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Aspects of tempo in the First Symphony of Ludwig van Beethoven in two interpretations

The Abstract

This thesis aims to address the subject of tempo as one of the most important components of classical music. The work consists of two parts.

The first part is an overview of the aesthetic background and the factors which influence the choice of tempo in the music of the beginning of the 19th Century. It is based mostly on the testimonies of Beethoven and his contemporaries. In addition, I will briefly describe the philosophy of interpreting tempo markings at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th Century. Such generalizations are possible due to the invention of recording technology at the end of the 19th Century. I shall also describe briefly the impact that recording has had on the interpretation of music.

In the second, practical part of my work, I shall observe and analyze two different recordings of the first movement of Ludwig van Beethoven's First Symphony. I have chosen two of the most prominent conductors from the latter half of the 20th Century - Herbert von Karajan and Claudio Abbado. I will analyze their tempo choices throughout the chosen movement by measuring them and putting the results in a table together with remarks about the formal structure of the music.

I will compare, analyze and comment on the two interpretations of these two important conductors and seek to explore the aesthetics behind their approach to tempo. I will also provide background information: factors that - consciously or subconsciously - seem to have influenced these two artists.

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1. Introduction

Tempo plays an essential role in music. Music is an art that is intimately coupled with its progression in time.

When creating musical material, a composer conceives ideas in a specific tempo and, in combination with other parameters - dynamics, articulation - creates the required character. It is logical to think that more precision in marking the tempos, dynamics etc., will result in a clearer understanding of the ideas of the composer.

The tradition of writing precise tempo markings in the score is relatively new. As composers became more individualistic a more personal style emerged. Works that were created before the era of Beethoven employ specific markings primarily when practical considerations needed to be addressed. Here, the traditions of performing written music were mostly carried on verbally. Specific dynamic characters, tempo or articulation markings were seldom mentioned at all. The musical terms most often used were Italian - terms often far from being unambiguous. But as the romantic spirit grew and lay its roots deep in man's mind, the search for greater individuality and precision also found its way into the composition of music.

This individualistic, personal approach is summarized by Clive Brown: „Historic evidence and contemporary experience demonstrate that tempo is among the most variable and contentious issues in musical performance. The majority of musicians regard it as their inalienable right to select their own tempo“ (Brown 1999: 282).

One of the first composers who pioneered for a more individualistic approach was Ludwig van Beethoven. He influenced his contemporaries immeasurably and was one of the first prominent composers to mark his scores with precise tempo markings according to the metronome of Mälzel.

Another important aspect to consider when investigating questions of tempo is the performing artist. For an interpreter, it is of utmost importance to perceive the different characters in music and to discover the tempo that communicates these varying characters in the best possible way. When analyzing tempo, it is important to observe the differences in speed of the smaller sections – sentences, periods and other musical phrases - within a larger context. Instructions for this dynamic approach to tempo are generally not written into the score, but are still vital for musical expression – to bring out the natural differences between phrases or sections with differing characters. But what are the factors that affect the choice of one specific tempo over another, whether it be a general tempo for a movement in a symphony or a more local tempo for some specific phrase?

To make a survey of the tempo changes during one work, I have chosen two interpretations of the first movement of Beethoven's First symphony. I shall analyze performances by Herbert von Karajan and Claudio Abbado. Later in my work, I will analyze their temporal decisions throughout the music performed.

The reason for choosing these two eminent European conductors is their importance in the western cultural world and the fact that both of them have been the chief conductor of the famous Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. Abbado is a generation younger than Karajan, but both men received their education at a time when such legendary conductors as Furtwängler in Germany and Toscanini in Italy were still active.

Karajan's importance lies also in his connection to his predecessors and contemporaries like Wilhelm Furtwängler, Karl Böhm, Günter Wand, Otto Klemperer etc. All of these conductors developed personal ways of making music

that are also well documented in their recordings. One could view Karajan as summarizing the trends of the 20th Century that developed western art music towards certain aesthetics. These aesthetics stood quite apart from the developments in research into performing practice which started in the early 1960's. Today, thanks to historically informed performance practice, music by Beethoven, Haydn, Mozart, Schumann and other classical and early romantic-era composers has a very different shape.

