

Reviews: London Philharmonia Orchestra Commercial Recording

“Absolutely wonderful! It is a unique and revolutionary interpretation! I love it. The recording is amazing and I was so glad to be part of the project with Ben! I respect him a lot.”

- Fabrizio Falasca, Assistant Concertmaster, Philharmonia Orchestra

“The distillation of a lifetime investigating composers’ truest intentions, this account of the Ninth is unprecedented in using all 14 of Beethoven’s late-added metronome marks. In bonus discs, Zander takes the marks and shows their potential. They seem to make the work easier to sing, though the players are stretched in the super fast second-movement trio. But this account of the work heaps revelation on revelation.”

- Paul Driver, The Sunday Times (London)

Classical Podcasts - Zander's Revelatory Beethoven Ninth

A valiant effort to change the way we listen to Beethoven's Ninth: critical commentary on a new recording with the philharmonia orchestra, chorus and soloists (Rebecca Evans, Patricia Bardon, Robert Murray and Derek Welton). Conducted by Benjamin Zander

For time in memoriam, musicians, musicologists and music critics have fought over the wisdom of strictly applying Beethoven's metronome markings (MMs). Arguments against even trying to be faithful to Beethoven's MMs range from casual generalizations, such as "Beethoven didn't know how to use this then new device" to the suggestion that his MMs don't make sense or are impracticable.

Benjamin Zander, music director of the Boston Philharmonic and the Boston Youth Philharmonic, and a frequent guest conductor of the Philharmonia and other orchestras, has taken the stance in favor of Beethoven's markings. He did so in a revelatory reading of Beethoven's Fifth issued on Telarc several years ago, and now has taken on the Ninth, an even greater challenge. Several of its fourteen MMs are highly controversial, often ignored or compromised away by some of the great conductors of the past century. In two discs that accompany the performance, Maestro Zander gives a thorough, intelligent analysis of the reasons why he has championed application of all of Beethoven's MMs. On the disc that contains the performance, the musicians splendidly realize them no matter how unaccustomed they may have been in doing so.

Listening to the two discs of commentary, it becomes immediately clear that Zander has spent considerable time and effort delving into the issue. He goes through all fourteen markings individually, indicating how they have been dealt with previously and revealing the sometimes fascinating facts about their generation, categorizing them by how controversial they have been during the modern era. Zander gives numerous musical examples to show what passages sound like when played at Beethoven's designated MMs and, conversely, how they are often treated by other conductors. We hear passages conducted by Furtwängler, Toscanini, von Karajan, Bernstein and many others. These other versions sound "right" to us because we have come to accept them as well as the contention that Beethoven simply didn't know how to use the metronome or that his metronome was somehow faulty. These contentions certainly need to be challenged, as Zander does in this cd set.

Zander provides us with a chance to experience the Ninth the way Beethoven apparently intended it to be performed. Yet he makes it equally clear that it is not his purpose to proffer a "definitive" Ninth but to be as faithful as possible to Beethoven's intentions. Zander contends that he does not mean in any way to denigrate those conductors who have not followed Beethoven's tempo markings to the letter and he willingly admits that in some instances live and/or recorded performances of these conductors can be profoundly moving and affecting. For Zander, the importance of adhering to Beethoven's tempo markings is not merely a matter of technical accuracy but by doing so, he believes, even greater beauty and excitement in the music is revealed.

Zander's recorded performance of the Ninth achieves virtually all of his goals in regard to tempi. That is not to say that he forces tempi into rigid confines without any flexibility. A master of rubato, Zander knows how to utilize this performance

technique idiomatically. For example, although the forceful climax of the principal theme of the first movement (from bar 17) seems ever so slightly pressed, it is still consistent with the main tempo, and generates greater urgency as well as dynamic thrust. Similar instances elsewhere could be cited, but in each case slightly more motion never causes a loss of touch with the main tempo.

Undoubtedly, it is the tempo of the second movement's trio section that is the most shocking here. As Zander explains, an uncorrected error in the list of metronome markings that were transcribed for the publisher caused the new accelerated tempo to be notated twice as slowly as Beethoven apparently intended. According to Zander, here's what happens: The Scherzo and the central section Trio are marked to be played at the same tempo – MM116. The first nine notes of the new tempo are unarguably a climactic flourish to conclude the Scherzo, since they are also used to end the entire movement. Out of that fortissimo final D, the 'sweet, soft' Trio emerges without any gap. Now, leading into that new Presto pace are eight bars with the indication to get faster (*stringendo*); there will now be 4 notes in the bar instead of the 3 notes that were in each bar of the Scherzo. If the tempo of 116 is duplicated for the Presto, as Beethoven clearly indicates, the four quarter notes per bar will now be going exceedingly fast—indeed, at the very limit of playability.

Most conductors, not believing Beethoven's instruction, interrupt the accelerated pace arrived at and settle for a tempo for the Presto which is neither fish nor fowl—well below any sense of Presto, nor related to the tempo of the Scherzo.” Zander takes Beethoven at his word and continues to accelerate right into the Presto, which causes the breakneck speed of the emerging Trio to make it sound like a totally new piece. This tempo for the Trio has always been considered unplayable. Notwithstanding, the Philharmonians accomplish it, for the very first time, with panache.

At Beethoven's marked tempi, the Adagio movement does not become sluggishly tiresome as it sometimes can be. It has often been pointed out that the almost imperceptible difference between the metronome markings for the adagio theme (quarter note = 60) and the andante moderato theme (quarter note = 63) is nonsensical. How can an Adagio be only three points on the metronome slower than an Andante? Surely this is proof positive that Beethoven's metronome markings should be disregarded! But when Zander points out that the Adagio tempo is to be felt in 2 (half-note = 30), and that Beethoven only used the 60 designation because his metronome didn't have anything lower than 50, it all makes sense.

