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Review: Resisting the Ninth

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Performers and Instruments

Resisting the Ninth

RICHARD TARUSKIN

Beethoven, Symphony No. 9 in D Minor, op. 125, performed by Yvonne Kenny, soprano; Sarah Walker, mezzo; Patrick Power, tenor; Petteri Salomaa, bass; The Schütz Choir of London; The London Classical Players; Roger Norrington, conductor (EMI CDC 7 49221 2).

Something that used to puzzle fans who listened to the souvenir recordings of the old Hoffnung Music Festivals without having attended them was the extra roar of laughter that would swell up during the applause at the conclusion of each travesty. It was the response to a favorite sight gag: the conductor would customarily leap off the podium and bound over to shake the kettledrummer's hand instead of the concertmaster's. And that is just what I felt like doing after hearing this extraordinary recent recording of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. Always something of a timpani concerto among symphonies—besides the famous solos in the Scherzo there is the horripilating tattoo that all but drowns out the first movement recapitulation, the confiding exchanges with the cellos and basses in the third movement coda, the shimmering roll that supports the most visionary moment in the finale, and much besides—the Ninth is enhanced immeasurably on this occasion by the stupendous playing of Robert Howes and the superbly responsive instrument on which he deploys his sticks.

Nor is Howes the only London Classical Player one wants to single out for special thanks. There is the fourth hornist whose perfectly pitched, beautifully phrased solo in the Adagio makes one almost regret the invention of the valve-horn, whose even tone robs the famous C \flat -major scale of so much of its otherworldly quality, a quality that—as Berlioz always claimed, and as one is now persuaded—Beethoven cannily planned the stopped tones to produce. (I cannot name the player because the roster lists five hornists; there must have been some subbing at the sessions.) There are the cellos and basses (in equal numbers!), led respectively by Susan Sheppard and Barry Guy, who make such an unforgettable assertion—“*mais in Tempo*,” as Beethoven wanted it!—out of the recitatives at the beginning of the finale, and then settle down into the most happily poised, least hortatory or sentimental enunciation of the Joy-theme you'll ever want to hear. The second time around they are joined by the warm and brotherly bassoon of Felix Warnock and well seconded in the vocal exposition by a young Finnish baritone named Petteri Salomaa. Nor would it do to pass over concertmaster John Holloway and his first fiddles, who execute with such breathtaking precision the figurations in the Adagio, made more challenging than ever by the unheard of tempo.

But then, all the members of this extraordinary band of sixty-five deserve to have their hands clasped and their backs slapped for their

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contributions to this outstanding enterprise, as do the remaining vocal soloists and, certainly not least, the fifty singers in the Schütz Choir of London. Among their names one recognizes many a familiar English Early Music chorister, but the sound here is as far as may be imagined from the cathedral-tot timbre normally associated with the various groups of Clerkes and Scholars from which they hail. (I have actually been hearing a bit of grumbling about this, which astonishes me; but never fear, those who would prefer countertenors and ephebe-impersonators in the chorus and coryphées from Count Dracula's Hofkapelle have probably only to wait until the other Early-Music Beethoven traversals currently in progress get around to the Ninth.) The singing and playing are so ardently committed, so imbued with mission and with risk, and yet withal so deucedly *accomplished*, as to put this recording (along with its predecessors in the series) in a class by itself, and not only among period instrument endeavors.

Finally, there is the mastermind behind it all, Roger Norrington, about whom I have already written admiringly and at length ("Beethoven: The New Antiquity," in *Opus*, October 1987). His outstanding virtues are in evidence again, particularly what I have called his inspired literalism—meaning his conviction that Beethoven's tempi and expression markings are not something applied to the notes and rests as a mere suggestion for interpretation, but an essential aspect of the musical thought—and his gift for finding sounds to fit the signs and then molding the performance into a vividly imagined and projected *Gestalt* that takes shape in the ear's mind and lives thereafter in the ear's memory as a compelling representation of a masterpiece's unique sonic profile: its "true content," as Heinrich Schenker would have called it.

I will give one example of this from the Ninth to stand for many. After the first great unison statement of the theme as it finally coalesces at the beginning of the first movement, there is a rising scalewise continuation from the tonic D to B \flat , the pitch that will function, unconventionally, as alternate tone center for this movement (and later, as primary center for the Adagio). The notes of this ascent, all marked

sforzando, are notated very strangely: as dotted eighths separated by sixteenth-rests. Most performers of the piece will notice the *sf* marking here, and articulate the passage with strong detached accents, separated by those effective rhetorical pauses known as *Luftpausen*. Norrington has realized that the strange rhythmic articulation, which recurs elsewhere in the movement in other dynamic contexts, is in fact *thematic*, and must be given a very distinctive sound in performance. So he has the players sustain the intensity of the *sf* through the full written value of the notes, and then very precisely measure off the exact length of the rest. The effect is very halting and ungainly—the musical equivalent, perhaps, of a wheeze. However we choose to interpret it, though, we certainly recognize it (as in other performances we do not) on each of its returns, no matter what the local dynamic level or melodic contour, and through it we recognize that all passages so marked are related in some important way, whether we wish to call the relationship structural or affective (if, indeed, a distinction is called for). The most striking instances of this thematic recurrence are at m. 196 and again at mm. 214–17 in the development section, where they are preceded by the most exquisitely calibrated transitions in the winds from staccatos, through slurred staccatos (the latter coinciding with a rarity in Beethoven's instrumental music—an expressly marked ritard), to the "wheeze" itself. While other conductors may fairly claim to have been attentive to the subtle differences in Beethoven's markings, only Norrington so consistently comes up with such distinctive and easily recognizable sound-analogs to each notational idiosyncrasy or nuance. It is his special genius.

All of which is so much more vital and important than mere historical verisimilitude—as (I would have thought) would be as obvious to Norrington as it is to me—that I find it quite confounding and disappointing to read sentences redolent of the usual earlie-musicke cant over Norrington's signature in the notes:

In this series we aim to recreate these past masterpieces, not according to recent interpretative tradition, but by the traditions of the early nineteenth century. In this way, paradoxically, we are sure that they will speak to us more vividly today. In particular

we want to restore the Ninth Symphony to the humane, quicksilver thought-world of the Classical Period, whose greatest progeny it is.

