



“NEWS”

## BRUCKNER'S LAST NINTH

ON November 22, 1952, from Clarens where he was near the end of his recovery period<sup>1</sup>, Furtwängler writes to musicologist Max Auer, founder and first president of the International Anton Bruckner Society:

What page of symphonic literature deserves more to be heard in a church than Bruckner's 9th Symphony!

Unforgettable is for me the execution of this incomparable work, which I conducted in its time, during the last and worst period of this disastrous war, in the abbey church of Saint-Florian<sup>2</sup>. In good conscience, I believe I can propose to the Holy Father to recognize this grandiose work as a sacred work.

The concert in question is not trivial. This is the very last time the conductor conducted Bruckner's final symphony, and not in just any setting. On October 11, 1944, the anniversary of the composer's death, in the abbey of Saint-Florian — to which the figure of Bruckner is forever attached — Furtwängler conducted this work, with no other on the programme, with the “Reichs-Bruckner-Orchester”. This ensemble, based in Linz, attached to the Radio, is officially named the “Linzer Reichs-Bruckner-Orchester des Deutschen Rundfunks”. It is led by Georg Ludwig Jochum<sup>3</sup>. Created in 1942, it did not give its first public concert until 1943. A few conductors are invited to perform, notably Herbert von Karajan and Karl Böhm. A choir was also founded, entrusted to the cantor of Leipzig, Günther Ramin, who handed over to the organist Michael Schneider in 1944.

It is probably no coincidence that, a few days before — October 7 — he completed the recording of this symphony as part of a “Magnetofonkonzert”<sup>4</sup>, with his Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra in the Beethovensaal, the Philharmonic having been in ruins since the previous January. Is it the programming of the recording that prompted the character we are about to discover to set up the concert? Or, conversely, did the concert give the radio the idea of putting it on tape? Knowing that it would have



Furtwängler visits the Monastery of St. Florian with Heinrich Glasmeier.

been very difficult to correctly record this work in the gigantic vessel which is the abbey church of Saint-Florian.

However, setting up this concert undoubtedly owes a lot to a character as curious as extravagant, Heinrich Glasmeier. Born in 1892, he became an archivist after the war. Member of the Nazi party in 1932 (and member of the SS), he was appointed the following year director of a radio in Cologne, then climbing the ranks, became general director of the RRG (Reichs Rundfunk Gesellschaft). But the control of the Ministry of Information and Propaganda (Goebbels) on the radio is such that his role will become that of an administrative director, without any power over the content of the programmes. In 1941 the monks were dislodged from Saint-Florian, and Glasmeier quickly moved the management of the Radio in there. Taking advantage of Hitler's desire to make Linz a cultural capital, Glasmeier wants to transform Saint-Florian into a new Bayreuth destined to celebrate Bruckner. He created the orchestra and the choir. As for him, he lives in the abbey like a father abbot — let's say a nabob exercising feudal authority, surrounding himself with luxury, draining

For SWF members only

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into the reserves and the cellar of the abbey... At the beginning of May 1945, while the Allies were advancing, he hastily left Saint-Florian, disappeared, and was considered dead shortly afterwards.

It looks like the concert did not get as hyped as the event. Thus it was not until October 7 that the *Oberdonau Zeitung*, newspaper of the Upper Danube region and organ of the Nazi party, announced the concert, in the short section devoted to culture.

**Furtwängler conducts the Bruckner Orchestra** in Saint-Florian for the anniversary of the master's death.

The «Linzer Reichs-Bruckner-Orchester des Deutschen Rundfunks» commemorates the day of the death of the one whose name it bears on Wednesday, October 11 at 6 p.m., with a solemn performance of the master's Ninth Symphony in the abbey of Saint-Florian. This concert is conducted by Wilhelm Furtwängler. Access for ticket holders only.

On October 9, the same newspaper briefly reiterated the announcement and specified:

Access only with ticket. Tickets, limited in number, at Pirngruber.

The Pirngruber bookshop is a real institution in Linz. Founded in 1776, it also organizes concerts.

The demand for tickets undoubtedly exceeded expectations since, on the very morning of the concert, the newspaper published a paragraph.

**Furtwängler concert in St-Florian.** Due to the exceptional attendance expected today for the performance of Anton Bruckner's 9th Symphony, a public dress rehearsal is organized at the abbey church under the direction of Furtwängler. It will start at 11 a.m. Scheduled train departing from Ebelsberg at 10:09 a.m.

