

**“GOT THE TIME?” – THOUGHTS ON MOZART’S TEMPO MARKINGS IN THE CORONATION MASS
(Jeffrey Baxter - January 21, 2010)**

Dear ASO Chorus,

After last Monday night’s rehearsal on the “Coronation” Mass, K. 317 (and in anticipation of Mozart’s 254th birthday next week), I thought I’d reexamine a 1988 book Norman referenced in that rehearsal: “The Tempo Indications of Mozart” by noted French conductor and pianist Jean-Pierre Marty. I met Mr. Marty in New York during that *Requiem*-heavy 1991 Mozart bicentennial year and was quite taken with his ideas. After a lifetime of studying, performing and conducting Mozart, Marty had gathered in one volume a comparative analysis of every single tempo indication Mozart ever wrote down (including some that father Leopold supplied in the wunderkind’s early works, as well as the pieces where no tempo indication is noted at all).

What piqued my interest this past Monday night was the reminder of Mozart’s choice of different Italian language tempo indications for the same music: *più andante* for the music of “Kyrie eleison” (on page 5 in our Bärenreiter scores) and *Andante con moto* for “Dona nobis pacem” (on p. 48). I went home and dusted off my copy of Marty’s tome.

MOZART AND MARTY

Marty begins his book with an excerpt from one of Mozart’s many letters to his father, this one dated Augsburg, October 24, 1777 – Mozart writing how the daughter of Stein (the famous piano manufacturer) played for him the night before: “She will never achieve the most necessary, the hardest, and the main thing in music, namely Tempo, because from her very youth she made sure not to play in time. Mr. Stein and I have discussed this point a good two hours.”

Marty explains: “All that Mozart tells us in this passage...is that tempo is the core of music and that this core, this mysterious element without which music is not really music, is entirely the performer’s responsibility. Let the performer play ‘in time’ for a start and let us hope that he will then ‘achieve’ tempo. If that does not happen, the most beautiful music ever composed will be deprived of its very essence. This throws into relief the tremendous responsibility which weighs upon performers as actual collaborators in the creation of music.”

In Mozart’s case “achieving” the correct tempo is crucial, as the metronome was only invented at the end of his century, therefore the three main written tempo indications of *Adagio*, *Andante* and *Allegro* (and all the gradations thereof) were much more important than they later became. Marty writes that they “constituted a common language used by all composers and understood by all good performers” and that Mozart’s use of them was “to express the particularities of his own music, which, especially in its early stage, was fully integrated with the musical aesthetics of his own time.”

Marty then gathers in his book every instance of Mozart’s tempo indications in every known piece he wrote, from Köchel listing 1a to 626. He sorts, compares, explains and classifies them looking for clues to possible similarities in style, character and hopefully “time.” It is this orderly and objective collection by Marty that is most impressive – an informed performer can then make many decisions for himself – but there follows in each group a very subjective suggestion of a metronome marking supplied by Marty. He says up front that he does not claim to be the last word on Mozart’s tempo and that this is nothing more than “a guide offered by one musician to his fellow musicians in the endless quest for an unattainable goal: ‘the main thing’ in one of man’s miracles, Mozartian perfection.”

A CROWNING GLORY – MOZART’S “CORONATION” MASS

The nickname “Coronation” for Mozart’s little 1779 C major *Missa brevis* (listed by Köchel in his 19th century catalogue as number 317 of 626 works) was never used by the composer to identify the work. The name comes from the fact that it may have been performed at two coronation ceremonies, one for Leopold II in 1791 in Prague (conducted by Salieri!) and one for Leopold’s successor, Francis II, the next year in Budapest (after Mozart’s death). See: <http://www.mozartforum.com/Lore/article.php?id=216>.

The piece certainly lends itself to such an occasion, given its “festive” orchestration with brass and drums (even including two horns) and especially because of the noble character of its *Andante maestoso* opening measures, with the march-like rhythmic figures in the strings.

This gesture of a slow-motion march is referred to by Mozart scholar Wye Jamison Allenbrook as an “exalted march” and appears many times in slow movements and arias by Mozart to depict a noble quality. He has taken a rhythmic gesture associated with music of the Nobility – the marches their retinues played – slowed it down to what sounds like an “exalted” form and used it in contexts to evoke a human, or in this case divine, nobility. Many 18th century composers incorporated dance-forms in their music (the march is considered one), but none with such expressive skill and insight as Mozart. One other extreme (and extremely expressive) case is the 4/4 slow movement of Beethoven’s Violin Concerto. –And speaking of Beethoven (who was obsessed with exorcizing himself of any Mozartian influences), one can hardly not notice how he would later incorporate (and develop) the Coronation Mass’s sudden *forte* to *piano* in the middle of the chorus’ opening declaration of “KY-ri-e” into his own stunning outcry of “KY-RI-e” in the *Missa solemnis*.