Alas, this is Judge Bork stuff. And I will only stage a confirmation hearing to the extent of pointing out that the Classical Period was something Beethoven never heard of (it being a fictive term and concept produced by Romantic historiography); that the "humane, quicksilver thought world" Norrington very successfully evokes in this performance is something he has created according to his own interpretative

lights—by far the most "recent interpretive tradition" around today!—and is in no demonstrable sense a restoration; and that therefore there is no paradox. Norrington is doing what important interpreters have always done (quite often, as here, with a palliating smokescreen of restoration), namely, recasting tradition in contemporary terms and according to contemporary taste. The ostensibly restorative element in his performances is really what I have called his literalism; and scrupulous literalism in matters of art and interpretation, as well as the "wit and humor" that Norrington goes on to describe as

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RECORDINGS CITED FOR COMPARISON

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- Karajan 1962. Gundula Janowitz, soprano; Hilde Rössl-Majdan, contralto; Waldemar Kmentt, tenor; Walter Berry, baritone; Vienna Singverein (dir. R. Schmid); Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra. DEUTSCHE GRAMMOPHON 2534349
- Klemperer ca. 1960. Aase Nordmo Lövberg, soprano; Christa Ludwig, mezzo; Waldemar Kmentt, tenor; Hans Hotter, baritone; Philharmonia Chorus (dir. W. Pitz); Philharmonia Orchestra. ANGEL AE-34428
- Leibowitz 1961. Inge Borkh, soprano; Ruth Siewert, contralto; Richard Lewis, tenor; Ludwig Weber, bass; Beecham Choral Society; Royal Philharmonic Orchestra. READERS DIGEST RDS-34
- Toscanini 1952. Eileen Farrell, soprano; Nan Merriman, mezzo; Jan Peerce, tenor; Norman Scott, baritone; Robert Shaw Chorale (dir. R. Shaw); NBC Symphony Orchestra. RCA VICTROLA 1607
- Walter 1957. Frances Yeend, soprano; Martha Lipton, mezzo; David Lloyd, tenor; Mack Harrell, baritone; Westminster Choir (dir. J. F. Williamson). COLUMBIA ODYSSEY 32160322E

“classical traits,” are really quintessential components of the modernist viewpoint. They serve the cause of aesthetic distancing, and as such actually run counter, I believe, to the impulse that produced the Ninth. But that need bother us only if we accept Norrington’s contention that his work embodies “the known intentions of the composer.” It does not, for it cannot, beyond matters that may be expressed as quantities.

II

These matters, and Norrington’s well-advertised compliance with them, are the most obviously newsworthy features of this performance, and they have already been much discussed—and rather misleadingly—in print. Because Norrington has built his interpretive approach around fidelity to Beethoven’s notorious metronome markings, he has acquired a reputation as the fastest Beethoven conductor in the West. One reviewer has elaborately contrasted Norrington’s rendition with the monumental performance conducted by Wilhelm Furtwängler on the occasion of the postwar reopening of the Bayreuth Festival in 1951—an occasion that, fraught with countless cultural, political, and plain emotional overtones, must have told mightily on the rendition. Here is his report, quoted from the music page of the Sunday *New York Times* for 7 February 1988:

Furtwängler[’s] is much, much slower. It can’t help being slower. Its instruments have greater weight. Today’s strings need more time to accelerate past this downward pull of gravity; modern brass sound has more brilliance, more resonating power, requiring a certain space between it and our ears.

Mr. Norrington’s tempos dance lightly because they can—they bear less burden. Lessened gravity frees them. Because ancient instruments retain sound with relative difficulty, our ears must hurry before the sound goes away. . . .

Furtwängler, for all his outmoded modernity—his progressive incorrectness—advises us that the past exists only as we think of it right now. . . . Mr. Norrington’s wonderful musicians and their ardent explorations of history argue eloquently in a different direction.

It is a feat to get so much so wrong in so little space. Furtwängler, to begin with, was as dubious a representative of “modernity” in 1951 as he is today. On the contrary, his performances

preserved in aspic a century-old tradition of Beethoven interpretation that went back precisely to the great figure the Bayreuth Festival worships. This was no secret in 1951; indeed that anachronistic link with Wagner was precisely what made Furtwängler indispensable to the occasion his performance celebrated, and he surely did all he could, in the event, to emphasize it. His, not Norrington’s, is the voice of history.

But beyond that, a careful hearing of his rendition alongside Norrington’s will show just the opposite of what the *Times* reviewer attempted to prove. The Wagnerian gravity of Furtwängler’s performance had nothing to do with the instruments being used, except insofar as the tone color, particularly of the brasses, revealed the Ninth’s Wagnerian affinities: the first movement recap is pure *Dutchman*, and there is an unforgettable glimpse of *Götterdämmerung* in the finale (mm. 193–98), due not only to tone color but to a massive accelerando. His tempi are eternally in flux, accelerating and decelerating in great waves that often pass Norrington’s steady paces in both directions, though the point of departure is usually—and necessarily, given the propensity to fluctuate—much slower. The essential difference between the two is not a matter of speed as such, but one of Norrington’s Apollonian regularity (an artifact of the twentieth century and only of it) versus Furtwängler’s variability, amounting at times to climaxes of truly Bacchic frenzy. Just listen to him lead his elephantine “modern” band through the last Prestissimo of the finale (mm. 920ff.), where Norrington—who has calibrated his tempo (half note = 146) to build on the previous Prestissimo (m. 851), marked by Beethoven at half note = 132—is actually the slowest on record (cf. Klemperer, the previous record-holder, at 150). Furtwängler is by far the fastest, and keeps getting faster. By the end of the movement he has broken 200, and left my metronome behind in the dust.

So please, let there be no more uninformed, deterministic talk about period instruments and their magical power to make a performance all by themselves. Such talk is evasive and simplistic at best, destructive of all judgement and values at worst. Nor, as we have already seen, are Norrington’s (that is, Beethoven’s) tempi uniformly faster than the norm.

The only tempo, in fact, that will surprise the knowledgeable listener with its quickness is that of the third movement, the *Adagio molto e cantabile*, where the Wagnerian tradition, to which even Toscanini bowed in this instance, established itself somewhere between one-half and two-thirds of the rate Beethoven indicated. (A breakdown: Beethoven marked the initial value of the quarter note at 60—i.e., one a second; Furtwängler begins at 30 and actually decelerates from there; Walter's basic pulse is 35; Karajan's is 38; Klemperer's is unexpectedly the fastest among traditionalists—he moves around between 39 and 46; while Toscanini, no iconoclast this time, hovers around 40 with many leaps and dips.) Norrington is just shy of Beethoven's mark around 58 (René Leibowitz had set the previous modernist benchmark at 52), though he is forced to slacken the heavily embellished second variation to around 50 to accommodate the first violins' triplet sixteenths and thirty-seconds. Which puts him not so far ahead of his faster predecessors.

Norrington's basic tempo for the first movement, held pretty steady throughout at quarter note = 80–82, is a good notch slower than the 88 Beethoven marked, and also slower than Leibowitz (ca. 90) and even Walter (ca. 84). Furtwängler begins this movement as if it were *Das Rheingold*, with a tempo under 50; but one of his Dionysiac lunges in the recapitulation (the dozen bars before letter P) actually brings him up into the 80s, past Norrington, though by letter Q (the famous horn solo) he has subsided to 67, and by the coda (the equally famous chromatic dead march *ostinato*) he is back in the 50s, where he remains. His notion of proper tempo, obviously, is a function of his affective reading of the music—something that was *de rigueur* in the late nineteenth century, *verboten* in the late twentieth. As to the early nineteenth century, the period of the symphony, *vide infra*.

