

## Bruckner's Sixth Symphony - Some performances that got away and some thoughts on tempi By Christopher Howell

This article is not intended as a complete guide to past or currently available recordings of Bruckner's Sixth Symphony. My ongoing series on "Forgotten Artists" has come up against Bruckner's Sixth and its problems twice, and both performances presented unusual features. Henry Swoboda's was the first to be issued and combined exceptionally slow middle movements with brisk outer ones. Carl Melles's Milan performance courted controversy by getting through the work in little more than 46 minutes.

The thoughts and comparisons all this involved led me to listen to a number of performances by conductors who would, for the most part, sit incongruously in a series dedicated to "Forgotten Artists", yet whose Bruckner is little known. This led me to meditate on the various interpretative problems this symphony presents, and in particular those of tempi. Here, then, is a parade of Bruckner performances that got away.

I realise that MusicWeb International caters for a wide range of readers, from the technically-informed to those who just love listening to music. Some of the points I wish to make could not be made without a minimum of technical vocabulary. Readers who are approaching Bruckner for the first time, or who wish to be guided over the "best buy", should stop here. I have tried to keep things as simple as possible, but their needs will be better met by the many excellent articles and reviews elsewhere on this site (see the [Bruckner 6 Masterwork Index](#) and the [Bruckner survey](#) by John Quinn and Patrick Waller).

My heartfelt, if generic, thanks goes to those collectors who have made these performances available in various blogs and discussion groups. Not all of these are open access, but the reader who wishes to follow this up should find these performances without too much difficulty.

### Some that got away

The name of **Erich Leinsdorf** has not greatly impressed upon the Brucknerian discographic world. He set down just one symphony, the fourth, during his Boston tenure. This was trashed by most UK critics, though the LP sleeve was adorned with a glowing recommendation from Neville Cardus.



During his Boston years, Leinsdorf also gave symphonies 6, 7, 8 and 9. Back in the 1960s, this was more enterprising than it sounds now. Much later, on 10 May 1984, he gave symphony no. 1 with the New York Philharmonic. With the same orchestra, he returned to no. 6 on 17 January 1986. This is the performance I shall discuss. If he ever conducted nos. 2, 3 and 5, they have not yet come to light.

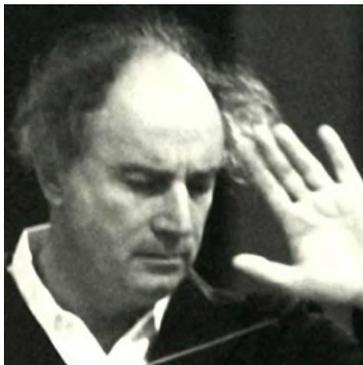
Leinsdorf's Sixth impresses by its steady, inexorable progress. The first movement starts broadly, the dotted rhythms clear but not given driving force. The timing of 15:23 seemingly puts this in the swifter bracket. In fact, having set his tempo, Leinsdorf scarcely deviates, accommodating with effortless clarity the rhythmic conflicts in second subject territory, which emerge with Schubertian naturalness. This may sound as if Leinsdorf is barging through regardless, something he was not incapable of doing on other occasions. Not here. Though there is little overall leeway over tempi, the individual moments are shaped and coloured exquisitely. In the end it seems that the music, not the conductor, is dictating the tempo. This first movement is shown to be a perfect classical construction.

In the second movement, Leinsdorf is considerably broader than Klemperer, who many find on the fast side. He has time to shape the oboe lament that counters the first theme with real eloquence.

His overall timing, though, 15:51, shows that he is not as broad as he seems. This, again, is because he allows no further broadening – nor tightening for that matter. The ultimate impression is of a dignified intensity.

The scherzo is lithe, even playful, while maintaining its mysterious nocturnal air. The trio is sharply characterized. The timing of 8:45 is relatively swift, but there is no sense of haste.

The finale, timed at 13:42, opens with an apparently moderate tempo. Once again, Leinsdorf has found a tempo that will accommodate every incidental moment. Like the first movement, the music moves inexorably and logically to its conclusion. If you want the classical approach, it could hardly be brought off better. In their various ways, the other recordings I discuss raise the question of whether this approach is actually one that Bruckner would have recognized.



Another conductor who remained on the fringe of the official Bruckner discography was **Rafael Kubelik**. He had, in truth, a considerable reputation as a Brucknerian in the German-speaking world, but for most of his tenure with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra he was contracted to Deutsche Grammophon. This company had to balance the interests of Kubelik with those of Jochum, Böhm and Karajan, and so it was that, symphony-wise, Kubelik got Mahler, Schumann, Beethoven and Dvořák but no Bruckner. In a late and perhaps tired phase, Kubelik and the orchestra moved to Sony. Bruckner's third and fourth symphonies were one of the immediate results, but they have never been particularly quoted among the top versions. Posthumously, collectors have been busy. Further versions of symphonies 3 and 4 have emerged, plus multiple performances of 6, 8 and 9. There are two performances no. 6 with Kubelik's own Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra, probably both from 1977 – 1971 has been claimed for one of them – and three performances from the USA, with the Cleveland Orchestra (27 March 1980), the Philadelphia Orchestra (26 March 1983) and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (3 July 1985). For better or worse, it is the last of these that I have used for my comparisons.

