

CONDUCTING FAST TEMPOS*

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Abstract

This module discusses the problems presented to a conductor by fast tempos. Suggestions are given for approaching fast tempos in several meters.

1 FAST TEMPOS

Fast tempos create situations when the patterns previously mentioned must be modified. A fast two will become nothing more than a one beat. A moderately fast tempo in a three meter may prevent a conductor from conveying all three beats comfortably. In these instances, the second and third beats may be implied by a rounded gesture after the downbeat. A very fast three meter will be conducted in one. Fast tempos in four will be conducted in two unless the tempo is so extremely fast that even a two pattern is impossible.

$5/4$ or $5/8$ at a fast tempo will be conducted in a modified two pattern with either beat extended to incorporate the extra quarter or eighth note of the five-beat meter. $7/4$ or $7/8$ at a fast tempo will be conducted in a modified three pattern. Again, any one of three beats will be modified to incorporate the extra quarter or eighth note of the seven-beat meter.

There are times when a conductor will question whether he should be conducting in two instead of four, for instance, or in one instead of three. Sometimes a tempo will seem to be too fast to conduct in three, but slightly too slow to conduct in one without losing control over beats two and three. There is never one simple answer for these questions. Each example must be dealt with on its own merits. The following questions can be asked, however, to aid a conductor in making the best decision for his ensemble.

1. If all the beats are given, will the gestures add undesirable "punch" to the piece?
2. What pattern will best convey the musical qualities of the music and be clearest to the ensemble?
3. What pattern (which gestures) will best control the rhythm?

There is a marked difference in a piece that must have the rhythmic feeling of two rather than four. Conductors must look "inside" the score to determine these situations.

Works that contain fast tempo conducting problems:

1. *Liebeslieder*, op. 65, Brahms, Lawson-Gould
2. *Hodie Christus Natus Est*, Willan, Carl Fischer, #A-575
3. *Glory to God*, Randall Thompson, E. C. Schirmer #2470
4. "This Little Babe" from *Ceremony of Carols*, Britten, Boosey and Hawkes
5. *The Lamentations of Jeremiah*, Ginastera, Mercury Music Corporation, #MC-103
6. *Praise Ye the Lord*, Fetler, G. Schirmer, Inc.

*Version 1.1: Mar 20, 2009 8:30 am -0500

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