

"The Tempo Indications of Mozart." By Jean-Pierre Marty

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Jean-Pierre Marty. *The Tempo Indications of Mozart*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988. xvi, 279, 112p.

Mozart's tempo indications have attracted something less than their fair share of scholarly and theoretical attention. Jean-Pierre Marty's comprehensive, painstaking study — the fruit of fifteen years' study and reflection — sallies with a happy blend of musicianly passion and Gallic sensibility into this sketchily surveyed terrain, mapping out problems and posing hypotheses, conjectures, and conclusions that reach across the entire span of Mozart's *oeuvre*. Every one of the composer's authenticated tempo indications has been pondered, weighed, and classified, and almost always with an ear to performative realities as well as an eye to systematic niceties.

Marty's classificatory scheme is an ingenious one. Moreover, it takes full (or almost full) cognizance of the fact that what good musicians have meant by tempo is not simply velocity, either relative or absolute. Although he does not use the term, what Marty offers is a *catalogue raisonnée* of tempo types in Mozart's music, a typology that serves as the organizational framework of the entire book. Each tempo type codifies a relationship among three factors. Priority falls, as one might expect, to the verbal category traditionally associated with the notion of tempo (adagio, andante, allegro, and so forth), with qualified examples (un poco andante, allegro assai, etc.) treated separately. But just as essential is the meter of the movement or passage in question. Here a degree of inventiveness was required, since what concerns Marty is not the *inscribed meter per se* but the *perceived relationship between metrical units*. As a result, in his bestiary of meters one may encounter, in addition to traditional markings (C, C, 3/4, etc.), creatures such as 3/4 (6/8) and 2/4(4/8). Their existence is clarified by the third dimension to Marty's tempo types, one implied rather than expressed in the score — a series of symbols that classify the possible relationships between one durational level (usually the denominator of the meter) and the level immediately below or, less often, above it.

Let us consider one set of examples. **Allegro Cb**, as Marty observes, "is Mozart's most frequent tempo indication" (p. 38), with over two hundred instances. Allegro could mean various things to different composers in the eighteenth century, or even to the same composer (as was apparently

the case with early and late Mozart). But in Marty's scheme **Allegro Cb** means something quite distinctive: whatever speed a performer may adopt for such an allegro, the tempo itself is really a composite of a primary pulse, established by the quarter note, and a secondary one added by the eighth note ("Ah chi mi dice mai" is an example). In **Allegro Cc** the relationship is reversed: here the eighth note plays a primary role and the quarter note a secondary one (frequently the case in Mozart's liturgical music — Marty's most mature instance being the "Kyrie" of the *Requiem*). In **Allegro Ca** a single unit, the quarter, prevails (as in the first part of Leporello's "Catalogue Aria"). Marty's system requires *portmanteau* meters to represent instances where the inscribed meter's denominator actually plays no determinative role: in the case of 3/4 (6/8), for instance, the eighth note holds absolute sway (he offers the "Andante" of K503 as "a perfect prototype").

Although he grumbles a little at the necessity of doing so, Marty assigns metronome speeds to each tempo type. When presented in tabular form, this battery of numbers can appear dogmatic and inflexible. But tempo, as Marty himself warns, "is not an abstract entity, subject to scientific measurements"; rather, it is "the living experience of the progression of the inner musical flow, brought to life either by the pulse of one privileged unit or by the subtle interweaving of two" (p. 11). In consequence, he does not hesitate to suggest markedly different metronomic rates for the same tempo and meter (in the examples just cited, he sets the quarter-note pulse as MM168 for **Allegro Ca**, 126 for **Allegro Cb**, and 184 for **Allegro Cc**). Furthermore, Marty's discussions of individual movements almost always live up to this credo of tempo as living experience rather than as abstract entity. In vocal numbers the prosody of the text is carefully considered along with the dramatic situation (including the implied ones of Mozart's concert arias). Works are also distinguished by their destination — church, chamber, or stage — although the effects of different acoustic environments on tempo is passed over in silence. The fascinating field of conformant tempo relationships among works that share the same thematic type is not explicitly discussed, but a very valuable tool for exploring this and other potential connections is provided in the extensive catalogue at the end of the volume, wherein are listed the incipits of all of Mozart's movements (complete or unfinished) which carry a tempo indication. The index following systematizes Mozart's works with exemplary thoroughness: every section of a work where a change of meter or tempo occurs is listed separately, with references to the body of the text as well as to the

catalogue. The absence of a general index, on the other hand, is much to be regretted.