Kubelik's overall timing is less than a minute and a half longer than Leinsdorf's. He is a few seconds shorter in the first movement, marginally slower in the others. This does not mean, though, that his performance is broadly similar. He opens the symphony somewhat faster than Leinsdorf. Not greatly, but enough to enable him to achieve at key points that sense of euphoric exhilaration, of acceleration even when he is not actually accelerating, that made his performances so involving. He heralds the second group with a *ritardando* and then plays this whole section at a considerably slower tempo than his initial one. Kubelik was considered in some quarters an heir to Furtwängler in his use of flexible tempi and moulded transitions. He certainly displays here Furtwängler's ability to shape the architecture of a movement by stagecraft and drama, rather than by creating a sense of steady, logical growth as Leinsdorf did.

Kubelik's second movement is broad. Indeed, I am amazed to find it only a little longer than Leinsdorf's, for Kubelik allows himself to dwell lovingly and longingly over the transitions. He also gives himself more elbow room over the second theme and lets the tempo slacken further for the third theme in funeral march style. In view of the timing, I have to suppose that he also forges ahead at moments where Leinsdorf did not, but I did not actually catch him doing it. Kubelik's mood in this movement is intimate. He gives a sense of pantheistic communion with nature.

Kubelik's scherzo is marvellous. Where Leinsdorf suggests a sort of twisted Mendelssohnian scherzo, Kubelik replaces the playfulness with glinting malice, as though evoking a particularly nasty set of

Dvořákian water sprites. I am not so sure about Kubelik's trio, though. He fidgets with the music as if unconvinced as to how it should go.

Kubelik's finale is very fine, provided that the stop-go approach is to your liking. Basically, Kubelik fields two tempi, advancing the argument when the music is loud, holding back when it is soft. Yet he is guileful. When he brings in the second subject, he is not so very much below tempo. He allows himself to linger subtly as this group proceeds. All the same, I did find myself wishing by the end that he would occasionally turn a corner directly, rather than peering round it first.

Which method, though, out of Leinsdorf's or Kubelik's, is closer to what Bruckner expected? Bruckner was sparing with tempo indications, but he did mark the second group in the first movement "Bedeutend langsamer" – considerably slower. Leinsdorf makes only a very fractional adjustment – from his opening 52-54 to the minim (half-note), he drops to 48-50. In a big romantic symphony, this is tantamount to making no change at all, and in fact the ear does not really perceive a change. Leinsdorf may have argued that tempo changes within a movement should be concealed from the listener. Symphonic logic and inevitability are certainly on his side. Kubelik, on the other hand, makes a bigger difference – he begins around 60 to the minim and drops to around 40. Is this what Bruckner meant by "considerably slower"?

We do, in fact, have a clue as to what he meant, or at least a clue as to what one of his best friends thought he meant, which may not be the same thing in Bruckner. I prefer, though, to return to this issue at the end, after seeing what the various conductors actually do. I will point out, though, that there is scope to argue over just where you go back to your original tempo, if you make a big change. I will also point out that no change of tempo is marked for the secondary material in the finale – Kubelik makes one. There is, though, one whole passage in the finale that is seemingly marked to be played at a slower tempo. But again, let us first see what the conductors actually do.

**Hans Rosbaud's** credentials in the Brucknerian world have always stood high, but on the strength of just one recording, of the 7<sup>th</sup> symphony, that he set down for Vox. This, squeezed onto a single Turnabout LP around 1970, gave many young collectors their introduction to Bruckner – and a very good introduction it was, apart from the dynamic compression attendant on putting so much music on one disc.

Rosbaud probably just missed becoming a household name. The Chicago Symphony Orchestra, which adored him, had hoped he would become their Music Director after Reiner's death. Alas, Rosbaud, whose gaunt appearance hardly suggested good health, died before this could happen.



Rosbaud was one of those conductors who recorded little, but mainly worked with radio orchestras, so in fact much of his work has survived. Collectors have been busy and the Bruckner cycle, as far as the numbered symphonies are concerned, is complete apart from no.1, which Rosbaud seems never to have performed. The sixth, with the South-West German Radio Orchestra, Baden-Baden, was given in 1961.

This is the longest of the versions we have seen till now, with only the finale coming in about halfway between Leinsdorf and Kubelik. Rosbaud actually starts at about the same speed as Leinsdorf – 52 to the minim. He takes the "considerably slower" marking for the second group very seriously indeed, dropping right back to 33. The character he gives the music is something else again, though. Although the Baden-Baden outfit is second-string, with fallible brass and understaffed strings compared with those of New York or Chicago, Rosbaud gets the full Wagnerian works out of them. There is a heroic

ring to the brass and the strings dig into their melodies deeply. There is a rugged Furtwänglerian bass line underpinning it all. Collectively, Rosbaud and the orchestra clearly believe that this symphony belongs deep in the German psyche.

In keeping with this majestic ruggedness, Rosbaud does not ease his way into his new tempo for the second group with a big *rallentando*, as Kubelik did. Rather, he lets the new tempo meet the old one head on. This technique is employed to shattering effect when he bursts back into his original tempo. However, as I pointed out above, the score leaves some room for doubt as to where he should have resumed his original tempo.

The second movement stretches to 18:20, well over two minutes more than Leinsdorf or Kubelik. Rosbaud draws burnished tone from his strings, inspiring them beyond their theoretical limits to create a Parsifal-like grandeur far removed from Kubelik's intimacy. Slow it may be, but tension is never lost.