In the Scherzo, Norrington and Furtwängler begin, *mirabile dictu*, at the same tempo (full measure = 117–20), which is just a mite faster than the one indicated by Beethoven (116) and quite a bit slower than Toscanini at 124, Leibowitz at 130, and Karajan at 131 (Klemperer lumbers egregiously at 102). Norrington holds fast to his initial pace, while Furtwängler is all over the map (the steadier the rhythmic writing, the faster his tempo; he hits a peak of 123 around letter A). That Norrington, for all his touted dependence on the markings, is not slavish or pedantic about them, is evident in the second half of the Scherzo, where he (again like Furtwängler) sets the *Ritmo de tre battute* slower than the opening and accelerates from there, regaining his original tempo at the return of the *Ritmo di quattro*.

The Trio is another newsmaker—but for its slowness. Alone in the field, Norrington accepts Beethoven's marking (half note = 116 in cut time) as valid. Everyone else, following tradition, rejects it as an error: for how could Beethoven have intended a *Presto* following a *stringendo* to revert to the tempo of his initial *Molto vivace*—indeed, to sound slower,

since there is now twice as much time between downbeats as before? Even Klemperer is faster than Norrington here, as is Furtwängler, and—by a wide margin—Toscanini (150–60), Karajan (152), and Walter (156). As for Leibowitz, he evidently believed that the intended mark was whole note (i.e., full measure) = 116—against the plain physical evidence of Beethoven's manuscript, available in published facsimile since 1924. Trying valiantly for what was clearly impossible, he ended up at half note = 180. That the result sounded ridiculous in its flat contradiction of Beethoven's pastoral imagery did not deter him in his quest for literal authenticity. (I should add that by the time the horns get their turn at the trio tune, Klemperer, having slackened to 96, manages to snatch the slowness trophy from Norrington.)

All of Norrington's departures from the range of the familiar in the finale are in the direction of moderation where others take things to extremes. Some are radical. The *Alla Marcia* variation (m. 331) and the entire double fugue that follows are taken at tempi chosen to accord with Beethoven's setting for the *Allegro assai vivace* (dotted quarter = 84). Norrington is not really that close to Beethoven, in fact, but at 94 for the *Alla Marcia* and 100–02 for the fugue, he is far slower than anyone else on record, especially Furtwängler, who is again the fastest (130; 140), and gets faster as he approaches the choral outburst at letter M, although not without a radical dip (to 90) to reflect the brief harmonic shift toward the minor mode that sets off the climax. At letter M Norrington is slower than his slowest rival (who else but Klemperer?) by a good twenty-five points on the metronome (101 vs. 126). Furtwängler, at 137, is bested at the other extreme only by Toscanini's furious 191. There has been no mark to indicate any tempo change from Beethoven, incidentally, since the 84 at the *Alla Marcia*.

At the *Andante maestoso* ("Seid umschlungen, Millionen . . ."), all those who had been careering in the 120s and 130s come to a virtual standstill, with those commonly perceived antipodes, Toscanini and Furtwängler again tied at the lower extreme (ca. 56 to the half note). Norrington is exactly at Beethoven's indicated tempo (72), which puts him alone on the opposite end. Thus Toscanini's tempo contrast covers 135 points on the metronome, Norrington's a mere 29. At the ensuing *Adagio* ("Thr stürzt nieder, Millionen?"), where everyone else's tempo congeals into the forties, Norrington (at half note = 56) is again alone out front at a tempo close to Beethoven's indication (60).

With the second double fugue (*Allegro energico*, dotted half note = 84), it's a whole new horse race. Now Norrington is at the rear, at 90, and Furtwängler is in a frenzy at 115. When Beethoven jacks the tempo up to half note = 120 for the coda, Norrington again tracks him closely, which puts him briefly ahead of the pack (only Toscanini is faster, at 123); Furtwängler and Walter start slowly—Walter all the way back to 94—but accelerate madly so that they

can slam into the Poco adagio at m. 810 like two tons of bricks. Norrington barely breaks stride and resumes the same tempo as before when Beethoven marks Tempo I at m. 814. Furtwängler continues to apply the whip here, passing Norrington and Toscanini by the time the next Poco adagio is reached (the one for the soloists at m. 832; Norrington's quartet must have blessed him for relaxing so little). From then on it's Prestissimo al fine, with Furtwängler achieving lift-off as noted, except for the Maestoso at m. 916, where Norrington keeps close to Beethoven's marking (quarter = 60), and Furtwängler skates clear off the metronome at the other end, with a tempo below 30.

The surprising upshot of this comparison is that Norrington's finale is the safest and sanest (humanest and quicksilverest?), while Furtwängler's apparently lives by the precept that anything is all right if it is enough so. That was Wagner's philosophy, too, where conducting Beethoven was concerned. And, though we will never know what Beethoven would have made of Norrington's performance, we can be sure that Wagner would have detested it. It is in light of the Wagnerian tradition, and nothing more recent than that, that Norrington's performance is "revisionist."

But that is not where its virtue lies. I have given all the foregoing figures just to set the factual record straight and clear the air of misconceptions, not because the tempi, any more than the instruments, will automatically make the performance great or authentic. Having chosen our tempi we still have to make the performance. And though it is easy enough to say that we are rejecting the nineteenth century in favor of the eighteenth (Stravinsky said it, after all, some six or seven decades ago), "eighteenth" here is only a stand-in for "twentieth," since the twentieth century is the one that has always loved to wear masks, and still does.

So what shall we make of the twentieth-century viewpoint on the Ninth, insofar as Norrington's performance represents it? Full of admiration as I am for the execution per se, grateful as I am for a rendition so novel and provocative that it has forced me to think harder about the piece than ever before, still I find I cannot simply give myself up to it, as I was so happy to do in the case of Norrington's previous recording. And I think I know why.

III

For a century and a half and more now, Beethoven's "Symphonie mit Schluss-chor über

Schiller's Ode: 'An die Freude' " has surely been the most strenuously resisted masterpiece in the canon of symphonic music. Immediately notorious, it was received with skepticism wherever it was performed in the early years of its existence, as Robin Wallace has shown in his fascinating documentary study, *Beethoven's Critics*, which traces the reception of Beethoven's music during the composer's lifetime and for a short time thereafter. Throughout the nineteenth century, hostile voices continued to be raised against it. For Louis Spohr, who had known Beethoven in Vienna in his youth, and played under his baton, the Ninth was a monstrosity that could only be explained in terms of its creator's deafness:

His constant endeavor to be original and to open new paths, could no longer as formerly, be preserved from error by the guidance of the ear. Was it then to be wondered at that his works became more and more eccentric, unconnected, and incomprehensible? . . . Yes! I must even reckon the much admired Ninth Symphony among them, the three first movements of which, in spite of some solitary flashes of genius, are to me worse than all of the eight previous Symphonies, the fourth movement of which is in my opinion so monstrous and tasteless, and in its grasp of Schiller's Ode so trivial, that I cannot even now understand how a genius like Beethoven's could have written it. I find in it another proof of what I already remarked in Vienna, that Beethoven was wanting in aesthetical feeling and in a sense of the beautiful.

For Fanny Mendelssohn, who heard it under her brother's direction on its Düsseldorf premiere in 1836, the symphony was "so grand and in parts so abominable, as only the work of the greatest composer could be, . . . a gigantic tragedy with a conclusion meant to be dithyrambic, but falling from its height into the opposite extreme—into burlesque." It was the Ninth that gave maximum credence to the complaint confided by the nineteen-year-old Schubert to his diary against "that eccentricity [of Beethoven's] which joins and confuses the tragic with the comic, the agreeable with the repulsive, heroism with howlings and the holiest with harlequinades."