One can find ample opportunity to quibble over the limitations of Marty's system. Take, for example, Tito's aria, "Del più sublime soglio." Marty places it in *Andante Ca*, in which the eighth note "has no autonomy whatsoever," but rather serves merely to glorify the quarter note. That seems plausible enough at first, but by bars 30-34 matters have changed: the slurred pairs of eighths here insist on making their presence felt in a way earlier ones had not. Fealty to a single overriding tempo type — coupled in this case with a solemn injunction against a performer's making of these eighth notes anything more than an arithmetical derivative of the predominant quarter beat — denies a fluidity in the articulation and perception of late eighteenth-century tempo that many may be loath to renounce.

That one can raise similar objections elsewhere does not betoken a lack of system, but rather the prominent role of multivalence in Marty's classificatory scheme. Marty himself admits that "on many occasions I have had long hesitations before assigning a work to a particular type and have often changed my mind on my original choice," (p. 227). Yet, despite the system's clear need for musical intuition, Marty at times tacks perilously close to shoals on which other recent studies of tempo and meter have foundered by hankering after a specious precision that would transport performative decision-making to the never-never-land of the composer's intentions. At several turns he insists that his study's aim is to deduce what was "in Mozart's mind." Even apart from an unsavory whiff of psychologism, this recovery of compositional intentions is doubly suspect because Marty frames it in the context of a dubious "common practice" that supposedly governed the assigning and determining of tempo during the second half of the eighteenth century, a "code then known to all good musicians" (p. 84). When explained (p. xiv), this code turns out to be nothing more than a continuum of the familiar Italian tempo designations with *adagio*, *andante*, and *allegro* as evenly-spaced, supporting pillars.

By these lights the writings of an eighteenth-century musician like Kirnberger are not up to code. He described a *tempo giusto*, or "natural tempo" — based on a vital eighteenth-century relationship that Marty leaves largely unexplored — as lying somewhere between dance

categories and tempo types. If a composer used one of the familiar Italian tempo terms, Kirnberger observed, it was to modify this basic natural tempo.¹ Emanuel Bach lends at least some credibility to Marty's code scheme: "The pace of a composition, which is usually indicated by several well-known Italian expressions, is based on its general content as well as on the fastest notes and passages contained in it."²

Yet in point of fact Marty himself never really takes this questionable notion — or the patina of historical authenticity it seems to promise — very seriously. At one point, for example, in proposing a speed of MM60 per quarter for movements Mozart marked "Andante maestoso," he concedes that "there is, of course, no objective argument to demonstrate irrefutably that it is precisely the tempo Mozart would have wished. One must nevertheless admit that it 'works'. . ." (p. 85). The proof of the tempo, in other words, is in the playing.

Two great advantages accrue to the exhaustive labor of schematizing Mozart's tempo indications, inelastic though the results may be. First, suggestive relationships within and between tempo types often emerge. Some readers may be surprised to discover that Mozart wrote only four works in 12/8 (a meter Leopold had included along with 4/8, 9/8, and other uncommon compound markings as "worthless stuff").³ Surprisingly, all four are in D major or minor (Marty's catalogue shows little correlation between keys and tempo types). Second, Marty's scheme emboldens him to speak his mind with conviction against several of the inscrutable and closeted editorial decisions of the *Neue Mozart-Ausgabe* (e.g., with respect to Costanza's "Biancheggia in mar" in *Il sogno di Scipione*, p. 207), as well as against prevailing absurdities in contemporary performance traditions (such as the lethargic *schlep* usually made of the B-flat Trio of *mascherati* in the first finale of *Don Giovanni*).

1. Johann Philipp Kirnberger: *Die Kunst des reinen Satzes in der Musik*, 2 parts (Berlin, 1771-1779), part 2, 117.

2. Carl Philipp Emanuel Bach: *Versuch über die wahre Art das Clavier zu spielen*, trans. William J. Mitchell as *Essay on the True Art of Playing Keyboard Instruments*, (New York, W.W. Norton and Co., 1949), 151.

3. *Versuch einer gründlichen Violinschule* (Augsburg, 1756), trans. Editha Knocker as *A Treatise on the Fundamental Principles of Violin Playing* (London and New York, 1948), 32.

Some readers may miss any significant mention of one or two celebrated problems involving tempo and meter in Mozart's music: e.g. the rebarring of "Bei Männern, welche Liebe fühlen" — for which Mozart went through the autograph and shifted the 6/8 meter by a dotted quarter. Further, no notice whatever is taken of Mozart's contemporaries, even Haydn, and the scanty bibliography shows little contact with relevant research.

In his preface Marty admonishes that his study is not in fact a musicological treatise but a labor of love. It is sobering to reflect that even an intelligent musician would think of the two as mutually exclusive. Still, in any combination thinkable, both the musicologist and the musician in each reader will find a great deal that is rewarding and stimulating in this volume.

Thomas Bauman