Rosbaud's scherzo goes beyond Kubelik's water sprites to create a nightmare world, a sort of scherzo among the ruins. In the trio, he shows a firmer hand than Kubelik.

In the finale Rosbaud, like Kubelik, allows an unmarked tempo change for the second group – as though the “considerably slower” marking in the first movement applied not just there, but sanctioned a general interpretive method. Rosbaud is less inclined to linger over transitions, however, and ultimately takes a more direct route to the grand peroration.

This performance certainly brings out the Wagnerian resonances in Bruckner and perhaps makes him sound more German than Austrian. It nevertheless explores, and does so magnificently, aspects of the music which we do not hear under Leinsdorf or Kubelik.



**Jascha Horenstein's** Brucknerian credentials were universally recognized except, for some strange reason, by the recording companies. For years, the Horenstein legend depended upon a pre-war 7<sup>th</sup> and readings of the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> set down in mono in the early fifties for Vox. Plus, of course, the glowing reports, often backed by letters to Gramophone and the like, from those who had attended his concerts or heard his broadcasts. Only too late in the day did the fledgling Unicorn company come to the rescue, but Horenstein died before very much had been done.

Posthumously, things have been better. BBC Legends issued Bruckner's symphonies 5, 8 and 9. A complete cycle of the numbered Bruckner symphonies can be assembled, though those not issued by BBC Legends have various sonic shortcomings. No. 6, given in a BBC studio by the London Symphony Orchestra on 21 November 1961, is often good in the quieter passages but tends to crumble at climaxes and has a few dropouts and blips. This did not prevent me from appreciating it.

Horenstein starts at about the same tempo as Kubelik – 60 to the minim. He makes only a minimum *rallentando* to smooth his way into the “considerably slower” second group. He drops back here less than Kubelik, to 44. Yet his timing of 16:22 for the movement is longer, almost as long as Rosbaud's.

As I said above, there is some doubt as to where you are supposed to resume your original tempo. Logic suggests you would do this when the strident fortissimo theme enters at letter F. Kubelik and Rosbaud sided with logic – Leinsdorf's slackening was so slight as to make the matter irrelevant. But the score does not actually say “A tempo” here, nor does it until very much later, when the false

recapitulation – the music as in the first fortissimo, but in a totally wrong key – crashes in at letter M. This is followed very soon by a return of the “considerably” slower group – with the change duly marked. Once again, Bruckner does not actually ask for a resumption of his first tempo till the final pages, at letter Z. It would sound very odd if you did this, I thought as I listened to the previous two performances. But Horenstein does it and it sounds anything but odd. In his hands, practically all the movement goes at the slower of the two tempi. The fast tempo comes as a sort of introductory challenge, renewed about halfway through, then brought back at the end. It acts as a framework to a basically meditative, movement. There is great breadth to the climaxes. A completely different structure to that presented by any of the other three conductors so far, but it is arguably what Bruckner wrote.

The other difference between Horenstein and the others, especially Rosbaud, is that Horenstein completely avoids Wagnerian grandeur. He emphasizes the post-Schubertian lyricism. This is a very Austrian Bruckner, with almost yodelling woodwind and pure, non-heroic brass.

Horenstein does not dig into the second movement as Rosbaud does, though he is slightly broader than the other two. He is particularly adept at obtaining infinite dynamic shading within a pianissimo. It may be partly the effect of the LSO's natural sound, but this performance suggests a parallel with Elgar in the way it expresses deep emotion through reserve.

Horenstein's scherzo is slightly faster than those heard up to now. This tiny tweak of tempo is enough to give it a demonic, driving character. The trio is by contrast broad.

Horenstein starts the finale steadily. In this movement, Bruckner has not indicated a tempo change for the second group, and Horenstein eases into it naturally and serenely without any change of tempo at all. And yet, at 14:47, he is slower than the others. Once again, there is a curious marking. At letter M, when the opening theme comes back as a sort of recitative on the cellos, Bruckner puts another of his “considerably slower” indications. Logic suggests it might have been intended just for that moment. Surely the dotted rhythms of the wind phrases are supposed to go at the same speed as before? Under Rosbaud they do, and he creates a sort of push-pull effect, going back and forth between his slower and faster tempi. It is masterful, but Horenstein takes Bruckner at his word, holding back, till Bruckner actually marks “Tempo I” quite a bit further on, at letter Q, though towards the end of this passage a runaway horn forces his hand a bit. It is as though the composer, fatigued, is biding his time until he can regain his strength. In fact, this oasis of slow music about two thirds through, in place of the continual stopping and starting of Kubelik and Rosbaud, however expertly done, gives point to the later stages of the movement. There is a wonderful sense of finality as Bruckner and Horenstein marshal in the opening theme of the symphony in the closing pages. So here, too, Horenstein reveals a different structure compared with the others, and Bruckner's markings, not to speak of the results, would seem to give him reason.

All the conductors discussed so far were independent-minded, individualists. But, little as Bruckner was played in the earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century compared with now, was there no tradition? How did a typical Kapellmeister, a guardian of the Austro-German tradition, deal with this symphony?