The only nineteenth-century musicians who embraced the Ninth without reservation were those whose own aesthetic program it could seem to validate. This brings us back to Wagner, of course, for whom the Ninth sounded the death knell of "pure music" and finished off the symphony as a viable independent genre. "The

last symphony of Beethoven," Wagner wrote, outlining his vision of *The Art Work of the Future*, "is the redemption of Music from out her own peculiar element into the realm of *universal art*"—and this, of course, by the incorporation of The Word in the guise of its *Schlusschor*. "It is the human evangel of the art of the future"—that is, of Wagner's art. "Beyond it no forward step is possible," within the realm of instrumental music, "for upon it the perfect artwork of the future alone can follow, the *universal drama* to which Beethoven had forged the key." A classic co-optation, this.

The contention that the Ninth represented the summit of Beethoven's art or that it embodied the inexorable will of History only intensified the backlash against it, even—or above all—among those who acknowledged its greatness. "Do not search for the abnormal in him," Schumann had preached to Beethoven's devotees. "Do not illustrate his genius with the Ninth Symphony alone, no matter how great its audacity and scope." It was Brahms, of course, who made the most pointed critique of the Ninth along these lines with his famous near-quotation of its choral theme in the finale of his own First Symphony in 1876. This was no simple homage or oath of fealty such as one finds in so many late nineteenth-century symphonies (e.g., by Franck, Bruckner, Mahler), which chiefly resonate with involuntary echoes of Beethoven's first movement. By bringing the choral theme back within an instrumental context, Brahms, as it were, corrected the wrong turn Beethoven had taken, with what dire results for the Master's corybantic followers.

Not even in the twentieth century, when the canon has become the ossified object of a wholly distracted, automatic genuflection, and when Beethoven's technical and stylistic audacities have long since been absorbed into the language and vastly exceeded, has the Ninth entirely succeeded in going down. Resistance remains and has become increasingly generalized. Thomas Mann had Adrian Leverkühn, the composer-protagonist of *Doctor Faustus*, cry "I want to revoke the Ninth Symphony!" On a somewhat less exalted plane, Ned Rorem refers to it in one of his diaries as "the first piece of junk in the grand style," which I single out for quotation since I heard Mr. Rorem repeat the assertion only a few years ago (this time he called it "utter trash") at a colloquium with student

composers at Columbia University, and I could observe the smiles of mischievous complicity on the faces of many members of that audience of serious young musicians that went out reflexively to meet the one on Rorem's own. That made me think about the Ninth's special status, all right. It seemed perfectly clear to me that mentioning another piece could never have elicited such a surefire response (as Mr. Rorem, a frequent public speaker, must know very well). To cast aspersions at a symphony by Tchaikovsky or a tone poem by Liszt would have seemed merely superfluous, while insulting any other Beethoven piece (even the "Eroica" or the Fifth) would have called forth confusion and consternation, I'm sure. The Ninth, it seems, is among connoisseurs preeminently the Piece You Love To Hate, no less now than a century and a half ago. Why? Because it is at once incomprehensible and irresistible, and because it is at once awesome and naive.

IV

There has been a lot of interesting critical writing about the Ninth lately, betokening a restlessness within the musical-intellectual community that may reflect large issues. We seem to be experiencing a general revolt against the formalist viewpoints—whether intellectual or epicurean—that have been part and parcel of modernist thinking on the arts, and a return to hermeneutics (that is, "reading" a work of art for its "meanings") as a proper mode of critical inquiry. It is natural that the Ninth has become a focal point of this ferment because, as Leo Treitler puts it,

more than any other work of the Tradition, it *demand*s interpretation. It does so in and of itself because it blatantly confounds efforts to account for its events on strictly formalist terms, but also by virtue of the interpretational, or hermeneutic, field in which it has been transmitted to us.

The last clause is a warning, to those inclined to pursue Original Intent, that the meaning of the Ninth—or any other text or artwork—depends "both on the tradition in which it was composed and the tradition that it has generated," the latter tradition having arisen precisely out of the inadequacy of the former to account fully for the work. Why *does* the kettledrum practically drown out the first movement's recapitulation? Why *does* the submediant (B \flat) replace

the more usual mediant (F) as the symphony's antipodal tonal region? Why do the horns have their strange solos in the first and third movements, and why are there four of them (to mention only events that have already figured in our discussion thus far)?

The Ninth poses more questions like these than any other Beethoven symphony—perhaps more than any symphony by anyone else up to the time when composers began purposely loading their symphonies with symbols and sphinxes (this being the tradition that the Ninth “generated”). And they are questions neither textbooks of harmony nor textbooks of form nor histories of music will ever answer, questions next to which the most obvious novelty—the choral finale and the introduction of The Word—seems quite unproblematical. Treitler's point, which seems indubitable, shows how wrong Wagner was to declare that the introduction of a text rendered the symphony “articulate” and its meaning explicit. Despite the text, maybe to some extent even because of it, the meanings of this symphony remain mysterious.

Other analysts and critics have attempted hermeneutic interpretations of the formal and tonal structures of the symphony (e.g., Ernest Sanders, as long ago as 1964) and, along more specialized lines, of its specific imagery for representing the Deity all through the work, but especially in the finale (William Kinderman). Kinderman's study takes into account both concurrent compositions, as they evolved in Beethoven's sketchbooks alongside the Ninth (the *Missa solemnis*, the String Quartet in Eb, op. 127), and also what is known of Beethoven's response to the philosophy of Kant. Maynard Solomon, in an especially rich and pregnant essay, has analyzed the meanings of the Ninth in terms of recurrent musical imagery of all kinds—martial, pastoral, ecclesiastical—and in terms of a complicated network of thematic reminiscences and forecasts. (Here, incidentally, Solomon revives a long-debated and seemingly long-since-rejected exegesis of the work by the Russian critic Alexander Serov, who claimed to transmit an insight of Wagner; its resurrection followed Robert Winter's demonstration, on the basis of a sketch study, that the theme of the Ode to Joy was in fact fully evolved before the first three movements were composed.) These thematic forecasts prefigure the

Elysium named in the finale and turn the symphony into an embodiment of the primordial mythic structure of a quest. As Solomon summarizes this aspect of his inquiry:

A multiplicity of drives converges in the Ninth Symphony's finale—for a visionary D major to overcome the power of D minor [and casting the tonality of D major as “visionary” resonates beautifully with its use in the third movement, where it inhabits the interludes of unearthly stillness that mysteriously intrude between the variations in Bb]; for a theme adequate to represent “Joy, divine spark of the Gods”; for Elysium, with its promise of brotherhood, reconciliation, and eternal life; for a recovery of the classical ideal of humanity united with Nature. And more: for a Deity who transcends any particularizations of religious creed; for a fusion of Christian and Pagan beliefs, a marriage of Faust and Helen.

