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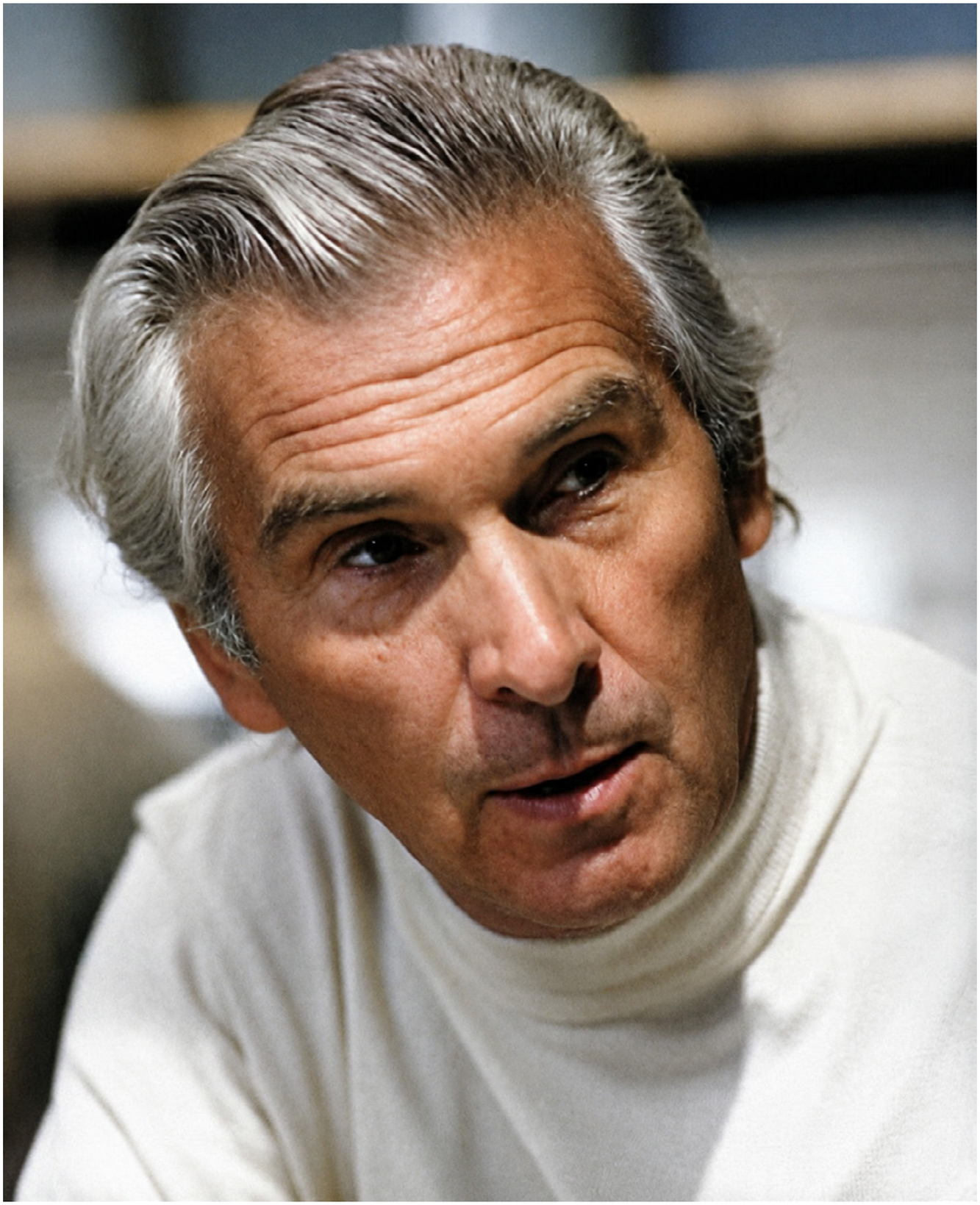
50TH ANNIVERSARY TRIBUTE