In many people's eyes, an archetypal Kapellmeister was **Joseph Keilberth**. Keilberth's recording of Bruckner's Sixth, set down on 12-13 March 1963 with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra and issued in the UK on Telefunken GMA/SMA 83, predated Klemperer's New Philharmonia recording by more than a year, but they actually appeared within a few months of one another. They came after long years of waiting, when Brucknerians could only make do with Henry Swoboda's sporadically available recording, issued back in 1950. Not all critics preferred the Klemperer but



history seems to have decided for the latter. Keilberth recorded only one other Bruckner symphony, the 9<sup>th</sup>. History has certainly rehabilitated his Wagner conducting, particularly his Bayreuth "Ring". Less attention has been paid to his concert work, though live recordings of Bruckner's Fourth, Seventh and Eighth Symphonies can be found.

Keilberth's opening tempo, around 56-60 to the minim, is fractionally under that of Horenstein and Kubelik. What is striking, though, is the almost jabbing precision he gives the Morse-code-like accompanying rhythmic figure. This is, in fact, the most sharply-etched version rhythmically of those heard till now. British listeners might even think of Holst's "Mars" as the first forte passage breaks out. Keilberth also takes the "considerably slower" marking very seriously indeed, dropping back to around 36 – more than either Kubelik or Horenstein. Like Horenstein, he takes Bruckner at his word over when to return to his original tempo, with the result that the entire movement, except for the beginning and end, and a short stretch in the middle, goes at this slower tempo, and massively imposing it sounds. His timing of 17:10 is the slowest of the performances discussed so far.

Where Keilberth differs entirely from Horenstein is in the character he gives the music. There are no yodelling woodwind here, no rolling, smiling Austrian mountain pastures. Nor, for that matter, do the brass have the heroic Wagnerian ring of Rosbaud's performance. It is a bleakly uncompromising vision, in which the lyrical secondary material appears as a sad memory of past beauties, rather than a present delight.

Keilberth's second movement, at 14:43, like Klemperer's at 14:42, has been criticized as unduly hasty. To my ears, it is entirely in keeping with the mood set in the first movement that Keilberth should treat this as a funeral cortège – grave but always moving onwards. The second theme, from which others have drawn such human warmth, seems once again a memory of a past love. But a memory we must not indulge, for life moves bleakly on.

In the scherzo, Keilberth's sharply articulated string triplets make this seem like a dance of skeletons. The nocturnal cries from the wind are mournful, the climaxes terror-struck. The trio, with aggressive interjections from the horns, seems like a trip among the ruins.

Keilberth opens the finale steadily and, like Horenstein, allows no change of tempo for the second group. Once again, Schubertian innocence is replaced by numbed memories. Keilberth is also faithful to Bruckner's literal markings in that he drops back "considerably" where this is marked, and holds his slow tempo right through this section. The effect is that of an interlude inside a walled garden before facing outside tragedies once again. As with Horenstein, this gives added point to the later stages of the movement. Arguably, therefore, Horenstein and Keilberth are the two conductors till now who have presented the musical structure as Bruckner wrote it. It is all the more remarkable, then, that they give such utterly different characters to the music, each equally overwhelming in its way.

Reputations and perceived interpretative methods are strange things. If anybody had played me Rosbaud, the modernist who specialized in Webern and beyond, and Keilberth, heir to the Bayreuth tradition, not telling me which was which, I think I would have guessed them the wrong way round. So much for the traditional Kapellmeister, then. Keilberth's reading, no less than the others, is clearly the closely-thought product of an independent mind.



Perhaps we should seek our humble Kapellmeister, faithful to tradition, further inside provincial Austria or Germany. We might try Recklinghausen in Westphalia, for example. The Vox recording of this symphony by the Westphalian Symphony Orchestra under **Hubert Reichert** has a certain place in the Bruckner discography. Dated around 1963, so roughly contemporaneous with Keilberth and Klemperer, it

bears witness to a flurry of activity around this symphony after more than a decade of neglect. Perhaps Vox even thought they might corner the market, but they reckoned without Telefunken and EMI. This recording reached the UK some time later on Turnabout (LP 34226) and cornered, instead, the bargain basement market. It did not, however, garner the sort of cult status enjoyed by Turnabout's Bruckner issues under Rosbaud and Horenstein.

The Westfälisches Sinfonieorchester Recklinghausen amalgamated in 1996 with the Philharmonisches Orchester der Stadt Gelsenkirchen to create the Neue Philharmonie Westfalen. The site of this new orchestra offers no information about its earlier history, such as the period of Reichert's tenure. Nor does any information about Reichert himself come easily to hand. Nevertheless, this orchestra and conductor were fairly active for Vox during the 1960s. Major projects were Bruckner's 2<sup>nd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> symphonies, Goldmark's "Rustic Wedding" Symphony, Dvořák's Stabat Mater and some minor/inauthentic Beethoven, including the "Jena" Symphony. They also accompanied the pianist Rena Kyriakou, the violinists Ivry Gitlis and Susanne Lautenbacher and the clarinetist Jöst Michaels in concertos.

The orchestra is undeniably provincial in tone. The strings sing sweetly, though I would swear there are no more than eight firsts and the rest in proportion. They work with a corporate will in fortes but there is some queasy brass chording in softer moments.

Reichert starts off faster than any other version heard so far, around 66 to the minim. A possible consequence of this speed is that the dotted rhythm contrasted with the triplet pervading this opening section gets smoothed to a triplet, as though the whole was written in 12/8 time. Or did Reichert feel this should be done for reasons of style, as some people say it should be in Schubert's B flat Impromptu or "Wasserflut"? I do not agree, but that would be a long story.