Yet Solomon is careful to affirm that “the precise nature of Beethoven's programmatic intentions will always remain open: . . . the Ninth Symphony is a symbol the totality of whose referents cannot be known and whose full effects will never be experienced.” And further, most pertinently, that “in refusing to accept the mythic design as the ultimate or sole meaning of the symphony we remain true to the nature of music, whose meanings are beyond translation—and beyond intentionality.”

The message is clear. We may interpret Beethoven's meanings in endless ways, depending on our perspicacity and our interests (Solomon himself proceeds to biographical and psychological speculations that will not interest everyone or shed what all might agree to regard as relevant light on the symphony). What we may not do, on this view, is on the one hand to claim to have arrived at a definitive interpretation, or on the other to deny the reality of this semiotic dimension or its relevance to the meanings of the work.

V

Meanings like these had not figured in eighteenth-century musical discourse. That century had its semiotic codes, all right—its *Affektenlehre*, its *sinfonia caratteristica* (the genre to which the “Pastoral” Symphony belongs, as do also, perhaps, the “Eroica” and the Fifth), and so forth. But such embodied meanings, whether emotive or descriptive, were always *public* meanings. No one needs to inter-

pret the “Pastoral” Symphony. If we do need to have certain eighteenth-century genres interpreted for us by historians—the expressive conventions of Baroque opera, for example—that is only because we have lost the code through desuetude, not because it was esoteric. Some Baroque genres (sacred ones) did, it is true, occasionally embody esoteric meanings of a theological sort, to which hermeneutic techniques need to be applied, but these were survivals of a pre-Enlightenment aesthetic and were rejected between Bach’s time and Beethoven’s. During that time, moreover, musical illustrations and emotive gestures were delimited by what was universally taken to be the nature of beauty and the purpose of art. As Mozart himself insisted, “music, even in the most terrible situations, must never offend the ear, but must please the listener, or in other words must never cease to be music.”

The meanings embodied in the Ninth Symphony, as in the late quartets, are no longer public in this way. Though they are clearly crucial components of the works, they cannot be fully comprehended according to some socially sanctioned code. They have become subjective, hermetic, gnomic. They are not so private as to render the musical discourse altogether unintelligible, but they do render its message ineffable and to that extent, oracular. In the Ninth, at least up to the finale, inspiration thus calls out to inspiration. Intuitive grasp, aided of course by whatever can be gleaned by code or study or experience, is the only mode of understanding available. And that must be what Beethoven meant by insisting, in his late years, that he was not merely a composer (*Tonsetzer*) but a tone-poet (*Tondichter*).

Nor can the meanings in his works be simply bracketed off as “extramusical,” since as we have seen, inscrutable *musical* events and relationships are what hint to us of their existence (the drumroll, the key contrasts, the horn music). Bracket the meanings and no self-explanatory musical utterance remains. Most obviously, too, many of the musical events most closely bound up with these meanings do offend the ear (besides that shattering drumroll, think of the *Schreckensfanfare* at the outset of the finale, in the second of which the D-minor triad and the diminished-seventh chord on its leading tone are sounded together as a seven-tone

harmony whose level of dissonance would not be matched until the days of Strauss and Mahler). However much they may move or thrill, they cannot be said to please the listener. By Mozartean standards they aren’t music; and by composing them, Beethoven tells us that he doesn’t care what we think of them (or of him), that they are in fact bigger than we are.

Which is another way of saying that they are sublime. We tend nowadays to interchange the words “beautiful” and “sublime” in our everyday language, perhaps even in our critical vocabulary; but eighteenth-century writers were careful to distinguish them as virtual opposites. For Edmund Burke, they presented “a remarkable contrast,” which he detailed as follows:

Sublime objects are vast in their dimensions, beautiful ones comparatively small: beauty should be smooth and polished; the great is rugged and negligent; . . . beauty should not be obscure; the great ought to be dark and even gloomy: beauty should be light and delicate; the great ought to be solid and even massive. They are indeed ideas of a very different nature, one being founded on pain, the other on pleasure.

The history of music in the nineteenth century could be written in terms of the encroachment of the sublime upon the domain of the beautiful—of the “great” upon the pleasant—to the point where for some musicians, with Wagner at their head, the former all but superseded the latter as the defining attribute of *Tonkunst*, the art of tones. Quite obviously the Ninth was a milestone—perhaps even the point of departure—along this path. All the adjectives Burke applies to the “great”—vast, rugged, negligent, dark, gloomy, solid, massive—suit its first three movements to perfection, even as the adjectives applied to “beauty”—small, smooth, polished, light, delicate—could not seem less appropriate. Spohr was right after all. Beethoven did lack a sense of beauty. Or rather, he rejected the assumption on which Spohr based his judgment, that to be beautiful—i.e., pleasing—was the only proper aim of art.

Even the Eighth Symphony is, by and large, a conventionally “beautiful” piece by comparison with its successor. And here let us take note that as much time separates the dates of completion of the Eighth and the Ninth—twelve years (1812–24)—as those of the Eighth and the

First (1800–12). There is just no comparing the Ninth with its fellows, or with any contemporary composition, for that matter. Nicholas Temperley rightly observes, in his *New Grove* article on the symphony, that

the Choral Symphony . . . can only be treated as a solitary masterpiece, with no immediate predecessor or successor; in this it resembles the symphonies of the radical Romantics . . . and the immense influence it had was on the late nineteenth-century composers, not on those of its own time.

Solitary, vast, awe-inspiring, the Ninth reminds everyone of a mountain. It makes us uncomfortable. “We live in the valley of the Ninth Symphony—that we cannot help,” says Joseph Kerman. Why the resignation? Why should we wish it otherwise? Because of the finale, of course, and the impossible problem of tone it has created, especially for us in the fallen twentieth century. That it is a catastrophic descent cannot be denied. Beethoven even tags it so for us, when he has his baritone ask for something *angenehmer*—something more pleasing—after the horror fanfares in which sublimity reaches far past the threshold of pain. And the pleasure, as the nature of the Joy-theme at once announces, is to be an eminently public pleasure, annulling the private pain Beethoven had previously disclosed to us. Kerman calls the theme “half folklike, blinding in its demagogic innocence.” Is *this* the Elysium to which our noble quest has delivered us, the realm glimpsed mistily through visionary modulations amid the crags and ravines of earlier movements? And who are all this ruffraff, with their beery *Männerchöre* and sauerkraut bands? Our brothers? And the juxtaposition of all this with the disclosure of God’s presence “above the stars?” No, it is all too much!

So much we may already read in nineteenth-century reactions to the finale, which register—through the fastidious charge of bathos—a characteristic dismay that Beethoven apparently took his democracy straight. In the twentieth century, the problem has been compounded. Not only have artists of our time once again rejected intimations of the sublime as the proper role of art—for a Ned Rorem, the “grand style” already implies a “piece of junk”; his expression is a pleonasm—but we have our problems with demagogues who preach to us about

the brotherhood of man. We have been too badly burned by those who have promised Elysium and given us Gulags and gas chambers. Our suspicions may not extend to Beethoven himself, as they do to Wagner, whom so many find personally repellent; rightly or wrongly, we seem to respect his naiveté. But we can hardly share it, or live happily with it.

