's Eighth Symphony (1890), one of the last of the great Romantic symphonies, is a grandly complex masterpiece. This book explores this many-faceted work from several angles. It documents the complicated and often misunderstood history of the symphony's composition and revision and provides an accessible guide to its musical design. It demonstrates, by means of a study of well-known recordings, how performance styles have evolved in this century. It also revisits the conventional wisdom about the various versions and editions of the symphony and comes to some provocative new conclusions.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

'What [this book] does reveal is enough to keep Bruckner-enthusiasts agonising and arguing for decades.' BBC Music Magazine

Bruckner's Eighth Symphony (1890), one of the last of the great Romantic symphonies, is a grandly complex masterpiece. This book explores this many-faceted work from several angles. It documents the complicated and often misunderstood history of the symphony's composition and revision and provides an accessible guide to its musical design. It demonstrates, by means of a study of well-known recordings, how performance styles have evolved in this century. It also revisits the conventional wisdom about the various versions and editions of the symphony and comes to some

provocative new conclusions.

There are so many complaints about books like this from "reviewers" to the effect that all the musical "analysis" misses the point of the music. The usual line is that knowing the "form" isn't the same as "understanding" the "content." I wonder why these people think that a critic should impose himself between the music and any listener, however modest his musical knowledge? Isn't the point of analysis to describe the structure of the work? If, in addition, the critic wants to offer his own emotional response to a composition, that's very desirable. To the degree that you can understand the structure of a work, you'll probably refine your personal response to it, but to ask that a definitive "interpretation" be supplied by a critic misses the point. That said, I think this book is well worth buying if you love the Bruckner 8.

Unfortunate that the reviewer who liked this book the least posted their review twice, lowering the overall rating that much more. So I was compelled to post my own review having read the book and judging it much more worthy than a 3-star rating. Since my Bruckner discovery only a few yrs back I've been on a quest to find an answer to the question "Why does Bruckner's music affect me the way it does?" I've read most of the English language books on Bruckner (which sadly isn't saying much) and to me this book is one of the best, albeit limited in scope. In fact in a number of books on Bruckner which are mainly collections of essays written by different authors (Perspectives, Cambridge Companion...) I've found the chapters written by this author, Benjamin Korstvedt, to be some of the most informative and well-written for a layman such as myself. Not to say they are dumbed-down, he just seems to have a knack for presenting material, often-times complex and multi-layered in the case of Bruckner, in an organized and understandable way. Its true this book is small, as are the other Cambridge Music Handbooks typically devoted to one work of a particular composer, but there's plenty packed into these pages to make it an informative and entertaining read for any Bruckner devotee or interested music lover. The symphony's reception, individual movements, textual considerations and performance practice are expertly revealed (Korstvedt published the 1888 version of the 4th for the Bruckner Collected Works edition, so he knows his Bruckner) but a couple of things really caught my attention. The first was regarding the evolution of the 8th, specifically Levi's rejection of it and Bruckner's reaction to that. This was not a distraught, devastated Bruckner, easily persuaded. This was an artist who knew his craft and would go on to create the greatest symphony of all time. I also enjoyed the chapter about the sublime in Bruckner's music. The author begins with a brief history on writings of the sublime in general, then goes on to

demonstrate it in the Adagio of the 8th. I totally relate to the sublime elements of vastness, incomprehensibility, etc in Bruckner's music. So I may have gotten the answer to my question about Bruckner's appeal, now I just need to understand what it is that makes something seem sublime. Keep an eye on the resale prices. I picked up a copy of the hardcover at a much better price than what i'm seeing now. Its a very attractive book with a great image of our boy A.B.

If you care at all about this symphony or this era, do not miss this book - one of the best Cambridge handbooks (a superb series). Korstvedt not only clarifies the murky question of revisions, and helps us understand the creative process in this work and the structure and meaning - he also explodes what has become the conventional wisdom about editions. He makes a powerful case for the supposedly "corrupt" edition published in the composer's lifetime, showing how it profoundly changes our understanding of the meaning of the work, and discussing great early recordings based on this edition (and comparing them to some distinguished modern recordings). The chapter on performance traditions by itself is worth the price (only \$10 used - what a deal!) A must-read, which I hope will be read not only by listeners but by Bruckner performers.

The substantive content of this slender volume is in absolute contrast to the greatness of this monumental symphony, arguably the most imposing symphony of the second half of the 19th century. The small book still manages to be stuffed with filling, but of the wrong kind: intricate and tedious academic harmonic analyses and self-proclaimed 'controversial' findings with regard to the various editions of the symphony. Thus, despite its short length, the book overstays its welcome by failing to balance its technical minutiae with any larger musical issues such as where the symphony could proceed after Wagner or the sublime solution of Bruckner. All-in-all, it resembles an unfocussed and undigested doctoral thesis (which doubtless was its unfortunate genesis). IMHO, one of the weaker titles in the otherwise fine Cambridge Press series, and a disappointment for those hoping for a long-overdue addition to the sadly empty bookshelf on this extraordinary composer.

I've just borrowed this book from a university library. Professor Korstvedt has written a fine treatise on the Bruckner Eighth and is apparently planning a full-length biography on the composer and this is certainly something to look forward to, especially as it will, I think, be the first such work by an American author. This book undertakes a detailed analysis of the masterwork - its form and genesis and all of the relevant background material. But for a very thin hardcover volume with just over a

hundred pages of text? You've got to be kidding me! Borrow this book from your library unless money is no object.

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