WHAT TIME IS IT, ANYWAY?

Our interest here, however, is not in the amazing structural and technical devices Mozart uses in his Coronation Mass – his unique rondo-form for the “A” parts of the ABA (tripartite) Credo, the effortlessly sounding sonata-allegro organization of the Gloria, the unique double interruption of the chorus in the Benedictus, or the operatic glory of the soprano solo in the Agnus Dei (later to become the Countess’ aria “Dove sono” in *Le Nozze di Figaro*). As performers we want to know what Mozart meant by his different tempo indications for the same music that he (ingeniously, by the way) uses in the opening and closing movements.

The *Missa brevis* tradition of “Dona ut Kyrie” (recapping the music of the Kyrie in the *Dona nobis*) was well known to Mozart. The tradition more likely developed as a time-saving device for hurried church composers, since the phrases *Ky-ri-e e-lei-son* and *Do-na no-bis pa-cem* both have six syllables. Mozart, however takes the opportunity not only to repeat part of the music, but to speed it up at the end (in much the same way as Beethoven’s codas would later drive his symphonies to an exciting close).

Let’s examine (with Marty’s help) the tempo indications supplied by Mozart for the opening and closing movements of this Mass:

KYRIE

1. *Andante maestoso* [literally “majestic going” or “walking”] - choral introduction; martial figures in violins
2. *più andante* – [“more andante”] - Solo quartet music
3. *Maestoso come prima* [“majestic as before”] – chorus reprise of opening measures

AGNUS DEI

1. *Andante sostenuto* [“Andante, sustained”] – soprano solo in F major
2. *Andante con moto* [“Andante with motion”] - Solo quartet music from Kyrie’s *più andante* section
3. *Allegro con spirito* [lit. “happy” or “quickly, with spirit”] – Choral version of solo quartet music.

It is of course (mostly, but not exclusively) the music of #2 listed above that Mozart re-uses:

m. 7 *più andante*
Ky - ri - e e - le - i - son.

m. 57 *Andante con moto*
do - na no - bis pa - - cem.

-So why the two different tempo markings? Did he want them not to be performed at the same tempo? Of course not. I find two reasons: 1) Mozart's understanding of the broad use of the indication *Andante* and, in these two examples, 2) how the tempo markings that precede them affect their choice.

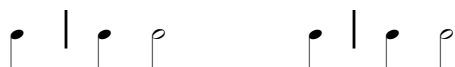
“GOING,” 18th CENTURY-STYLE

Marty has observed that *Andante* is the central of three main tempo markings of Mozart (*Adagio* and *Allegro*, the other two). In Italian, *andare* means “to go;” *andante*, “going.” It implies forward motion and, as Marty points out, is the same in the other European languages: Fr. *allant*, Sp. *andando*, Eng. *going*, Ger. *gehend* [and in German, like the others, “going” can mean “walking,” as opposed to “driving,” “riding” or even “flying”].

Because Mozart (like Palestrina and Bach) was so prolific, and because so much of his music has survived, one is able to sort through this wealth of material and see where certain patterns emerge (and establish “rules,” as it were). Marty has divided all of Mozart's *Andante* markings into three main categories, based of the following four factors:

1. Crucial importance of the meter: C as opposed to C ; 3/8 as opposed to 3/4, etc.
2. Within a given meter the determination of what note-value receives the main impulse (ex., the Kyrie's opening measures where the 8th note clearly carries the impulse).
3. Role of the upbeat, which, in 4/4, lightens the downbeats of strong beats 1 and 3 – in Mozart this is often the rhythmic gesture of the French dance-form *Bourrée*:

short | short LONG___ short | short LONG



4. The relation of speeds (what tempo comes before or after a given tempo).

Given these criteria, Marty finds fifteen different cases of *Andante* and groups them into three main categories (supplying suggested metronome markings for each):

- I. Simple Tempo
 - A. Binary Tempo
 - B. Ternary Tempo
- II. Composite Tempo (slow main pulse / fast secondary pulse) – no upbeat present
 - A. Binary Tempo
 1. more than two beats per bar
 2. two beats per bar
 - B. Ternary Tempo
- II. Composite Tempo (fast main pulse / slow secondary pulse) – upbeat present
 - A. Binary Tempo
 1. more than two beats per bar
 2. two beats per bar
 - B. Ternary Tempo

-All this just for *Andante*!