Karajan's interpretation of Beethoven's symphonies underwent some changes over the years. Karajan recorded his first set of Beethoven symphonies with the Philharmonia Orchestra in London in the 1950's. He also has three different sets of Beethoven symphonies recorded with the *Berliner Philharmoniker* (roughly a new set every 10 years). The younger Karajan uses much faster tempos, coming very close to Beethoven's own tempo markings.

The piece I will analyze is Beethoven's Symphony No. 1, Op. 21 in C major - first movement, Adagio Molto – Allegro con brio. This symphony stands out as it can be positioned between the classical and romantic eras in music. It contains features from both of these eras. This symphony is classical in form but can also be said to mark a small milestone for individualism and romanticism. This journey from classicism to romanticism would find its first major manifestation in Beethoven's Symphony No.3.

Two books have been central to my research: Clive Brown's extensive and thorough "Classical and Romantic Performing Practice 1750-1900" and Robert Philip's "Performing Music in the Age of Recording," an important source for historic overview of the era of recording.

1.1. Brief biographical background

The following section sketches briefly the conductors, the orchestra, and the work under review.

Herbert von Karajan (born 1908, died 1989) is one of the most famous conductors who ever lived. In 1967, the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra appointed Karajan as its chief conductor - a position he held until 1989. Although his work with the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra was his primary focus throughout this period, he also conducted many other major orchestras all over Europe. Known for his artistic depth, musicality, excellent memory, love for visual and auditory effects and personal charisma, Karajan was one of the most influential musicians throughout the latter half of the 20th Century (Brunner 2001: 366-367).

Claudio Abbado (born in Milan, 1933) is also one of the most well-known conductors of the 20th Century. Abbado has been the chief conductor of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra 1982 - 1985, chief conductor of the London Symphony Orchestra 1979 - 1986, music director of the La Scala opera theater from 1980 to 1986. He was also the successor to Herbert von Karajan at the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra from 1990 to 2002. He is best known for his interpretations of classical, as well as romantic music, but includes also the music of the 20th Century in his repertoire (Greenfield 2001: 5-6).

Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra was founded in 1882. The orchestra has worked with countless famous musicians such as von Bülow, Weingartner, R. Strauss, Mahler, Brahms, Grieg, Nikisch, Furtwängler, Celibidache, Karajan, Bernstein, Abbado, Rattle. The quality of the orchestra places it at the absolute top

of world orchestras (Becker 2001: 369-370).

Symphony No. 1, Op. 21 in C Major. Beethoven finished this symphony in 1800. Understandably, this is not yet a symphony where Beethoven reaches his maturity in writing symphonic music, like he does in his Third Symphony but, at the time, the composer was still able to shock listeners with his new composition. A novel approach was, for example, reflected in his orchestration – the growth of importance of wind instruments (woodwinds continue their emancipation in the composer's later creation). The core of the drama is still classical. Thematic and motivic development continues from the point where Haydn ended with his London symphonies. The length and structure of the symphony are similar to Haydn's and Mozart's late symphonies (Cooper 2008: 96).

1.2. Method of measuring tempos

I have measured all the significant and deliberate tempo changes throughout the first movement of the First Symphony and given the precise tempo markings according to the metronome of Mälzel. To identify a significant tempo change and to measure it, I have used a metronome. A tempo change is considered significant and deliberate, when the tempo increases or decreases at least two scale points on Mälzel's metronome. This I also consider the margin of possible error in my measuring method.

2. Overview of the historical aspects concerning tempo

This chapter introduces various historical aspects of the development of tempo within musical expression.

2.1. Flexibility of tempo and historical approaches

Because of the subjectivity of the matter, it is extremely difficult to assess tempo and its variability objectively. As the impulse to choose a tempo is derived directly from the musical text, it is logical to assume that different persons can feel these impulses differently. Where there is true music-making, there is also a dynamic approach in applying tempos.

The end of the 19th Century offers us for the first time the opportunity to record music. The recordings from those times also provide us with an insight even farther back in music history, since the musicians behind these recordings were born and taught in the second half of the 19th Century. With this, we have indirect insight into the aesthetics and traditions of Schumann, Brahms, Mahler and their contemporaries.