For that reason his work, no less than Wagner’s, needs neutering. And the way in which the twentieth century has until recently been neutering the Ninth has been to say to it, paraphrasing Alice’s triumphant rejoinder to the Queen of Hearts, “Why, you’re nothing but a pack of notes!” Formalist analysis, beginning with Schenker’s huge tome of 1912, has been our dodge—and our scalpel. For those who cannot reject it outright, deflecting attention from “meaning” to “structure” has been the primary means of resisting the Ninth.

VI

And it is to that tradition of what we might call sublimated resistance that Roger Norrington’s brilliant recorded performance seems to belong. By turning its attention wholly on the notes and realizing these with unprecedented lucidity, it has managed to avoid confrontation with the troubling meanings. Never has the Ninth seemed so effable. And when all is said and done, and though as an admirer of Norrington’s work I say it with reluctance and regret, the result has been a trivialization.

The best illustration of all comes right at the beginning, the famous beginning that was so unprecedented in the symphonic literature, and so influential on its later development. No symphony had ever started, as the Ninth does, so amorphously, at the very threshold of audibility, with a tremolo on an open fifth that discloses neither tempo nor mode. Such vagueness became a Romantic cliché, but its beginnings with Beethoven do not really denote “an enjoyment of sensuousness as opposed to structure and articulation,” as Edward Lippman has succinctly defined “The Tonal Ideal of Romanticism.” Beethoven’s gesture marks a transcendence of the Enlightened viewpoint on art, which saw art as imitation of nature—nature, for music, being speech and simple song—and its replacement by a metaphysical idea according to which music, as Lippman puts it, “pos-

esses a mysterious and self-contained character that stands in opposition to the world of every day experience," so that the beginning of a composition is like "the unveiling of a secret domain."

Norrington, with his passion for clarity and his genius for vivid articulation, plays this gambit utterly false and frustrates its magical effect. The tremolo in second violin and cello, notated as a sextolet, is articulated like a nervous little tarantella with six eminently countable sixteenths to the bar and an accent on every downbeat: DIG-a-da-dig-a-da DIG-a-da-dig-a-da. The quality of time is kinetic, not hovering. With the beats and measures so highly organized, and the tempo so regular, the gradual coalescing of the theme proceeds like clockwork, or like an advancing army. The metrical displacement of the entries as the passage moves to its culmination—surely intended to maintain vagueness and prevent kinetic regularity from ever setting in—emerges as precise syncopations. No secret domain gets unveiled. Great success in realizing the letter of the score here has led to a falsification of its spirit.¹ No one would glean from the opening of this performance the intimations of the cosmic and the infinite to which Nietzsche gave expression in a passage from *Human, All Too Human*—"The thinker feels himself floating above the earth in an astral dome, with the dream of immortality in his heart: all the stars seem to glimmer about him, and the earth seems to sink ever further downward"—an impression that links up presciently with that other tremolando-ridden passage in the finale when God's dwelling place "beyond the stars" is invoked. Here again, vagueness is assured by the vertical superimposition of quarter-note triplets in the winds against sixteenths in the strings. And this passage, in turn, is the

¹It could be argued, of course, that Beethoven's notation is exact, and the claim of vagueness is based on a preconception. The sort of "spirit" I am looking for, one could contend, demands a different sort of notation, i.e., an "unmeasured" tremolo. The latter, though, seems not to have been a part of Beethoven's notational vocabulary. The earliest symphonic score in which I have spotted it is Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique* of 1830, though Adam Carse, in his *History of Orchestration*, cites operatic precedents going back to the eighteenth century. Beethoven's use of the sextolet, contradicting the subdivisions at the melodic surface, would seem to be evidence that Beethoven's intended effect was the very blur that Norrington has triumphantly clarified.

very one that resonates with Beethoven's reading of Kant, whom he perceived as equating "the moral law within us, and the starry heavens above us."

A reading of the Ninth as a pack of notes, even an inspired reading of the notes like Norrington's, leaves us very far from the truth of the work, for all that our knowledge of the latter is doomed to incompleteness. Illuminating readings of the score—and here I must place Furtwängler's in a class of its own—are those which make the kind of connections discussed in the last paragraph. It is that kind of performance, which may be achieved with any instruments using any tempos, that truly counts as an interpretation, in the hermeneutic sense.

Though full of surface distortions, Furtwängler's performance makes disclosure after spinetingling disclosure of the spiritual content of the music by means of inspirational, unnotated emphases, pointing to unsuspected musical parallels that link widely dispersed passages. It was not until I heard Furtwängler's unnotated tenutos in m. 24 of the first movement, and his unnotated *molto ritardandos* two bars later, that I realized the significance of the enigmatic E \flat -major chord (a "Neapolitan," but in root position, not the conventional "sixth"), which moves to a diminished-seventh chord on E \flat in m. 27. These are the precise harmonies that, in the last movement, introduce Beethoven's depiction of the "starry dome" beyond which God makes his abode, the "dénouement of the entire symphony," to quote Treitler. It is the chord progression that, with the addition of A in the bass, leads finally and securely to the never-again-to-be-questioned D major of Elysium, the very progression the first movement never gets to consummate. It is the progression the timpani tries so hard to insist upon at the first movement recapitulation, but can never browbeat the bass instruments into vouchsafing: their unstable F \sharp falls inexorably to F \flat , and Elysium is lost. (At mm. 326–27, timpani still raging, the "beyond the stars" progression is assayed once more, but again to no avail; D major again fails to materialize.)

Again, it was thanks to Furtwängler—who with courageous initiative decided that the *fortissimo* for the brass's F at m. 132 in the Adagio should also apply to the low strings' D \flat a bar later—that I was able, to my astonishment, to

perceive another foreshadowing of the deity in the last movement: the chord progression here is the same heaven-storming submediant that no one can miss where the chorus proclaims, "Und der Cherub steht vor Gott!" Next to revelations such as these, textual and metronomic matters recede to a somewhat secondary importance, and preoccupation with them seems evasive.

As long as we are on the subject of the third movement, let me add that Norrington fails to realize what seems to me the most eminent potential advantage of adhering to Beethoven's metronomic indication. With the music going fast enough to place the rhythmic pulse on the half note (or the dotted half in the last variation)—which is how Norrington correctly justifies the marking "Adagio molto" in conjunction with what seems such a quick metronomic setting—it ought finally to be possible to hear the winds sing the original theme ("e cantabile") at its original speed behind the violin filigree in the two variations. At conventional "modern" tempi the wind line loses its melodic coherence, and the lyrical impulse devolves inappropriately upon the violins, turning the embroidery into the essential design, as happens when one gets up too close to a painting or a building. The faster tempo might have enabled our ears to step back and observe the sonic texture as one can see from the score Beethoven intended it to be observed. Yet either because he had not shaken the customarily skewed perspective, or because he was too eager to show off the accomplishments of his magnificent first fiddles, Norrington allowed their athletic filigree to go on occupying the sonic foreground, robbing the music of its visionary calm. Indeed, it takes on more flagrantly than ever that sentimentally contorted Biedermeier aspect so many have unjustly decried in the piece as a lapse of style. Said Vaughan Williams: "I cannot get out of my head the picture of Beethoven playing the pianoforte in a fashionable Viennese salon."