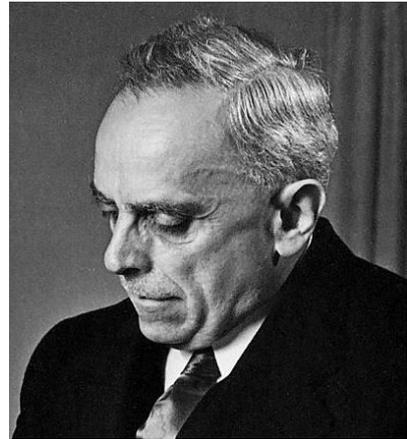
Reichert also makes the biggest difference of anyone so far between his opening tempo and the "considerably slower" second group. He drops to 33, in fact, so has exactly halved his tempo. This is a trick that Klemperer employed in several of his Bruckner recordings as a neat way of having his cake and eating it – maintaining an even pulse while slowing down for music that would not fit his initial tempo. Nonetheless, the effect here is of a serious drop in tension. 33 in itself is a possible tempo, as Rosbaud showed, but then Rosbaud returned to his original tempo when the next forte passage burst in. Reichert obeys instructions and holds his slow tempo till the false recapitulation. For some reason, though he returns to his original tempo after the recapitulation at letter Y instead of keeping steady till letter Z. His overall timing, 16:55, is just short of Keilberth's, but under Reichert things tend to plod at times.

The second movement is probably the most successful in Reichert's performance. At 16:19, those disgruntled back in the 1960s with what they saw as Klemperer's and Keilberth's unseemly haste, might well have kept this at hand when they wanted to hear a broader slow movement. There are no miracles of phrasing or texture, but there is gravity and patent sincerity.

Reichert's scherzo, at 9:46, is virtually identical in timing to Rosbaud's, but Reichert manages only a generalized energy and his trio plods at times. It is Reichert's finale, though, which I feel sells Bruckner seriously short. The fact that, at 16:05, it is almost a minute slower than the next slowest of those discussed, says nothing in itself. Reichert sets out at a fairly broad tempo and to begin with, things seem quite promising. But then he drops to a considerably slower tempo (unmarked) for the second group and dawdles further within it. When he comes to the passage actually marked "considerably slower", he obeys orders, but then starts sidling back into a faster tempo long before it is marked. The result is the sort of stop-go Bruckner finale that a Rosbaud or a Kubelik could bring off by sheer force of personality, but here it falls flat. I fear that the impecunious collectors of the 1970s who snapped this up after buying the Rosbaud and Horenstein performances on Turnabout, may have got the idea that the Sixth was a much less good symphony than the last three.

And yet, there is a certain honest likeability about it. I have tried to describe the very different characters that the various conductors who given the music. Here we have the default situation, the result when conductor and orchestra set their sights no higher than just about managing to get through it. I was reminded of Carl Melles's Beethoven recordings in Brunswick. Here, too, we get the impression of a provincial band playing "their" music, blissfully unaware of the heights of inspiration achieved outside their own little patch. Beethoven's genius can survive even this. I hope the spirits of Deryck Cooke and Robert Simpson will forgive my next remark, but Bruckner sounds awfully like a worthy local master when the conductor does not give him that extra leg up the tree of inspiration.

Mention of Melles almost brings me back to my starting point. I mentioned in my article on Melles that there used to be a tradition of fast Bruckner performances, with the Swiss conductor **Volkmar Andreae** a leading exponent of it. Andreae set down the first three symphonies for Philips in the early 1950s with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra. The records were issued on the cheap GL label in the UK in the 1960s, but earned little favour. Much more recently, a complete cycle of the numbered symphonies plus the Te Deum, given in 1953 for Austrian Radio, again with the Vienna Symphony Orchestra, has had some circulation. Andreae (1879-1962) was conductor of the Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra from 1906 to 1949 and thereafter worked freelance with a base in Vienna. It is difficult to get much of an idea about his conducting because we can only hear him, to the best of my knowledge, in Bruckner. There has, however, been some interest in his compositions in recent years, due not least to the efforts of his grandson, the conductor Marc Andreae.



With an overall timing of 50:55 he certainly lives up to his reputation as a fast Brucknerian – nearly three minutes shorter than the next fastest of those discussed so far, the Leinsdorf. His first movement, timed at 14:22, opens about as fast as Reichert, with some impetuous spurts ahead – 66-69 to the minim. He drops back for the second group less than Reichert, to around 42-44. He resumes his original tempo with dramatic effect at the abrasive forte passage (letter F), then drops again to his slower tempo when the triplet crotchets (fourth notes) resume in the bass at letter K. In place of the great structural blocks Bruckner mapped out with his own tempo indications, therefore, Andreae uses the typical romantic method of one tempo for the loud music, a slower one for the soft music. Kubelik and Rosbaud did this too, of course, but were more successful in conveying an overall architecture. Andreae seems to be living for the moment. Refreshing as it is after Reichert, its excitement seems superficial in comparison with any of the others.

Andreae's slow movement, at 15:37, is longer-drawn than Keilberth's (or Klemperer's). At the beginning you might think it will be longer-drawn still. In fact, Andreae begins each of the three themes expansively, then gradually moves forward as the music gains intensity. I am beginning to get the idea that this movement is so beautiful that any sincere approach will work, and this is no exception.