With the arrival of the era of recording, the perception of music and the traditions of performing it changed dramatically. When comparing a recording from the end of the 19th Century to a contemporary recording, we observe that the orchestras today are much more accurate and consistent in playing techniques and tempos.

The possibility to record your performance has offered a retrospective that has fundamentally changed the aesthetics of performing and the overall understanding of music.

This new possibility brought with it some hazards. Technical limitations often set restrictions to durations of performances. This meant that the music and its tempo were sometimes adapted to fit the technical standard. Also, the era of recording drove musicians and orchestras to become more united in sound, execution of articulation, ways of phrasing. The possibility to record and distribute your ideas in music brought about a greater conformity among different countries and orchestras. Recordings started to influence listeners and performers, standards became more unified all over the world.

When choosing a tempo for a piece of music, there are two larger philosophies. A conservative line is maintained by composers and conductors who treat the written score of music literally as the only source of information. Modification of that information is treated with the greatest caution.

In favor of a freer approach, we find composers and conductors who see themselves as artists with greater personal responsibility, whose right to choose tempos for any given music (sometimes within reasonable limits of flexibility, sometimes with immense differences from written tempo markings) is their inalienable right as an interpreter. Personally, I believe that both these approaches can well be transformed into great moments on the stage.

Mendelssohn, Berlioz, Toscanini, Weingartner, Ravel, Stravinsky were among the musicians who diligently observed and demanded a great respect for the author's text and written nuances.

More flexible when choosing tempos were composers and conductors such as Wagner, Elgar, von Bülow, Furtwängler, Mahler, Richard Strauss (Philip 2004: 15-16).

2.2. 19th Century traditions

Carl Czerny and Daniel Gottlieb Türk, two composers contemporary with Beethoven, give us a good insight into the reality of performance practice during the beginning of the 19th Century. These practices were almost certainly known also to Beethoven, and we can imagine that he bore them in mind when he was creating his own works.

Carl Czerny was a pianist and a composer, who was in close relation to Beethoven himself as his student. His statements will therefore provide a particularly good opportunity to look at the traditions of those times.

Below I will describe some situations in which Czerny declared *ritardando* or *rallentando* were used:

1. on the return of the principal subject;
2. in the transition to a different time;
3. in a well marked *crescendo* serving as introduction or wind-up to an important passage;

4. on the *diminuendo* of a quick lively passage;
5. at the end of a trill or cadence (Brown 1999: 386)

Daniel Gottlieb Türk, 19th Century theorist and composer, suggested that *accelerando* could be effective:

1. for the most powerful places, 'in pieces which have a character of vehemence, anger, rage, fury and the like';
2. for single motifs 'which are repeated more powerfully (usually higher)';
3. occasionally 'when gentle feelings are interrupted by a lively passage' (Brown 1999: 379)

He considered that *tardando* (delaying) could produce a telling effect:

1. before certain fermatas 'as if the strength is gradually exhausted';
2. when places 'towards the end of the piece are marked with *diminuendo*, *diluendo*, *smorzando*, and the like' (Brown 1999: 379)

2.3. Introduction to Beethoven's treatment of tempo

Beethoven lived in a time when music was undergoing major changes, not least due to himself. The demise of the classical period and rise of the romantic spirit brought new aesthetics into focus.

Beethoven and his contemporaries started to look for more individual and more specific ways of writing their ideas on paper. Temporal imprecision in the written scores became something with which composers were no longer satisfied.

This dissatisfaction coincided with the invention of a metronome in 1815 by Johann Mälzel which marks a significant moment in the history of music. Perhaps though it was only a matter of time before someone would finalize the idea of measuring tempo with a specific technical device. The importance of the new invention is summarized by Johann Hummel: „To composers, it offers a great advantage, that their compositions when marked according to the degrees of the metronome, will be performed in every country in exactly the same time; and the effect of their works will not now, as formerly, (notwithstanding the most carefully chosen musical terms), be lost by being played in a hurried or retarded movement“ (Brown 1999: 305).