Anton Bruckner
Symphony No. 8 in C minor

TONHALLE-ORCHESTER ZÜRICH

RUDOLF KEMPE

NEWLY REMASTERED · STEREO



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Rudolf Kempe was born in June, 1910, in Niederpoyritz, near Dresden. He always considered himself a Dresdener; a musical child, he first studied the piano, and from the age of 14 violin and oboe at the Dresden Musikhochschule, the school attached to the Saxon State Orchestra. Following graduation, aged only 18, Kempe became first oboe of the Dortmund Opera Orchestra, but soon afterwards he was appointed principal oboe of the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra. As a member of this great orchestra, whose chief conductor then was Bruno Walter, Kempe played under Furtwängler, Richard Strauss, Erich Kleiber, Klemperer and Beecham, amongst others. In 1933, Kempe's aspirations led him to the Leipzig opera house, making his conducting debut with Lortzing's *Der Wildschütz* in 1935. Kempe joined the staff as répétiteur, continuing also as a chamber music player and lieder accompanist. He enlisted in the German Army, and in 1942 was seconded to the Chemnitz Opera, becoming chief conductor and music director after the War.

Kempe's recording career began at that time, and it was soon apparent that in East Germany a gifted successor to the great conductors of the past was at work. Kempe's stature was reinforced when he opened the Vienna State Opera's 1951 season, and in September 1953 Kempe made his British debut at Covent Garden during a visit by the Bavarian State Opera. He was immediately invited to conduct *Salome* the following month, doing so with notable success, and he returned the next season to direct *The Ring*, repeating it in 1956. Kempe made his Metropolitan Opera debut in 1954, and was offered the Covent Garden directorship twice. Although he declined these inducements, he became a regular and much-admired conductor in London.

Kempe's HMV recordings with the Berlin Philharmonic in the mid- to late-1950s include performances of Brahms's *Ein deutsches Requiem* and four symphonies, together with a grandly dignified *Eroica*. With the Royal Philharmonic he re-made Brahms's Fourth Symphony, and towards the end of his life, made another set of Brahms's symphonies with the Munich Philharmonic.

Kempe recorded two greatly significant later orchestral sets for EMI. One was an integral Beethoven symphony cycle with the Munich Philharmonic, and the other, possibly Kempe's most lasting recording achievement, was a four-volume complete set of Richard Strauss's orchestral music with the Staatskapelle Dresden. This magnificent accomplishment, played with incomparable artistry by the orchestra best placed of any then to justify its choice in this repertoire, is unlikely to be surpassed for a long time to come, even though 50 years and more have elapsed since it was made. Other outstanding EMI Kempe recordings include Wagner's *Lohengrin* and *Die Meistersinger* – both of them operas Kempe had already recorded in East Germany in the early 1950s. In 1965, Rudolf Kempe became director of the Tonhalle-Orchester Zürich, remaining there for seven years, and this rare recording of Bruckner's Eighth Symphony is the most important memorial of his period in Zurich. The music is clearly very close to the conductor's heart.

The Symphony itself was begun in 1884, Bruckner's first sketch of the first movement being completed on his 60th birthday, 4th September. The work's first draft was finished by the following August, and Bruckner spent much of the following two years revising and correcting the score. On his 62nd birthday, Bruckner sent a copy of the completed manuscript to his champion, the conductor Hermann Levi. But Levi found himself unable to come to terms with the work; unwilling to offend Bruckner directly, he asked a mutual friend, Joseph Schalk, to convey his uncertainties. This was a blow to Bruckner's self-confidence – the greatest he ever experienced – and he entered upon a period of several years in which he revised a number of earlier symphonies, rather than continuing with the Ninth Symphony, which was already forming in his mind, these revisions culminating in a new version of the Eighth.

This received its first performance in Vienna on 18 December 1892 under Hans Richter, to tumultuous acclaim. The work is a tremendous revelation of genius, one of the greatest symphonies ever written and laid out on the grandest scale, with every aspect falling fully and perfectly into place. The final coda, in which four main themes of the symphony

are combined in a wholly natural and breathtakingly masterly manner, demonstrates Bruckner's genius in a way surpassed by few of his predecessors.