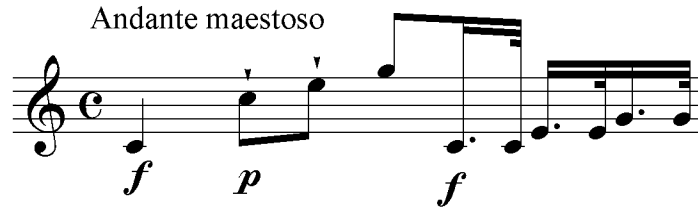
On top of that, *Andante* was often given many “qualifiers,” such as *maestoso*, *con moto*, *sostenuto*, etc. all of which may affect the speed and/or describe the music's character.

-So, back to the Kyrie of the Coronation Mass.

LORD HAVE MERCY!

Mozart writes *Andante maestoso* over the opening bars of the Kyrie, just as he would a few years later over the Fugue of his Prelude and Fugue in C Major, K.383a. In a 1782 letter to his sister he explains: “I took care to write ‘Andante maestoso’ over it, so that one doesn't play it fast.” Marty observes that this statement from the composer indicates that for him and his contemporaries “plain *Andante* was considered more a fast than a slow tempo.” He also notes nineteen examples of *Andante maestoso* in Mozart's works.

For this Kyrie he notes the prominence of the 8th note as the main unit of beat, as evidenced by the *subito forte* on the “weak” part of beat 3 in the strings:



Given this and his aforementioned criteria, Marty suggests a metronome marking of ♩ = 88 / ♪ = 44.

For the ensuing solo quartet’s music at the midpoint of measure 7, Mozart indicates simply *più andante* [“more Andante”], or faster. To find a solution, Marty looks ahead to the similar music in the *Dona nobis* where the indication is *Andante con moto* [“Andante with motion”] for the same music. According to Marty’s groupings, this tempo falls in the category of a speed whose relation is ♩ = 60 / ♪ = 120. Fine enough, since in the Kyrie Mozart is moving from an 8th note pulse to a quarter-note pulse and, yes, 60 beats per minute is faster than 44 beats per minute, but something seems wrong. The lilting vocal lines, the natural trumpets’ ascending “horn-calls” and the strings’ pulsing 16th-note accompaniment need a livelier tempo than 60 beats per minute can provide. Marty’s logic is sound, though, and based on a proportion of what precedes this music in the *Agnus Dei* movement.

LITTLE LAMB WHO MADE THEE?

Perhaps the crowning glory of the Coronation Mass is this completely “secular” operatic aria for the text *Agnus Dei* [Lamb of God], set in the pastoral-sounding subdominant (F major). In spite of the 45-minute restriction on festive music by the infamous Prince-Archbishop Colloredo, Mozart here let his inspiration flow, forgetting for a moment the practical need for brevity.

His tempo indication is *Andante sostenuto* [“Andante, sustained”], and Marty notes that for Mozart this must have been a tempo “particularly suited to a certain quality of vocal expression” as it is also the indication for three other concert arias in 3/4 (and strangely, all three in E-flat major). Marty observes that for Mozart *Andante sostenuto* suggests a more “sustained” *Andante*, therefore slower than a regular one and falling into his category of a metronome marking of ♩ = 60 / ♪ = 120. –And since for Marty the ensuing quartet of *Dona nobis* (m. 57) also falls into the 60/120 category, he suggests that the tempo remain the same and that *Andante con moto* only refers to a shift from the slower to the faster note-value.

This seems strange, given the presence of a double bar and a change of meter (m. 57). There are many instances in Mozart’s music where he shifts the emphasis from a slower to a faster note-value and never feels the need to supply a “tempo” indication. Sometimes he will do it for an entire section (like the G minor 32nd-note section of the middle movement of his D minor Piano Concerto, K. 466) or alternate back and forth, phrases at a time (as in *Dona Anna*’s final aria in *Don Giovanni*, “Non mi dir,” at m. 13 of the aria proper.)

Marty has his logic, though, and it is based on a tempo relationship to the final *Dona nobis* of the chorus, noted *Allegro con spirito*. Marty defines this as *Allegro* “with extra spirit,” hence faster than *Allegro* and suggests that if the preceding quartet is 60/120 then this new section should be performed at about double tempo (120 or less, as Marty states “slightly short of *doppio movimento*”).

It is all very neat and orderly, moving in the *Agnus Dei* from 60-60 to 120 for the three sections, but there is a problem: If *Andante con moto* and *più andante* are the same (since Mozart used them interchangeably in this piece) and both indicate a tempo faster than *Andante*, then why did Mozart bother at all with a tempo indication in m. 57 of the *Agnus Dei*?

–And further, upon surveying the many performances of this Mass (both live and recorded), why does almost every conductor, from “vegetarian” period instrument specialists to “meat-eating” bad boys like Herbert von

Karajan, take m. 57 (“Dona nobis pacem”) faster than the previous music for Agnus Dei, thus ruining Marty’s nice, neat double-time relationship for the *Allegro* Dona nobis? I believe their artistic intuition is sound and that they invert those two interchangeable tempo indications (as one wishes Mozart had), so that the Kyrie’s *più andante* applies to m. 57 of the Dona nobis.