Beethoven was bold in incorporating the newly invented gadget into his composing process. One needs to bear in mind though that since the metronome was invented 1815, all Beethoven's music dated prior to that year was marked with precise tempo indications retrospectively.

Beethoven expressed his attitude towards the tradition of marking the tempos only with different italian words in his letter to publisher Schott. He says that when suggesting tempos, *tempi ordinari* cannot fulfill all his wishes anymore. However, this certainly does not mean that Beethoven neglected italian terms altogether. The terms remained as words expressing Beethoven's wishes when suggesting a character of a movement and continued to be an integral part of Beethoven's markings throughout his life (Fallows 2001: 272).

There was also another, more practical reason for making the scores as precise as possible – publishing. People started to buy increasingly more printed music, to play at home, alone or with friends. The majority of these people were not professional musicians, which meant that they needed all the help they could get when interpreting tempos, dynamics, articulation etc. Understanding these aspects without detailed markings was a natural thing for a professional musician, but for the public, it needed to be made as clear and understandable as possible (Brown 1999: 302-304).

3. Practical analysis of tempo as an interpretive tool

The following is an overview of tempos in the first movement of Beethoven's First Symphony in two different interpretations.

3.1. Measuring the tempos











All the tempos taken by Karajan and Abbado in the first movement of the symphony will be measured. Two DVD recordings constitute the main source for my analysis. Karajan's recording is made in 1983 and Abbado's in 2001.

I have chosen the DVD format over the CD format because of the possibility to observe the conductor's work visually - I can observe and analyze the effect that the music has on the conductor, how it changes his manual technique, facial expressions and general body language.

In the table of tempos, I will include some general descriptions of character, as it appears and/or changes with a specific tempo. This is important as a character is often strongly connected to its tempo or is somehow emphasized with a specific tempo. Also, this gives us a way to observe the kinds of tools the conductor uses to get the required result.

All significant changes in tempo are measured and set into a table. To make the navigation and understanding of the context easier, I will also include the formal context.

3.2. TABLE OF TEMPOS

<p>Bars 1-12.</p> <p>Slow introduction, Beethoven's written tempo mark:  = 88 - <i>Adagio molto</i> (very slow).</p>	<p>Abbado:  =80. Bar 8 – slight slackening of the tempo.</p> <p>The introduction's general meter feels relatively flexible, while in the bars of <i>forte</i> and <i>tenuto</i> Abbado uses even more freedom of tempo when shaping the phrases (bars 1-3, 8 and 10).</p>
	<p>Karajan:  =70. Bar 8 and 10 – slight slackening of the tempo. Bars 5-7 are executed with a steady tempo.</p> <p>The introduction is however, not in a generally steady tempo, in the bars of <i>forte</i> and <i>tenuto</i> (bars 8 and 10), Karajan slows the tempo.</p>
<p>Bars 13-32.</p> <p>The first subject group, first theme. Beethoven's written tempo mark:  =112 - <i>Allegro con brio</i> (quick and lively) <i>alla breve</i>.</p>	<p>A:  =110. Abbado uses a slight hastening of the tempo in the second part of the main theme (bars 15-18).</p> <p>If we analyze the texture, we see, that the musical material is ascending toward a higher register, the articulation is lighter, the orchestration thinner. In bars 13-31 the tempos move between  =104 and  =112. In the faster parts of that section, the character of the music becomes lighter and livelier.</p>
	<p>K:  =88. Very steady tempo in both the long phrases and shorter segments. With the last bars of the first part of the first subject group (bars 31-32), Karajan increases the tempo slightly to lead into the transition.</p>
<p>Bars 33-52.</p> <p>Transition to second subject group.</p>	<p>A:  =110. The tempo moves steadily. A slight hastening of the tempo occurs in bars 41-49 where Beethoven writes <i>staccato</i> articulation. The transition ends with a firm chordal cadence. Here, at this very firm ending of the transition to the second subject, Abbado broadens the tempo slightly to reach the character of the second subject group.</p>
	<p>K:  =92. Tempo is steady. At the cadence (bars 51-52), a small slackening of tempo occurs.</p>