In 1927, the International Bruckner Society was founded in Leipzig and – in association with the Austrian National Library, to which organisation Bruckner had bequeathed his scores – began to publish a complete edition. Until 1945, this task was in the hands of Robert Haas, possibly the most knowledgeable Bruckner specialist of his day, who was replaced after the War by Leopold Nowak. Rather than merely completing the work begun by Haas, Nowak reissued several works in new editions, and whilst many of the republished scores differ only in minor matters, the versions of the Eighth Symphony contain notable changes. Haas's "original" score, printed in 1939, adds – with the most musical of intentions – to the 1890 score a number of passages from the 1887 score. Nowak's edition of 1955 is of the version Richter premiered. Haas's additions are small in total and make little difference to the construction of the work but restore some beautiful passages which are rarely heard today. The Robert Haas edition is the one chosen by Rudolf Kempe.

Kempe's knowledge of the score – he almost invariably conducted from memory – combined with his sensitivity and deep musicianship, his experience as an orchestral player and his imaginatively flexible approach to structure and phrasing marked him out as a true master. We must profoundly regret that he did not record more Bruckner: in his hands, the Eighth Symphony is a tremendous revelation of the composer's genius, for he shows it to be one of the greatest symphonies of any period, enormously powerful, vast in conception, full of wonderful melody and orchestrated magnificently. Kempe's performance is magnificent, drawing playing of great intensity, power and beauty from this fine orchestra. The conductor's sudden death in Zurich in May 1976, ten months after being appointed chief conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra in London, was indeed a profound shock to the world of music.

Robert Matthew-Walker © 2000, rev. 2026



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LANI SPAHR – audio restoration engineer, producer, lecturer and annotator – has garnered critical praise from *Gramophone* ("There are historic releases that make the grade because they are just that – 'historic' – and there are releases that make history because they are musically overwhelming. This set is both."), BBC Radio 3, *BBC Music Magazine*, *Fanfare*, *The Sunday Times*, MusicWeb International, *Diapason*, Classical Source, *International Record Review*, and many others.

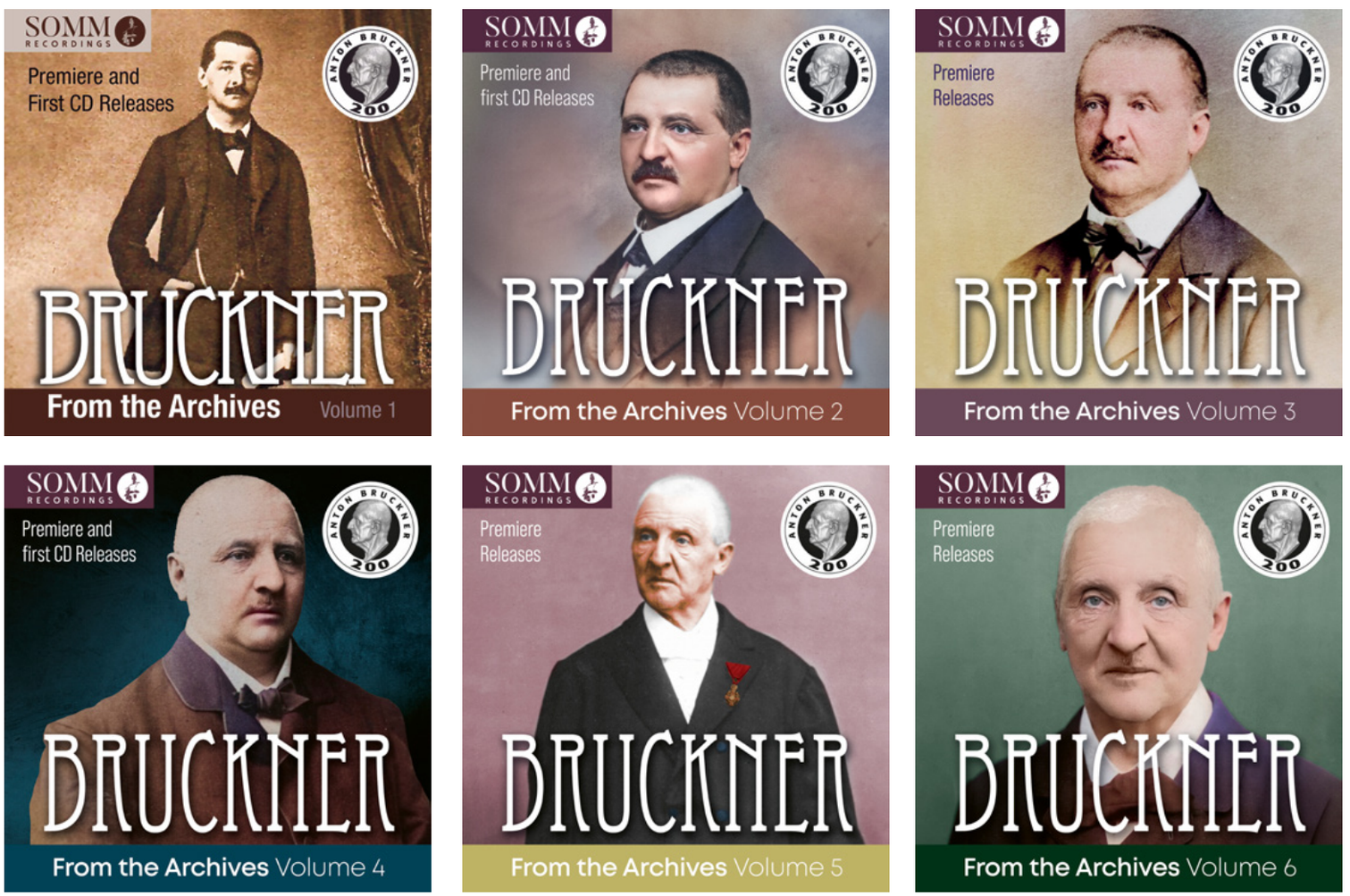
In 2016, BBC Radio 3 presented an hour-long documentary about his stereo reconstructions for *Elgar Remastered* (SOMMCD 261-4). In addition to his close collaboration with SOMM, which has produced several critically acclaimed recordings, his work can be heard on Music & Arts, West Hill Radio Archive, Naxos, Boston Records, and Oboe Classics, and he has worked for Sony/France on historic restorations of the recordings of George Szell. In 2020, he was awarded an Honorary Membership of the Elgar Society for his work on the recorded legacy of Sir Edward Elgar.

