

***Symphony No. 8 in B Minor, D. 759, "Unfinished"***  
**Franz Schubert (1797–1828)**

Written: 1822

Movements: Two

Style: Romantic

Duration: 25 minutes

All Franz Schubert did was write music, and he did it very well and very quickly. For instance, during 1815, at the age of eighteen, he composed two symphonies, two masses, five operas, a tremendous number of piano and chamber music pieces, and an incredible 146 songs! With all that writing going on it was difficult to keep track of things. Small wonder that forty-three years after it was written, someone discovered Schubert's most famous work, the "Unfinished" Symphony, locked away in a chest belonging to one of his close friends. In that chest were two movements of what Schubert obviously intended to be a complete four-movement symphony.

The first movement begins mysteriously with the cellos and basses playing a single dark line. The rest of the strings join in with a sort of murmuring figure that acts as the accompaniment to an even darker melody played by the woodwinds—the principal theme of this movement. It grows in intensity and ends firmly on a cadence that quickly subsides into a second, more hopeful theme played by the cellos. The violins pick up the theme and repeat it. But not for long! Soon the dark mood returns with a series of foreboding chords. Bits and pieces of the second theme get passed around in the orchestra; then there is a literal repeat of everything that has happened so far. The middle section of the first movement presents motives from both of the main themes in a highly dramatic fashion. As the tension begins to lessen, the recapitulation of the opening sneaks back in. It ends in an even bleaker mood than it began.

The horns and bassoons introduce the second movement while the cellos play the main theme over a “walking” bass line. The atmosphere of this movement is more hopeful than the first, but it is not without its darker moments. A beautiful hushed melody played by the clarinet over syncopated strings starts the second section. Soon the entire orchestra enters and infuses some drama. The tension subsides and brings the movement back to its beginning. The second section gets a restatement too, but with different orchestration. When the walking bass returns, it signals the close of the movement.

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***Psalm 150***

**Anton Bruckner (1824–1896)**

Written: 1892

Movements: One

Style: Romantic

Duration: Nine minutes

“Bruckner! He is my man!” That was Richard Wagner’s assessment. The conductor Hans von Bülow had a different idea. He called Bruckner’s symphonies—for which he is best known today—“the anti-musical ravings of a half-wit.” Johannes Brahms called them “Symphonic bo-constrictors.” The composer Jean Sibelius was more favorably impressed: “[The Symphony] moved me to tears. For a long time afterwards, I was completely transported. What a strangely profound spirit, formed by a religious sense . . . as something no longer in harmony with our time.”

Anton Bruckner was a deeply religious Roman Catholic from the peasant class in upper Austria. He was the oldest of eleven children and spent the first years of his life studying to become a schoolmaster, organist, and village fiddler. As a teenager, he was admitted to the Augustinian monastery of St. Florian as a choirboy. Here he learned the music of the great Viennese classical composers Haydn and Mozart and developed his life-long love of the music of Schubert. After leaving St. Florian, he had a year of teacher training in Linz and then spent a couple of years teaching in tiny Austrian villages before returning to St. Florian where he taught for the next ten years—all the while honing his organ “chops.” In 1855 he became the organist for the cathedral in Linz. Thirteen years later he accepted a teaching post in organ and music theory at the Vienna Conservatory where he remained for the next twenty-three years.

His composition studies relied heavily on the old masters. Beethoven was as "modern" as Bruckner knew, until his encounter with the music of Wagner. In 1865, beginning with his symphonies, Bruckner set out on a course of composition that was so individual in character that it was not until this century that his genius achieved worldwide acclaim. In addition to his ten symphonies, Bruckner wrote a lot of choral works: eight masses, 32 motets, five Psalm settings, the *Te Deum* and over 40 secular works.

This setting of *Psalm 150* is Bruckner's last choral composition. He intended it to open a music festival in Vienna but didn't finish it on time. From its powerful opening “Hallelujah” to its gentle central section with its soaring soprano solo and finally to the great choral fugue at the end, this is about as compact and succinct as Bruckner gets!

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***Dona Nobis Pacem***

**Ralph Vaughan Williams (1872–1958)**

Written: 1936

Movements: Six

Style: Romantic

Duration: 36 minutes

The Scottish music critic Cecil Gray gave a colorful description of Ralph Vaughan Williams:

He flounders about in the sea of his ideas like a vast and ungainly porpoise, with great puffing and blowing; yet in the end, after tremendous efforts and an almost heroic tenacity, there emerges, dripping and exhausted from the struggle, a real and lovable personality, unassuming, modest, and almost apologetic.

Ralph Vaughan Williams' father was a minister and his mother was the great-granddaughter of the famous Wedgewood potter. His great uncle was Charles Darwin. He attended Cambridge and the Royal College of Music but developed slowly as a composer, publishing his first composition when he was thirty. In that same decade of his life, he "discovered" English folk music and travelled throughout the country collecting and transcribing folk songs—many of which found their way into his compositions. He also edited *The English Hymnal*, "one of the most influential hymnals of the 20th century," which contains some of his own hymns. He wrote articles for the *Groves Dictionary of Music and Musicians* and travelled to France to study with Maurice Ravel. In 1909, he conducted the premiere of his *Fantasia on a Theme of Thomas Tallis* and a year later, when he was 38, the premier of his first symphony, called *A Sea Symphony*. By the end of his life, Vaughan Williams had written nine symphonies, five operas, several concertos and numerous works for chamber ensembles, choruses, and bands and was known as "The Grand Old Man of English Music."

Vaughan Williams wrote *Dona Nobis Pacem* for the Huddersfield Choral Society for its 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. It was a celebratory time for the chorus, but Ursula, Vaughan Williams' widow, noted that while he was writing the piece

The picture of Europe was a dark one. The Dictators were declaring their aims and intentions. Though Mussolini had drained the Pontine marshes and caused Italian trains to run on time . . . his threats in other directions were clear enough. More horribly, the Nazis were dividing the world between Aryans and Jews in hysterical discrimination against some of their greatest citizens.

For the text of the work, Vaughan Williams chose a portion of the Agnus Dei from the Roman Catholic Mass, passages from the prophets in the Old Testament, a speech given by John Bright to the House of Commons during the Crimean War, and three stunning poems by Walt Whitman—a poet that Vaughan Williams “never got over . . . I’m glad to say.”

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