Bars 53-68. Second subject group.	A: ♩ =106. It is a bit slower than his main tempo because of the gentler and more lyrical character of the second subject. Abbado is also somewhat flexible making small changes of tempo inside the phrase. When returning to music with more energy (bars 65-68), we notice a slight hastening of tempo.
	K: ♩ =86-88. Steady second subject group.
Bars 69-76. Transition to the second theme of the second subject group.	A: ♩ =108. Abbado slows the tempo to ♩ =92 (bars 75-78).
	K: ♩ =86-88. Karajan slows the tempo to ♩ =82 (bars 76-80).
Bars 77-87. Second subject group, second theme.	A: ♩ =92. In this section, the melody is more serious, even dark. Abbado chooses a somewhat slower tempo to give more time for the character to evolve. The theme finishes with a slight increase of tempo (bars 85-87) into the principal motive of the main theme.
	K: ♩ =82. As the subject's character is darker and more serious, Karajan also uses a slower tempo. Like Abbado, Karajan also ends the theme with a slight hastening of tempo leading into the principal motive of the main theme in bar 88.
Bars 88-99. Musical material from the first subject group, presented in the dominant key.	A: ♩ =104.
	K: ♩ =86. Almost the tempo of the beginning of the exposition.
Bars 100-109. The closing theme of the exposition,	A: ♩ =104.
	K: ♩ =86 and slight hastening of the tempo to reach the development.
Bars 110-121. Development,	A: ♩ =104.
	K: ♩ =90.

Bars 122-135.	A: ♩ =108 - tempo <i>subito</i> . The musical material is darker and more mysterious, the change of character is even more emphasized with the slight increase of tempo.
	K: ♩ =92.
Bars 136-159. Transition to the next theme.	A: ♩ =106. The tempo is generally steady. In bars 142-143 there is a slight slackening of the tempo to ♩ =102. In bars 144-160, Abbado takes slightly more time at the ends of the phrases (bars 147 and 151). This shifts the musical importance from the beginnings to the ends of the phrases.
	K: ♩ =92. Karajan maintains a firm and steady feeling of meter, one notices only small tempo variations at the ends of the phrases.
Bars 160-177.	A: ♩ =100. The character is dark and powerful (bars 160-172). The transition to the recapitulation, bars 171-178 begins with a steady tempo, then, at the <i>crescendo</i> , the tempo increases slightly to ♩ =104.
	K: ♩ =92. Steady tempo during bars 160-170. During the <i>crescendo</i> (bars 174-177) just before the recapitulation Karajan, like Abbado, increases the tempo somewhat.
Bars 178-205. Recapitulation, bar 178.	A: ♩ =104. This is a section which, in comparison to the parallel section in the exposition, has a growth in the dynamic plan and intensity in sound - the tempo remains yet steady. In the end of this section (bars 204-205), we hear a slight slackening of tempo to ♩ =100.
	K: ♩ =92. Tempo remains steady. Karajan reaches the secondary subject group with a slight slackening of tempo (bars 204-205) to ♩ =88.
Bars 206 - 230. Second subject group, first theme.	A: ♩ =100. Slight slackening of tempo in bars 220-221 and big decrease of tempo in bars 229-231 – the transition to the second secondary theme.
	K: ♩ =88. In bars 224-228, Karajan increases the tempo and then slows it down in bars 229-231. The first half of this phrase is executed with a <i>crescendo</i> and acceleration. The second half of the phrase goes through <i>fortissimo</i> chords, that leads us into <i>subito pianissimo</i> to stress the contrast between the current and upcoming material.

Bars 230-271. Second subject group, second theme. <i>Coda</i> (bar 259).	A: ♩ =92. In bars 238-245, Abbado increases the tempo to ♩ =100. The acceleration continues until the bar 245, although the principal subject group starts already in bar 241. In bar 253, we hear <i>poco meno mosso</i> – the musical material is fragmented, thinner, the articulation lighter. The tempo is somewhat held back and pushed forward again in bars 260-268.
	K: ♩ =92. Tempo is steady, throughout, in both more lyrical (bars 260-268) and more dramatic parts (bars 269-270).
Bars 271-298	A: ♩ =100. In the final bars of the movement (bars 288-298), Abbado continues with the same tempo and makes a <i>poco accelerando</i> to reach the end.
	K: ♩ =90. In bar 277, a small increase of tempo to ♩ =92. Steady tempo until the end of the movement. At the final chords, the dynamic peak of the end, we hear a small broadening of tempo.

