

Beethoven Symphony 9

1st Movement

Tempo. Beethoven's marking of crotchet = 88 or thereabouts gives a fantastic mix of power and drive. Why play it slower?

1. 1st Movement: Bars 1-4

It is worth knowing that the opening section is in four phrases of four bars each. The violins therefore play onto the 3rd bar of the phrase, the violas and basses onto the 1st. Perhaps the conductor can indicate a slightly different amount of weight to each.



2. 1st Movement: Bars 17f

Beethoven has become much more prescriptive with his notation than composers from just a generation before. Here I believe he wants sustain through the double dotted notes. Later on (439ff) he inserts a rest when he wants the common 18th century effect of a gap between the notes.



3. 1st Movement: Bars 63f

Beethoven loves throwing in syncopations. That's is what he does here by slurring across the beat. Here it is just the second violin part, but sometimes the whole orchestra does it resulting in a complete void of on the beat accentuation. In other words slightly accent the start of each slur.



4. 1st Movement: Bars 66f

Beethoven's use of the markings *f* and *sf* is not at all straightforward. Often a row of *f* markings indicates a row of accents, although in other places it is a row of *sf* markings. And sometimes, as here, you get the two simultaneously, surely meaning the same in each part.



5. 1st Movement: Bar 81

Often this quaver is played short disturbing the lyrical nature of the intertwining woodwind solos. If played long - i.e. leaned on rather than hit - the melodic line is preserved.



6. 1st Movement: Bars 194-6

Each time this woodwind phrase comes the *ritard* is clearly marked only on the final beat, and the *a tempo* on the next downbeat. No need to make a meal out of it!



7. 1st Movement: Bars 515f

The funeral march like coda is often played quite a bit slower than the rest of the movement, with no good reason that I can see. Also it juxtaposes semiquavers and demisemiquavers. There is no need to align these as there is sometimes in earlier music.



2nd Movement

Tempo. This movement is often taken in the vicinity of Beethoven's marking, giving the lie to suggestions that his metronome was faulty (more of this in the 4th movement).

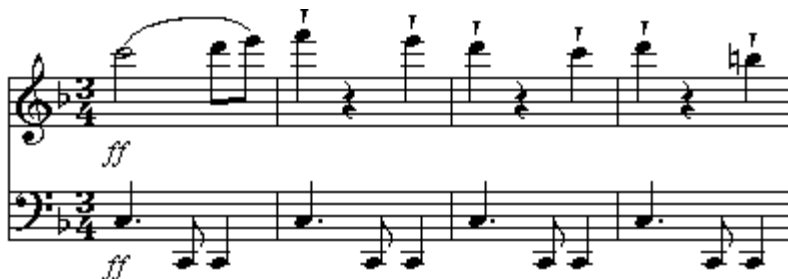
8. 2nd Movement

This movement is in phrases predominantly of 4 bars length. It's worth thinking in these phrases, so that in the following example (the bass and timpani parts for the first two phrases) the two blank bars are counted as a "3, 4" into the next phrase. This is also the clue to safely counting the empty bars at 147ff - the woodwind end on bar 1 of a phrase and then we need to count "2, 3, 4". Note also Beethoven's unusual timpani tuning of Fs an octave apart. And a comment on the rhythm. It's worth practising it without the (in the fast 3/4 tempo), and then adding the quaver back in without disturbing the position of the crotchet. Try it!



9. 2nd Movement: Bars 93-96

Here there is a potential problem of balance between the strings (all playing the lower part) and the woodwind (upper part). Some conductors have 'solved' this by writing the woodwind part into the horns. But providing the strings make their fortissimo one of precise rhythm and less of sheer volume, and that the woodwind play they're loudest, it should be fine. '*Schalltrichter auf*' anyone?



10. 2nd Movement: Bars 288-291

Use of *f* as an accent. Often these bars sound no different to the ones that precede, so these accents need working at! Occurs in a number of other places.



11. 2nd Movement: Bar 404-414

A real tempo problem. The stringendo begins at dotted minim = 116 and lasts for 8 bars. The tempo marking at 412 is unclear. It is usually rendered as minim 116 again. But the brakes will suddenly have to go on and the stringendo will seem somewhat pointless! If (as has been suggested) the unit should be the semibreve then the stringendo will have to be very extreme to fit. Neither really works. Jonathan del Mar's suggestion that Beethoven intended the mark to be minim at 160 (116 and 160 sound very similar in German too) is the best solution I've come across.

The image shows a musical score for two staves. The first staff is in 3/4 time and contains the tempo marking 'stringendo il tempo' and a 'cresc.' dynamic marking. The second staff continues the music and is marked 'presto' with dynamic markings of 'ff', 'f', 'f', 'f', and 'f'.

12. 2nd Movement: Bar 503-506

Sometimes Beethoven marks something like two minims of the same pitch in a bar with a tie where it appears he wants a semibreve. Here, however, it seems clear he wants to hear pulsed minims.

