

Mäezel Metronome Tempi

In an apparent hangover from the total serialist and new complexity scores of the mid to late twentieth century, exacerbated by the digital age's ability for software to play in any speed and to convince the ear that it can hear the difference between crotchet equals 84 and crotchet equals 85 (I challenge anyone to count out the discrepancies between these tempi in the acoustic of the recital hall), one found oneself quite frustrated at the impractical (and quite abstract) tempo and time changes regularly appearing in student scores. For the last decade, I have pretty much insisted that all my student composers ONLY use the tempi available on the traditional Mäezel Metronome.

I once tried to 'reinvent the wheel' and reconceive a list of tempi governed by the Golden Ratio (and other natural proportion theories). Weeks into the research came the realisation that this is exactly why the Mäezel settings feel more instinctive, they have an inherent proportional relationship, and, from a practical perspective, they are still regularly recommended by conservatoires across Europe and the UK.

This list of tempi has been very useful over the years, one rarely hears comments on the way time is communicated within my scores during rehearsals (perhaps we are always too busy discussing the plethora of more pressing issues?). The music has never suffered as a consequence of a commitment to the value of this list, in fact, to the contrary, it often saves time procrastinating over (what used to be) agonising decisions concerning intricate tempi changes that would over-complicate rehearsals anyway.

The Mäezel Metronome Tempi have long since been committed to memory, but this list is still one of the first documents copied and printed to the digital and hard copy 'planning' folders of each emerging composition. It is strongly recommended that you consider adopting this list for your own scores, and always ask yourself, 'could I count out the changes I am asking for' ...?

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