Andreae's scherzo, at 8:36, is more of a typical Brucknerian hunting scherzo than in any of the other performances, albeit an eerie one compared with that in the 4<sup>th</sup> symphony. It is dynamic and exciting. There is not much dawdling in the trio, which verges on the brusque.

Andreae's finale, timed at 12:19, is more than a minute faster than the next fastest, Leinsdorf's. You will realize how fast much of it is when I say that, unlike Leinsdorf, he slows down for the second group, though not by a great deal. An interesting thing here is that the music of the second group is not songful but light and dancing. Some modern commentators have suggested it should be played

as a polka. Right or wrong, Andrae's is the nearest any of these conductors come to doing so. Andrae duly observes Bruckner's "considerably slower" marking, but gets going again as soon as possible. This, then, is another stop-go finale, but at this tempo, clearly there is much more go than stop. Perhaps I would have appreciated the performance if I had not heard the others shortly before. There remains the interest attached to a type of performance practice which may have seemed normal in Bruckner's own day. But in truth, what relevance does a performance practice that maybe suited Brahms have to Bruckner?



I shall now return almost to my starting point, a European conductor who tended to be thought of in Europe as "American". Leinsdorf's successor in Boston, **William Steinberg**, was a stalwart supporter of Bruckner. He recorded symphonies 4 and 7 and the G minor Overture for Capitol with the Pittsburgh Symphony Orchestra and the Sixth for RCA during his tenure in Boston. These recordings are not especially well-known in the UK. In the USA, where he remains a much appreciated figure, collectors have been busy, and at least one performance of each symphony from the Fourth onwards, as well as the Te Deum, has circulated. Bruckner purists were required to approach his offerings with caution, though, since he blithely went on using the older editions and sometimes made further cuts of his own. This issue does not

affect the Sixth Symphony, however. I have heard, not the RCA recording, but a public performance given with the Boston Symphony Orchestra on 16 January 1970.

Steinberg's overall timing of 52:18 suggests a parallel with Leinsdorf, but this is not entirely the case. Steinberg starts more briskly than Leinsdorf, at around 63 to the minim. He duly observes the "considerably slower" marking for the second group, easing into it with a small ritardando and dropping to around 46. He joins that select group of conductors who take Bruckner at his word and return to their original tempo only at the false recapitulation and for the final coda. He does, though, make one odd gesture – a rallentando which rounds the music off before letter G. This gives the woodwind theme at letter G a structural importance that – as far as I can see – it does not have. A small point – and one he repeats in the recapitulation – but one that slightly disturbs me.

Steinberg does not aspire to either heroics or tragedy here. He presents Bruckner as a logical, if Wagner-tinted, successor to Schubert. So, too, does he in the second movement. At 16:53 this is actually quite expansive, but the tone remains warmly lyrical. There are no hints of Parsifal, nor of intimate musing.

At 7:54, Steinberg's scherzo is, by some way, the fastest of those discussed here. Bruckner's marking is simply "Nicht schnell", "Not fast", but did he mean that the crotchets (fourth notes) were to be "not fast" or did he refer to the triplet quavers (eighth notes) that ride over it? If he meant the crotchets, then even Steinberg's tempo is no more than a normal Ländler tempo, not really fast at all. Steinberg jabs into the repeated bass notes as though he does indeed have a rustic dance in mind. At this tempo, though, the triplet quavers make for an almost manic hunting scherzo. The nocturnal atmosphere is lost. Bruckner did not actually say that it should have a nocturnal atmosphere, but those performances that create one seem more affecting. Steinberg's trio is kept on the move.

Steinberg begins the finale quite briskly and his timing of 12:23 is the fastest so far. This is all the more remarkable when we see what he does with the second group. According to instructions, he does not change tempo when it starts. However, two bars later and at several other points, Bruckner has inserted over the single parts, so not a general direction to everybody, "gezogen". This means "drawn" and in a romantic symphony, it is normally taken as an instruction for the strings to dig in deeply with the bow. Steinberg treats it as an invitation to linger considerably over that particular

phrase, so at several points during this section he is actually going quite slowly. I find it unsettling. He reacts to the later “considerably slower” marking, but gets moving well before “Tempo I” is indicated. So this becomes another stop-go finale, though the fast basic tempo carries it through. The playing of the Boston SO is surprisingly slipshod during this performance – no doubt these slips were corrected in the RCA recording, which shows marginally broader timings. I’m afraid this performance does not wean me from the impression I have always got from Steinberg performances of a slightly anonymous excellence.

Before trying to draw some conclusions, I would like to re-examine the **Carl Melles** performance that set me off along this line of thought. This 46:13 performance – uncut in case you are wondering – was given on 6 November 1987 by the somewhat scrappy Milan RAI Symphony Orchestra of which Melles was then principal conductor. It is shorter by more than three minutes than the fastest version listed on John Berky’s comprehensive Bruckner site (49:30 under Catherine Rückwardt), and that in its turn is Berky’s only listed version lasting under 50 minutes.



Melles’s first movement, timed at 13:46, does not actually begin any faster than several others, with a tempo around 60 to the minim. He drops back a little for the “considerably slower” second group, though at 52 to the minim it is faster than any other I have discussed.