The image shows a musical score for two staves in 3/4 time. The first staff has a dynamic marking of 'f' and the second staff has a dynamic marking of 'f' and a 'dimin.' marking.

3rd Movement

Tempo. Norman Del Mar said of this movement "Crotchet = 60 makes no kind of sense, being almost exactly twice too fast". Leonard Bernstein would have agreed, as he manages crotchet = 25 in his famous concert after the fall of the Berlin Wall! At these sorts of speeds the music virtually ceases to move - and the pulse has to change from crotchet to quaver. Why do so many revere this symphony yet utterly disregard Beethoven's instructions? I wouldn't advocate a slavish following of the metronome marks under all circumstances (see my introduction for further thoughts on that), but differences of this order create an almost different piece of music.

13. 3rd Movement: Bars 3-6

Because this is a familiar tune it's easy to miss the unexpected hairpins in the final bar. This happens in the second phrase also.

The image shows a musical score for one staff in 3/4 time. The tempo marking 'mezza voce' is present.

14. 3rd Movement: Bars 25-27

The beginning of each bar should here sound like an appoggiatura and resolution (i.e. with a little weight on the quaver and a little less on the crotchet). But the length of the crotchet needs maintaining or the melodic line is lost.



15. 3rd Movement: 150f

Ritardandos are done in many places in this movement, some rather unnecessarily interrupting the flow. Certainly it is much easier to get these 1st violins triplets together if there is no rit beforehand.



16. 4th Movement: Bars 8-16

After the arresting opening fanfare we get the following outburst from the cello and bass sections (there are six such sections in all):



Usually this is done at a considerably slower tempo. But I want to suggest the Beethoven intended the speed to remain pretty much the same.

1. Beethoven's instruction translates as "With the character of a recitative, but in tempo." Often it is said that this is contradictory because a recitative is, by nature, not 'in tempo'. But it is only a contradiction if that is thought to be the *only* characteristic of a recitative. The instruction 'in tempo' cannot be clearer.
2. Beethoven is quite capable of writing instructions for playing around with the tempo when he wants it, as at the end of the third 'outburst' where he puts 'ritard' and 'poco adagio'.
3. The 3rd, 4th, 5th, and 6th outbursts are all marked 'Tempo I' which must refer to the Presto at the beginning of the movement.
4. When the solo voice enters at bar 216 with a very similar line to the one shown above the instruction is simply 'Recitativo'. Here the normal flow of tempo is suspended, as expected in a standard recitative.

I am not suggesting that these passages should be metronomic, but that they should have a basic pulse related to the Presto of the fanfares.

One reason this last movement often seems hard to get to grips with is its fragmentary nature (that is why, I believe, there is a good number of people who don't like this movement). A by-product of not pulling the tempo around is that the music 'hangs together' better for the listener - at least to my ears it does!

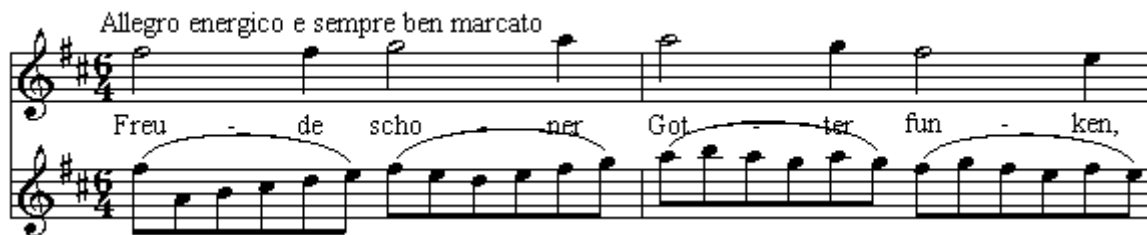
17. 4th Movement: Bars 331ff

In this section in Bb with the tenor solo there is again a question as to what speed Beethoven intended. The marking of 84 has been ascribed to a dotted crotchet until recently when further research has suggested it should be to a dotted minim. Whilst this seems the most likely, it does make it very fast and rather more difficult! Try it in different ways before deciding what is best. In the long fugal section after the voices have finished the main theme needs to be brought out:



18. 4th Movement: Bars 655ff

Again a tempo issue. Here most people play considerably faster than the marking (again showing that Beethoven's metronome wasn't wonky - you can't suggest it was too slow some of the time and too fast some of the time ...). If done at around the marked speed it becomes possible for the strings to play all their notes (and for some of the cello/bass ones to be heard!). However this will add to potential strain on the high notes in the choir (especially the sopranos) and so a compromise on the tempo may be necessary. Or discover how to get the choir to sing high without straining - it can be done!



19. 4th Movement: Bars 916-919

Even a conductor professing such as Zinman who professes to follow Beethoven's tempo markings doesn't attempt the marking here (crotchet = 60). Why? It's wonderful if you do!