Formerly a leading performer on period oboes in the US, he was a member of Boston Baroque and the Handel and Haydn Society Orchestra of Boston. In addition, he has appeared with many of North America's leading period instrument orchestras, including Tafelmusik, Philharmonia Baroque, Tempesta di Mare, Apollo's Fire, Washington Bach Consort, the American Classical Orchestra, Boston Early Music Festival Orchestra, Mercury Baroque and many others.

Also a modern oboist, he was the principal oboist of the Colorado Springs Symphony Orchestra, the Colorado Opera Festival, the American Chamber Winds, and the Maine Chamber Ensemble and made his European solo debut in 1999 playing John McCabe's Oboe Concerto with the Hitchin Symphony Orchestra in England.

He has served on the faculties of Colorado College, Phillips Exeter Academy (New Hampshire), and the University of New Hampshire Chamber Music Institute. He has toured throughout North America, Europe, and the Far East on period and modern oboes and has recorded for Telarc, Linn, Koch, Naxos, Vox, MusicMasters, L'Oiseau-Lyre, and Musica Omnia.

See also SOMM's *BRUCKNER From the Archives* series, remastered by Lani Spahr:



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Anton Bruckner 1824–1896
Symphony No.8 in C minor

TONHALLE-ORCHESTER ZÜRICH

RUDOLF KEMPE 1910–1976

50TH ANNIVERSARY TRIBUTE

Symphony No.8 in C minor WAB 108
(1887/90, Haas Edition)

1	I.	Allegro moderato	16:15
2	II.	Scherzo: Allegro moderato – Trio: Langsam	14:13
3	III.	Adagio: Feierlich langsam, doch nicht schleppend	27:41
4	IV.	Finale: Feierlich, nicht schnell	23:42
		Total duration:	**81:52**

Recording: Tonhalle Zurich, 12 & 13 November 1971
First Release: ex libris EL 16 607 · Ⓟ 1973
Executive Producer: **Siva Oke**
Producer, Sound Restoration and Remastering: **Lani Spahr**
Design & Booklet: Paul Spencer & Ray Granlund, for WLP London Ltd

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