4. Summary

Karajan's tempos are generally steady. Tempo changes most often appear when something extraordinary happens in the music - a change in the pace of the music in Karajan's performance is a big event. The long phrases are almost always stable throughout, the only times we experience a change in tempo are at the ends of phrases when a *ritardando* or a *rallentando* appears. Generally, Karajan seems reluctant to make big tempo changes during this movement.

A striking feature in the performance of Karajan is his selection of tempos compared to the markings of the composer. The tempos are generally much slower than Beethoven's markings. The character of music under the baton of Karajan, often feels big, heavy, even massive, slow, with suspended power. The performed dynamics, articulations and other nuances are serving the purpose of making the music sound grand.

Karajan sometimes uses tempo as a tool to emphasize differences in character. Themes that are more serious, darker, sometimes in minor keys, are executed with a slower pace. The second subject group, for instance, has a very different character from the first subject group, and that difference is also brought out with a convincing tempo change. This treatment feels natural, as something required by the music.

During the whole performance, Karajan appears to feel the music in his body. His *accelerandos* and *rallentandos* look very natural. As a conductor with such experience, Karajan knows exactly when to move his hands with greater energy or to diminish his movements to activate a tempo. With the changes of character of the music, his manner of conducting changes. For *rallentandi*, it is not so much a matter of slowing the tempo down, but rather going through a physical metamorphosis to be able to "carry" the melodies that are more sensitive and lyrical. This does not mean that Karajan gives the orchestra a great deal of freedom in tempo, in lyrical themes for instance. Throughout the movement, we feel and see Karajan being very much in command, holding the tempo in every bar.

Even though Karajan's tempos are considerably slower than Beethoven's metronome markings and the character generally heavy, one cannot but admit that the movement is beautifully conducted - with care and sensitivity for the music.

When listening to Abbado's performance, one feels a stronger historically informed perspective. The pacing and more transparent character puts this symphony into a natural context with Beethoven's immediate predecessors Joseph Haydn and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. His chosen tempos are generally not quite as fast as marked in the score by the composer, but the character of the themes and even the smaller segments, still come off as light, active, rich in energy, even fiery (as marked in the score – *con brio*).

Abbado uses light articulation, the character is playful. Tempo changes along with the character and becomes an integral part of the music-making. When the melody becomes more lyrical, Abbado seems to allow the music to find its natural tempo. We can also find many phrases, where the tempo goes faster when moving toward some important part of the form, towards a cadence for instance, or back to the main theme group. Abbado uses a variety of different tempos to create and bring out different characters.

Abbado uses his body language to show the character. When the orchestral texture is wide in range, the dynamic forte and the tempo fast, the conductor opens his hands and lets the orchestra „loose“ – to play with joy and passion on their own. This makes the orchestra feel more independent but also more responsible for whatever is happening. To change a tempo, he takes charge again.

When the *allegro con brio* starts, Abbado shows the tempo and the character and then immediately gives room for the players to execute that character. When the conductor is needed again, Abbado joins, shows the phrase or tempo and again takes a step back. Abbado trusts the orchestra to do the playing and joins just in the moments when he is needed.

We never actually see Abbado keeping the tempo *per se* – the tempo holds itself. This gives him freedom to step back and listen, connect players, give energy or a cue to a section or a soloist.

Abbado's performance seems to be more concerned with getting the right character and finding the natural connections between contrasting sections than establishing some specific tempo.

If we compare the metronome markings written by Beethoven and the tempos chosen by Abbado and Karajan, we see that they can differ significantly. Both conductors use slower tempos than Beethoven's markings. In the *Allegro con brio alla breve* (written tempo mark $\text{♩} = 112$), Karajan chooses tempos between $\text{♩} = 82$ and $\text{♩} = 92$. Abbado's tempos are between $\text{♩} = 92$ and $\text{♩} = 110$.