VII

The curiously restrained finale is another example of what I would call sublimated resistance to Beethoven's message, for all that it is played in unprecedented accord with Beethoven's metronome marks. It is the prime example, in fact, in keeping with the difficulty the

movement presents to twentieth-century sensibilities. This paradoxical situation arises out of what seems a basic misapprehension about the meaning of metronome marks, and our tendency to confuse a twentieth-century approach to tempo with a fictive notion of "classical" performance practice. It is worth some close discussion.

Reviewing Karajan's first stereophonic traversal of the complete Beethoven symphonies back in 1964, Paul Henry Lang asserted that "a steady and relentless tempo . . . is a *sine qua non* of classic symphonic thought," in urgent need of reinstatement to counter "the excessive tempo alterations and wayward phrasing that the mistaken identification of Beethoven with Romanticism called forth." This has been the conventional wisdom now for at least half a century, but it is not a historically tenable viewpoint—quite the opposite, in fact. In my earlier piece for *Opus* magazine I suggested that this notion of "Classical" style emerged when the aesthetics of the Italian opera house were applied to the performance of "absolute" music, a phenomenon of which Toscanini was the chief protagonist, and that it had never existed before the First World War. I have also suggested that the identification of Beethoven with Romanticism was not at all mistaken, and the Ninth offers the best corroboration. By setting Schiller, the preeminent German theorist of the Sublime and of individual creative freedom, after all, Beethoven made the identification himself. Romanticism, in any case, was something that existed in Beethoven's time. "Classicism," as we use the term today (mainly as a stick with which to beat the Romantics), was not.

Goaded now by my dissatisfaction with Norrington's finale, I want to pursue this general point into narrower and more specific matters of evidence. Where is the authority for the ideal of a "steady and relentless tempo" in Beethoven? What eighteenth- or early nineteenth-century writer upheld it? The matter is so taken for granted these days that chapter and verse are rarely adduced, or even called for. In fact, the only citations I have been able to find are the two that Lang happened to quote in his old Karajan review; and as I discovered in the process of verifying them, they were cited in distorted form.

The first is attributed to Gluck: "If the tempo

is changed in 'Che farò senza Euridice,' it becomes fit for a Punch and Judy show." This seems pretty definite, as well as colorful. But what Gluck actually wrote, in his letter of dedication of his opera *Paride ed Elena* to the Duke of Braganza in 1770, was this: "By changing very little in the expression of my aria for Orfeo, 'Che farò senza Euridice,' it might be turned into a little puppet dance. A note more or less sustained, a *rinforzo* distorted either in time or in volume, an appoggiatura out of place, a trill, a cadenza, a run can easily ruin a whole scene in such an opera. . . ."² He isn't talking about tempo at all, but about the tendency of singers to be careless with their embellishments and dynamics. To the extent that the remark might be extrapolated to tempo, it could only refer to a poorly chosen one (in this case, obviously, one that is too fast), rather than failure to maintain a steady pace.

More seriously doctored is the second authority, the German pastor and dilettante composer Carl Ludwig Junker (1748–97; Lang elevated him to the rank of a "classic authority on eighteenth-century practices"), who in 1782 published a little handbook entitled *Some of the Chief Duties of a Musical Director* ("Einige der vornehmsten Pflichten eines Capellmeisters oder Musikdirektors"), from which Lang extracted the following sentence (the interpolation in brackets is his): "Modifications of tempo can be better expressed by the composer himself, by his setting and coloring [i.e., by the note values employed and by the nature of the orchestration] than by the tempo changes caused by the conductor." Even before verification it is clear that this is garbled; it makes no sense. One cannot tell whether the conductor is being exhorted to forbear or the composer is being encouraged to be more specific. Does the writer want more modification or does he want less?

It turns out that the remark has been quoted out of context, and that Junker was really saying

virtually the opposite of what Lang purported to prove by quoting him. Here is the original statement:

It is true that the composer, through his writing itself, through the various types of nuances [available to him], could better and more completely express these modifications than the conductor [could] by varying the musical time-sequence; but it is just as true that the two of them, composer and performer, must work hand in hand, and that variation in the time-sequence, as an auxiliary art, remains indispensable.

Junker actually introduces the matter of tempo-modification by invoking Lang's "steady and relentless tempo" (*eine völlig gleichförmige Bewegung*), but only as a straw-man (p. 36). He then continues with this rhetorical question:

Must every piece be performed at the given tempo straight through to the end, without ever inclining toward a greater speed or slowness? Or ought this tempo, even right in the middle of the piece, be somewhat adjusted, ought it be accelerated, ought it be held back?

The first alternative is not even given consideration. The only choice, it turns out, is between accelerating and holding back. Stated in most general terms, the reason for constant tempo adjustments goes right to the heart of matters aesthetic. The sentence that immediately precedes the one quoted by Lang reads as follows: "There is no passion whose movement, itself wholly uniform, might be so circumscribed; it ranges, throughout, through various modifications of movement." And elsewhere, with regard to contrasting moods, Junker observes that

Nothing is sudden in nature; no change takes place through instantaneous transformation of opposing moods, no expression changes at a bound into its opposite. There are intermediate shades, which an expression must go through if it wishes to change into its opposite.³

²The original Italian: "Non ci vuol nulla, per che la mia Aria nell'Orfeo: 'Che farò senza Euridice,' mutando solamente qualche cosa nella maniera dell'espressione, diventi un saltarello da Burattini. Una nota più o meno tenuta, un rinforzo trascurato di tempo, o di voce, un appoggiatura fuor di luogo, un trillo, un passaggio, una volata, puo rovinare tutta una scena in un Opera simile."

³The original passages in Junker, all from the section entitled "On Tempo" (*Von der Bewegung*), are as follows:

Dass diese Modifikationen, der Komponist, durch seinen Satz selbst, durch die verschiedenen Arten der Kolorierung, besser und vollständiger ausdrücken könne, als der Direktor, durch die Veränderung der musikalischen Zeitfolge, bleibt richtig, aber eben so richtig bleibt es, dass

Thus musical movement (*Bewegung*) is a function of the “movements” of the spirit. Only as long as the unitary Cartesian view of the latter remained in force could a conception of “a steady, relentless tempo” hold sway. Such a tempo might have been appropriate to music conceived in terms of the Doctrine of the Affections (though I know of no contemporary writer who says so explicitly), but it was effectively banished by the advent of “Sentiment.” Or, to put it in terms of conventional style-periodization, Lang might conceivably have been describing the tempo conceptions of the Baroque, but surely not those of the Classical period. Junker’s Capellmeister, it transpires, was a Furtwängler, not a Norrington.

And so, I continue to maintain, was Beethoven, for whom metronome markings were good “only for the first measures, as feeling has its own tempo.” No one, to my knowledge, ever maintained a position to the contrary before the twentieth century, when for reasons completely unrelated to the matters at hand, composers began demanding an “objective,” depersonalized performance style for their own music, and performers allowed this rigid “neo-classical” mode of execution to rub off on what by then had solidified into the “classical” repertory, minus the neo.