He maintains his tempo till Bruckner marks a return to Tempo I at the false recapitulation, so from this point of view he is faithful to the score. He also faithful to Bruckner’s indication of 2/2 rather than 4/4. The question of whether the conductor is actually beating in two or in four does not concern me, the issue is what the listener perceives. Melles, by not digging in too deep, suggests a lyrical Schubertian flow. On the other hand, Bruckner did say it should be “Majestoso” – “Majestic” – and majesty seems to be lacking when the conductor goes at it full tilt.

Those who object to Klemperer’s and Keilberth’s funeral cortège slow movements will not be pleased to hear that Melles gets through it in 12:40. As I pointed out in my article on Melles, he seems to have taken the view that tempo markings are an absolute thing, that “adagio” means approximately the same thing throughout the Viennese repertoire, whether in Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Brahms or Bruckner. Bruckner’s marking here is “Adagio”, with the added instruction “Sehr feierlich” – “Very solemn”. Melles begins at 60 to the crotchet and tends to move on later rather than to hold back. If this had been a Brahms symphony, Melles’s tempo might not raise many eyebrows. It is exactly the same tempo adopted by Sir Adrian Boult for the second movement of Brahms’s second symphony – and he too moves on later more than he holds back. Most modern performances of the Brahms go rather slower, but no one has ever suggested that Boult’s tempo in this, his last recording of the piece, is not a proper adagio. Brahms did, however, write “Adagio non troppo” (“Slow but not too much”). At Melles’s tempo the music often comes across as fulsomely passionate, so Bruckner’s required solemnity, which I do not find lacking at Klemperer’s and Keilberth’s tempi, is not really present.

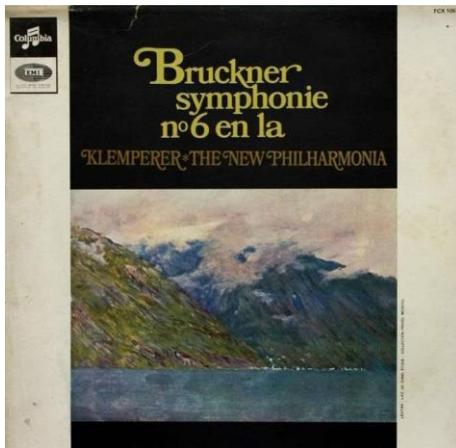
Melles goes for a fast scherzo, Steinberg-style. His timing of 8:16 is a little less, since he takes a steady view of the trio.

And so to Melles’s 11:30 finale. This is another movement marked in 2/2, and thus far Melles is correct. But the marking is also “Bewegt, doch nicht zu schnell” – “Lively but not too fast”. Melles allows no slackening for the second group, keeping it lightly flowing. He reacts minimally to the “considerably slower” marking and is off again as soon as possible, which is long before he is actually instructed to do so. Just what constitutes “not too fast” is anybody’s guess. For all Melles’s attempt to present an exuberant post-Schubert-Great-C-major finale, he is not able to keep a certain hectic,

bullish impression at bay. All the same, for a swift Bruckner 6, this makes more sense to me than the Andrae.

Speaking of swift Bruckner Sixths, I have distinct recollections of a performance in Edinburgh in which (not yet Sir) Alexander Gibson conducted the (not yet Royal) Scottish National Orchestra. I recall it as a forward moving, light-textured performance. In particular, the finale gave an impression of continual acceleration and aroused cheers from the public. I see from the BBC Genome site that this symphony was broadcast by Gibson and the SNO on 3 August 1972 – presumably the performance I attended. Gibson also broadcast it with the BBC Symphony Orchestra on 25 June 1974. I should be very interested to hear from anyone who has tapes, even poor ones, of either of these broadcasts.

But what of the celebrated **Otto Klemperer** recording, recorded with the New Philharmonia Orchestra on 6, 10-12 and 16-19 November 1964? Four years ago [I was happy to join](#) the general chorus of praise. In the light of the performances I have just discussed, I am not so sure.



Klemperer's first movement does not have an exceptionally long timing – 16:55 – but the opening is the slowest of any, at around 48 to the minim. The ear does not perceive any change of tempo as Klemperer embarks on the second group, though the metronome registers a minimal slackening, to 46. He does not resume his original tempo before Bruckner requests it, indeed, at the forte outburst, where several conductors resume their first tempo, Klemperer drops back slightly further to 42. Given the smallness of these adjustments, I query whether they are intentional changes or just a slackening of grip. The well-intentioned performance does seem to acquire a dispirited air at times. On the whole, if I am to hear a performance in

which Bruckner's tempo differences are ironed out, I would go to Leinsdorf, who has a surer sense of movement and growth.

I have already had my say about the funeral cortège tempo for the Adagio, which at 14:42 is just one second shorter than Keilberth's. I would only add that, in the later stages, Klemperer's tempo sometimes moves ahead (an insert from a different day's takes, maybe?), almost acquiring a Melles-like fulsomeness. Granted the approach, then, I feel that Keilberth does it better.

Klemperer's scherzo, 9:23, has the requisite – if you agree – nocturnal tread. Here though, as in the first movement, I am a little worried by the lack of drive. It is as if the conductor, having set his tempo, simply sat back and let the orchestra get on with it.