-But there’s more... one last little clue that Marty ignored, affecting a tempo choice for the final *Allegro*.

FINALE – FASTER STILL

It’s just one and a half beats long, but is a little masterstroke from the mind of Mozart: not only did he reprise the Kyrie solo quartet music in the quartet music of the Dona nobis, but in last the beat and a half of m. 70 leading into the final choral *Allegro* section of Dona nobis, he reprises the strings’ little martial figure from m. 1 of the Kyrie:



It is a springboard into the final *Allegro* and seems to suggest that a satisfactory tempo might be the same as what Marty suggested for the opening of the Mass: 88 (this time, ♩ = 88, as opposed to the Kyrie’s ♩ = 88).

Oddly enough, it is a solution that conductor Robert Shaw came upon (surely intuitively).

In summary, Marty suggests the following metronome markings for the Kyrie and Agnus Dei:

KYRIE

1. *Andante maestoso* [♩ = 88]
2. *più andante* [♩ = 60]
3. *Maestoso come prima* [♩ = 88]

AGNUS DEI

1. *Andante sostenuto* [♩ = 60]
2. *Andante con moto* [♩ = 60]
3. *Allegro con spirito* [♩ = 100-120]

With some slight adjustment (in #2 above and in the final *Allegro*), one may incorporate Marty’s careful study and devise a tempo relationship that is both artistically satisfying and true to the composer:

KYRIE

1. *Andante maestoso* [♩ = 88]
2. *più andante* [♩ = 68] – same as Dona nobis in Agnus Dei, m. 57
3. *Maestoso come prima* [♩ = 88]

AGNUS DEI

1. *Andante sostenuto* [♩ = 60]
2. *Andante con moto* [♩ = 68] – slightly faster than the previous 60, hence *più andante*
3. *Allegro con spirito* [♩ = 88] – same “tactus” as m. 1 of Kyrie

CODA – WHO’S GOT TIME FOR ALL THIS?

As stated initially it was Mozart himself who identified Tempo as the “main thing” in music, and musicians like Marty (and us!) who struggle to ‘achieve’ the right tempo are correct in acknowledging the “tremendous responsibility which weighs upon performers as actual collaborators in the creation of music.” So does this leave room for individual interpretation and artistry? Absolutely! -And especially if a truly great performance (i.e. musical re-creation) is to ensue.

For, an artist (including composers, performers AND conductors!) is only truly “great” when the world of opposites is reconciled, when Apollo and Dionysus are in perfect balance. –When, after all the study and practice, the performer can “let go” and live “in the moment.” It is true of great athletes as well.

There are many famous anecdotes, such as the pianist Horowitz who complained about how young pianists would practice and practice, and then get onstage in front of the audience and practice some more.

Many of us here have similar vivid memories of Robert Shaw who could magically (almost mystically) transform from rehearsal task-master to inspired artist once onstage. One of my personal favorites is the time when, during a dress rehearsal and after weeks of brow-beating rehearsals with him, he screamed out in mid-beat, “Live a little!”

Great composers too know how to “let go.” The pianist Byron Janis writes in an article entitled, “In Praise of Infidelity” – published last week in the Wall Street Journal – about his preparation for a tour with Aaron Copland’s Piano Sonata. Janis writes:

Never having performed it before, I wanted to play it for the composer first. On arriving at his home, I found him tinkering with one of its passages and said, “Mr. Copland, I notice you are playing *forte* and you have marked it *piano* in the score.” He turned to me grinning mischievously and said, “Ah, but that was 10 years ago!”

Janis goes on to quote the poet Yeats who spoke of this dilemma in “Adam’s Curse:”

Yet if it does not seem a moment’s thought,
Our stitching and unstitching has been naught.

But appropriately it is Mozart who should get the last word, as Janis allows him in his article:

“Finally, it comes down to a matter of taste.”

I hope you enjoyed this little tasting of Mozart’s Mass and the appetizer portion of Marty’s book – it saved you \$159.95... really! Click here: <http://www.amazon.com/Tempo-Indications-Mozart-Jean-Pierre-Marty/dp/0300038526>.

All the best (and Happy Birthday, Amadeus!),

Jeffrey Baxter | Choral Administrator
Atlanta Symphony Orchestra

PS. The ASO Chorus last performed the Coronation Mass on March 16, 1996 with Robert Shaw (for the 25th Anniversary Concert of the ASO Chorus) and on July 18/19, 2003 with Donald Runnicles (for the ASO’s Summer Mozart Festival).