But even supposing Gluck and Junker had meant just what Lang said they meant, by what lights do pronouncements of the 1770s and 80s apply to the music Beethoven wrote in the 1820s, or the way in which it should be performed? Over the half-century in question mo-

beyde, Se[t]zer und Ausführer, einander in die Hände arbeiten müssen, und dass die Veränderung der Zeitfolge, als unterordnete Kunst, nothwendig bleibe (p. 37).

Muss jedes Stück, ganz bis zu Ende, in der nemlichen Bewegung, die sich niemahls, weder einer grössern Geschwindigkeit noch Langsamkeit nähert, vorgetragen werden? Oder darf diese Bewegung, selbst in der Mitte des Tonstücks, etwas abgeändert, darf sie beschleunigt, darf sie zurück gehalten werden (p. 36)?

Es gibt keine Leydenschaft, deren Bewegung, sich selbst immer gleichartig, abgezirkelt seyn sollte; Sie wälzt sich durch verschiedene Modifikationen der Bewegung hindurch (pp. 35–36).

Nichts ist Sprung in der Natur; keine Veränderung geschieht durch die augenblickliche Verwechslung, entgegengesetzter Bestimmungen, keine Empfindung geht durch einen Sprung in ihre entgegengesetzte über. Es giebt Mitteltöne, die eine Empfindung durchgehen muss, wenn sie zu ihrer entgegengesetzten über gehen will (pp. 27–28n).

mentous changes had taken place in orchestral practice: baton conducting, for one thing, had decisively replaced the “presiding” fiddler or keyboard strummer. And while eyewitness commentators on Beethoven’s style of playing the piano—Schindler, Ries, Czerny—tend to contradict one another (though please note Czerny: “His playing, like his compositions, was far ahead of his time”), descriptions of his conducting are unanimous. To the familiar ones by Czerny and Spohr, let me add this one by Ignaz von Seyfried, the music director of the Theater-an-den-Wien: “He was very particular about expression, the delicate nuances, the equable distribution of light and shade as well as an effective *tempo rubato*. . .”—a *tempo rubato* that Beethoven pioneered in orchestral performance, and that was the primary impetus for the switch in orchestra leadership from the keyboard to the baton in the first place.

Anton Schindler actually tried to transcribe Beethoven’s *tempo rubato* for aspiring conductors. His *Life of Beethoven* (1840) contains a sizable extract from the Larghetto of the Second Symphony, marked by Schindler to reflect what he heard—or so he says—when Beethoven conducted the piece himself (ex. 1). Now as we all know, Schindler could be a mendacious fellow. Should we believe him this time? Ignaz Moscheles, who edited Schindler’s book in its English translation (1841), and who knew Beethoven for a while as well as Schindler did (he prepared the piano reduction of *Fidelio* under Beethoven’s supervision), was among those who believed. He added a footnote to Schindler’s discussion: “I agree with M. Schindler in these remarks. The slight deviations of time recommended must give life and expression, not only to this movement, but also to the imaginative compositions of all the great masters.”

VIII

Roger Norrington, who knows more about conducting and about Beethoven than I’ll ever know, surely knows all this. How, then, can we understand his very streamlined and steady performance of the choral finale to the Ninth except as a knowing anachronism, an effort to purge the piece of the traits which continue to embarrass many twentieth-century musicians? He knows better than I do that he is following no historical mandate when he allows the re-

The image displays three systems of musical notation, each consisting of a treble and bass staff. The first system includes markings for *poco accelerando*, *cresc.*, *f*, *poco lento*, *f*, *sf*, and *Tempo I*. The second system includes *poco accelerando*, *p*, *cresc.*, *p*, *p*, *p*, *Tempo I*, and *lento*. The third system includes *cresc. ed*, *accelerando*, *f*, *ff*, *poco allegretto*, and *p*.

Example 1 (after Schindler)

markably slow tempo at which he begins the Alla Marcia variation to govern all the 264 measures that ensue before Beethoven's next metronomic indication—a span that takes in the whole fugal development and the radiant choral recapitulation in D major. True enough, the “tempo of feeling” ineluctably pulls him along a little as the music progresses, but his effort to restrain it is quite annoyingly audible. I'll wager he would agree with me that Beethoven's tempo for the Alla Marcia—a good ten points, actually, below the tempo Norrington actually adopts—was meant to apply only to the pokey start in the bassoons and big drum, if it applies to anything at all;⁴ that by the time the tenor en-

ters, the tempo should have revved up considerably; and that the clear intention of the whole 264-bar stretch is to portray a mounting wave—or better, a spreading infection—of Elysian delirium. But, child of the twentieth century that he is, Norrington is suspicious of what Ortega y Gasset called an art that “proceed[s] by psychic contagion, for psychic contagion is an unconscious phenomenon, and art ought to be full clarity, high noon of the intellect.” In its effort

⁴This tempo has been questioned by many—even Norrington, by implication, when he told a *Gramophone* interviewer that “the only really suspect [metronome] marks occur in the Ninth. Beethoven made his metronome markings for all the symphonies soon after writing the Ninth [actually in 1817, the year in which he made his first sketches for his

last symphony], and he obviously knew the first eight rather better than he knew the Ninth” (“The Symphony as Opera” *The Gramophone* 44 [1987], 1222). Even though inaccurate in its historical details, this statement seems very sensible to me, and it applies above all to the tempo of the Alla Marcia variation. It has even been suggested (by Hermann Beck) that the metronome setting was meant to refer to the dotted half note, not the dotted quarter, which would exactly double the tempo to which Norrington adheres with such determination. Toscanini, on the evidence of his NBC Symphony recording, seems to have shared Beck's opinion.

to bridle what Beethoven sought to unleash, moreover, Norrington's performance of the Ninth finale remains true to that Anglo-Saxon *pudeur* which prompted Sir George Grove, at the height of the Victorian era, to censure the "restless, boisterous spirit [that] occasionally manifests itself, not in keeping with the English feeling of the solemnity, even the sanctity of the subject."

This, then, is the ultimate resister's Ninth, a Ninth to mollify and reassure those many of us who have come to hate the piece—or rather, who hate what the piece has come to stand for. The question is whether what the piece has come to stand for—that sublimity, that naïveté, that ecstasy of natural religion, that bathos—is something inherent in the Ninth, or something that has accreted to it. To take the latter view is, I firmly believe, to take the easy way out, and that is what Roger Norrington and his forces, with magnificent dedication,

conviction, and technical panache, have accomplished. In so doing, Norrington has again shown himself, as he did with the Second and Eighth, to be a truly authentic voice of the late twentieth century.

To resist the resistance, to make peace with this score on its own terms, may not be possible in our time. It would signal recovery of an optimism that our century's wars, upheavals, atrocities, and holocausts—and the despairing attendant cynicism that has from the beginning undergirded the modern movement—may have precluded once and for all. Yet the fact that we continue to insult and distort Beethoven's gigantic affirmation shows that it is still under our skins, that it still troubles the conscience of trivial artists like Ned Rorem, that it still awakens in us longings for what we can no longer believe in, but wish we could. We are still in the valley of the Ninth. 
And that gives hope.