The finale is an interesting case. At 13:50 it is obviously fairly broad, but by no means the broadest of those discussed. Unsurprisingly, Klemperer allows no drop in tempo as the second group begins. More unexpectedly, he indulges in quite a few unmarked rallentandos in the course of this lyrical music. I was a little disconcerted at first, but warmed to the fact that the conductor is actually shaping the music at last, as opposed to just sitting back and watching the notes pass by. In the many forte passages that follow, I got the impression that the Klemperer was driving the music forward, albeit slowly, rather than letting it trudge along of its own accord. I am not sure, however, whether this is enough to count it as a great performance. Moreover, Klemperer makes very little reaction to Bruckner's "considerably slower" marking and resumes his original tempo almost at once.



### Concluding thoughts on tempi

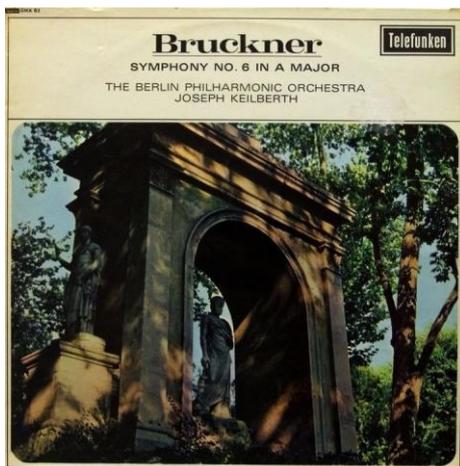
In an attempt to draw a few conclusions, I will first point to the paradox that a conductor who takes the second group of the finale at an unmarked slower tempo is not necessarily misrepresenting Bruckner, since it was standard practice in Bruckner's own day to adjust tempi from section to section in a large romantic symphony. Whereas, the conductor who does not take a perceptibly slower tempo for the second group in the first movement, which is marked "considerably slower", clearly is misrepresenting Bruckner. This would seem to put Klemperer and Leinsdorf out of the running, whatever their other virtues. The finale, however, does have that fairly long section about two thirds through which Bruckner marked "considerably slower". When this is observed, and when the conductor does not return to his faster tempo until instructed by Bruckner to do so, the effect, as I described above, is that of an interlude in a walled garden. The finale acquires a different, more logical shape, and the closing bars arrive with perfect timing. Of the performances I have discussed, only Horenstein and Keilberth structure the finale as Bruckner seems to have intended it.

But to return to the first movement. Is it possible to get any idea of what Bruckner really meant by "considerably slower"? Well yes, there is a clue. Bruckner's own very clear manuscript, which can be downloaded from IMSLP, has metronome marks for the opening of the movement and for the "considerably slower" second group – not, unfortunately, for any of the other movements. These metronome marks are plainly in another hand and the hand is apparently that of Cyrill Hinais, who claimed to have them on Bruckner's own authority.

Hinais's marking for the beginning is 72 to the minim. None of the performances discussed goes this fast, though Reichert and Andrae, at 66 with the latter sometimes spurting ahead to 69, are fairly close. Several other conductors begin at 60 – Kubelik, Horenstein and Melles, with Keilberth marginally below and Steinberg marginally above. Whether or not these conductors were aware of the metronome mark, they seem to have arrived at a certain consensus that proper articulation of the dotted note plus triplet figure accompanying the principal theme requires a tempo around 60 to the minim. We should bear in mind that, at the time Hinais supplied this metronome mark, only the two middle movements of the symphony had ever been performed. Notoriously, metronome marks that sound fine in your head, prove too fast in performance, so Hinais himself might have been the first to admit, after five minutes of orchestral rehearsal, that some downward modification was required.

For the second group, Hinais indicated 50 to the minim. Melles, at 52, actually exceeds this by a fraction. Leinsdorf, at 48-50, is practically bang on, so if you want to hear the bulk of the movement played, very beautifully, at the tempo Hinais thought Bruckner wanted, then this is where to go. However, since Leinsdorf's opening tempo is barely any faster, you will not get the effect of a double window looking out onto gentler pastures outside.

If you have to modify the first marking, logically you have to modify the other in proportion. Here we come to an interesting point. 72 to the minim means 144 to the crotchet. 50 to the minim means that the triplet crotchets underlying the second group go at 150. In other words, the crotchets in the first theme and the triplet crotchets in the new theme would go at about the same tempo. The



relationship is more important than the actual tempo adopted. If the relationship is sufficiently close, the listener perceives a single unifying tempo underpinning the two different tempi. Clearly, this is distorted with conductors like Leinsdorf and Klemperer who equate minim with minim. It is disastrously distorted with a conductor like Reichert who halves his original tempo. All the other conductors have fairly well grasped this point. They lose out again, though, if they resume their original tempo as soon as the louder music breaks in. This leaves us with Horenstein, Keilberth

and Steinberg who give us the movement according to Bruckner's own structure. Steinberg's finale, though, is a more dubious proposition.

All this is not to deny that Leinsdorf, Kubelik, Rosbaud and – up to a point – Klemperer do show insights, even greatness, that make them well worth seeking out. All the same, the two performances among those discussed that present Bruckner's own symphonic structure, and a great performance of it to boot, are Horenstein and Keilberth. It is a pretty severe indictment on those powers that be in the recording world that Horenstein was not engaged to make a studio recording of it while at the height of his reputation. It also seems to me very strange that the Klemperer should have held sway all these years when a much better performance by Keilberth was issued at about the same time.

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