But that's not all. The same newspaper publishes on the front page a long article (it ends on page 2) with the signature of Furtwängler, entitled "Art and people". This text in no way evokes Bruckner but refers to the lesson of Hans Sachs in Wagner's *Meistersinger*. On closer inspection, it is a reworking of the article published for Bayreuth performances of the same year.

Two days after the concert, the *Oberdonau Zeitung* published a review of the event (issue 13, October 1944).

### **Bruckner's Ninth with Furtwängler**

An artistic summit in St-Florian

Bruckner's 9th, the Reichs-Bruckner-Orchester and Wilhelm Furtwängler!

Doing better does not seem possible. In the exuberant baroque of the abbey church, on the evening of the anniversary of the death of Anton Bruckner, there was grave darkness, and the candles were twinkling on the music stands of the orchestra. His "Unfinished" commemorates the master. "Unfinished" so named because death put an end to it before Bruckner could complete the fourth movement for his symphony.

And yet, it is a finished work of art, like Strasbourg Cathedral or St. Stephen's in Vienna, whose second tower is missing, although it was on the plan. Particularly the Ninth — where Bruckner depicts in the first movement the struggle of a lifetime as an artist, in the second recalls the attractions and joys of life in the Hörselberg [Venusberg] in Tannhäuser, but devoid of meaning, and where, in the Adagio, the song of farewell to the world leads to a celestial transfiguration—relevant to the last artistic unity and the culmination.

Where does this great mystery which makes all the works, and therefore also this symphony under the direction of Furtwängler, an indelible artistic experience, lie? Although his conductor gesture is surprisingly flexible — he shakes the Scherzo as if coming out of his sleeve — from him emanates a mysterious calm, an assurance, and a strength to conduct the orchestra, which must follow the

smallest gesture, the slightest sign, as if hypnotized, just like the largest ones, which, for example, stimulate all the inimitable winds of our Bruckner-Orchester towards a supernatural sound radiance.

Gauleiter Eigruber<sup>5</sup>, himself present, had invited the armaments workers, thus allowing those who have a very hard work to take part in this exhilarating ceremony. Local railway and tram staff — whether hired — transported the many guests to the dress rehearsal and concert.

Max Hipert

If the analysis of the symphony is curious to say the least, from a visibly inexperienced editor with clumsy writing, the report of one of the main German newspapers, the *Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung*, by Herbet Caspers, turns out to be simpler.

At the request of Dr. Glasmeier, Reichsintendant, was played by the Radio Orchestra of Linz, in the baroque church of St. Florian, where Bruckner sleeps his last sleep under his beloved organ, the last work of the Master, his Ninth Symphony in its original version. Germany's most famous conductors have conducted the Radio Orchestra. This year, Furtwängler conducted Bruckner's swan song, in an interpretation of extra-terrestrial beauty and total sound plenitude. <sup>6</sup>

Surprisingly, Furtwängler never again included this work in the programmes of his post-war concerts, although he would perform the 4th, 7th, and 8th Symphonies. Did he think everything was said in October 1944?

Stéphane Topakian  
June 2022

#### Notes

1. Remember that Furtwängler contracted pneumonia during rehearsals for the 1952 Salzburg Festival, which kept him away from the stage until the end of November.
2. The abbey church was elevated to the rank of basilica in 1999.
3. Georg Ludwig Jochum (1909-1970), conductor. Having studied with Von Hausegger, he was appointed head of music in Münster. From 1940 to 1944 he conducted the Linz Opera and Orchestra. He is the younger brother of Eugen Jochum
4. This recording is still considered as one of the jewels of Furtwängler's discography. Listed in the Deutsche Grammophon catalog since the 1960s, it also appears in the publications of the SWF and the Berliner.
5. August Eigruber (1907-1947), member of the SS, has been governor of the Upper Danube region since April 1, 1940. But he also oversees the management of the Mauthausen camp. He was sentenced to death in 1946.
6. Not having been able to have access to the DAZ of the time, we resumed the translation on the site «Furtwängler» created by the late René Tréminee.

#### Sources and acknowledgments:

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- Archives of the Abbey of Saint-Florian



The St. Florian abbey church