Even though Karajan uses slower tempos than Abbado, we can see that both conductors treat the tempo as a flexible part of music-making even though Beethoven gives just one tempo mark for the entire *Allegro con brio alla breve*.

The slow introduction with Beethoven's metronome mark ♩=88, is met by Abbado with ♩=80 and Karajan with ♩=72. Again, we find that the conductors have chosen slower general tempos than the tempo mark written in the score. As noted previously, out of many complete recordings of Beethoven's symphonies by Karajan, this version has the slowest general tempo. Indeed the whole cycle with the Philharmonia Orchestra (recordings dated from 1951-1955) executes tempos much closer to the written tempo markings.

It should also be noted, that the orchestras are slightly different in size. Karajan's orchestra is somewhat bigger, there are about 10 more string players. This does not make a huge difference, but it adds heaviness and thickness to the sound of the orchestra.

Another important aspect to consider is the difference in age between the two conductors. Abbado is 25 years younger than Karajan - some would say, that this is already a difference of a generation. This means different environment, teachers and ideas - for instance the emergence of historically informed performance practice in the 1960's that totally reshaped the music written before the 20th Century.

The emergence of such conductors and musicians like Frans Brüggen, Nikolaus Harnoncourt, Sir Roger Norrington, Philippe Herreweghe and others brought out the idea that the music written before the 20th Century should be performed as close to the original performance as possible. The performer should try to understand the aesthetic criteria of the time when the specific music was written, but also search for detailed information about the style of phrasing, articulation, instruments used and instrumentation in general of the period in question.

These conductors dug deep into the historical evidence - for instance written descriptions of music as it was performed during the time of Johann Sebastian Bach or Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. This kind of attitude towards analyzing and performing music led to wider acknowledgement of such treatment in general. Some aspects, like the reemergence and usage of historically authentic instruments, have often been left to music groups specializing in the performance of such music. Historically correct styles of articulation and phrasing have, however, been widely accepted by most contemporary performers even when modern instruments were used.

When this historically informed consciousness emerged at the beginning of 1960's, Karajan was a world famous, established conductor soon about to be named as the chief conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. Karajan's aesthetic background was already settled, connected to conductors such as Wilhelm Furtwängler, Otto Klemperer, Karl Böhm. One finds many similarities between the recordings of these gentlemen - rather slow tempos, long phrases, continuous vibrato in string sections, strong and sometimes even doubled wind sections. As we can hear and see in the performance in question, Karajan was very much a successor to these aesthetic principles.

Abbado on the other hand, was in his early 30's when historically informed performance practice started to reshape classical music. This influence is, in my opinion, clearly audible in his interpretation of Beethoven's symphonies.

Both recordings were made relatively late in their careers - Karajan was 75 and Abbado 68 years old, so we might look at these performances as a summary of lifelong work as conductor and musician.

Personally I prefer Abbado's interpretation to Karajan's. If one considers an energetic, even passionate group of musicians playing freely and with the conductor's complete trust a good way to make music, then this vibrant recording would come very close to meeting all these criteria. With Karajan, everything is under the control of one person whereas, with Abbado, the music is the master. This liveliness and energy are the most impressive aspects of Abbado's performance.

The process of finding the right tempo is difficult to explain rationally. Sometimes the tempo of a piece of music becomes clear just at the very last stage of preparation. Sometimes it might take years of trying and experimenting with different *tempi*. Sometimes, after all the trouble and hesitation, one still feels uncertain about some parts of it.

For obvious reasons, it is easier for a smaller group or for an individual musician to form his or her ideas. A larger group of people has more of everything - opinions, ways of thinking, ways of understanding, even ways of hearing music. This makes it even more impressive to see large groups of people communicating non-verbally, being open to different ideas from different individuals in the group, and being flexible as a unit to planned and spontaneous tempo changes.

It seems sometimes that Karajan does not allow his orchestra to think on its own and does not expect them to be clever or imaginative. With Abbado, this seems to be the starting point! Perhaps this is the main difference between the two maestros.

Generalizations are always subjective and are not the focal point of this work. I have simply attempted to move a bit closer to a better understanding of these two, world-famous conductors.

5.Sources

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