Zander explains (and demonstrates in the performance) that when the impulses in the bar are reduced to 2, the melody can soar like an operatic aria that comports perfectly with the flow of the harmonic rhythm. That enables him to achieve a perfect balance between the movement's two main themes, capturing the songlike quality of the first and the rhapsodic character of the second.

Naturally, the extensive finale contains numerous passages that are affected by applying Beethoven's original tempo markings. The familiar "Joy" theme is more fluid and song-like than usual. The opening is paced as a true presto and the Recitatives maintain the excitement and drive that Beethoven must have intended by his marking: *mais in tempo* – meaning at the original Presto.

One of the most magnificent passages in the finale occurs just before the march section, when the chorus calls out "vor Gott" ("to G-d") three times with monumental power. The third time Beethoven indicates that the chord is to be held in a fermata *molto tenuto*. From the manuscript copy in London that Beethoven had checked over

minutely before the Vienna premiere for the Society that had commissioned the work, Zander discovered that the composer changed his mind and decided that that last chord should end on a diminuendo to piano, an effect that has, to my knowledge, never been heard before in modern times. This astonishing effect gives the conclusion of this section a heavenly aura befitting the text. As Zander suggests, staying with Beethoven's directions here gives us an entirely new way of listening to this stirring passage.

Correcting an error in the metronome markings for the March section leads to a truly startling result. A ceremonial march tempo is set for the entrance of the tenor, awe-struck by the beauty of the stars (with Robert Murray singing piano for once, as indicated) and then with hair-raising speed for the triplet fugato "battle" section. As the music builds to a magnificent rendition of the Joy theme for full orchestra and chorus, the thrilling pace yields a truly exhilarating performance. The final prestissimo is all too often raced through with such uncontrolled frenzy that it sounds almost like a blur. Zander, following the composer's instructions, shows what a fast march should sound like – with plenty of energy and providing a stirring conclusion to one of the greatest symphonies ever written.

Controversy can be both thought-provoking and exciting. Lack of substantive music education in public schools, the overwhelming pervasiveness of pop music in our daily lives, and the weakening of significant music criticism in the daily press have all contributed to both a dumbing-down and lack of interest in anything more than the musical experience itself. With this recording of the Ninth and the two discs of explanation, Maestro Zander has offered a stimulus to our often too passive involvement in listening to classical music that should enrich our musical experience of this glorious work and motivate us to become more deeply engaged in

interpretation. Of even greater significance is that Zander, the soloists, chorus and orchestra offer a glorious performance, as stirring as it is fascinating.

Lewis M. Smoley

Classical Source: Benjamin Zander discusses and conducts Beethoven's Choral
Symphony – Philharmonia Chorus & Orchestra

According to Benjamin Zander, the performance tradition which has obtained with respect to that cornerstone of the orchestral repertoire, Beethoven's 'Choral' Symphony, has been essentially wrong, and that is attributable to the failure by conductors to observe Beethoven's metronome markings. His discussion of the issues involved and his reasoning for adopting a literal interpretation of those indications (essentially, nothing less than instructions in Zander's eyes) are expounded in a lengthy discussion on this release's two supplementary discs. But he sets out his case eloquently, with a minimum of jargon or technical terms so that it is perfectly possible to follow the argument without any specialist knowledge of music theory. It would aid accessibility, however, if Zander had mentioned bar numbers when referring to the text of the score so that listeners who are following with it do not have to search around for the passages under discussion, and he does not go through the Symphony in order.

Zander's comprehensive and detailed analysis of all fourteen of Beethoven's metronome markings – and his reading of the Symphony overall – is predicated on the point that the correct tempo for the execution of his music was of the utmost importance to the composer. The arguments and evidence which Zander marshals are too extensive to outline here, but suffice to say that, whatever one thinks – or rather feels – about the result, his discussion about the work's textual and historical contexts will reward and enlighten anybody who cares about this masterpiece.

It is fascinating, for instance, to hear how Beethoven worked through the score with his nephew, Karl, to provide metronome markings for its publication, and that the latter seems to have inserted them incorrectly in a couple of instances. These have been rectified in recent editions of the Symphony, although many conductors and musicians evidently still work with the old ones.

By observing Beethoven's tempo indications literally, the Symphony as realised is brisker than usual (at least in traditional performances) and Zander explains that it took a fair amount of rehearsal time with the Philharmonia Orchestra and Chorus in order to render the music accurately and convincingly in the recording. The Trio section of the Scherzo (at 116 semibreves a minute, correcting the mistake of old scores which take over Karl's erroneous insertion in the fair copy of 116 minims) is now quite a sprint – in line with other similar passages in Beethoven's 'late' period, Zander argues. In order to achieve that, the reinterpretation of bars 404-411 leading up to that section from the Scherzo (dotted minim=116) is revelatory and thrilling, as the crotchets get faster in order to accommodate logically and seamlessly the sudden switch in meter – i.e. the =116 bars of three crotchets of the Scherzo become bars of four crotchets in the Trio – and thereby launch the latter section without any stuttering or incongruous gear changes. At the restored speed, however, the Trio sounds rather comically accelerated, as though on fast-forward mode.

The Adagio is also particularly swift – very much a lyrical song in motion, especially with the arabesque decoration by the violins in the third variation – rather than any solemn meditation on mystical things, and the tenor solo of the Finale, “Froh, wie seine Sonnen”, is brought in line with the similar wind-band marches which Beethoven had composed in the decade or so before the Symphony, sung with almost breathless wonder by Robert Murray, though almost at the risk of failing to keep up as

it sometimes sounds. In a few instances, however, Zander's precise following of Beethoven's tempos entails a slowing down from received readings, such as the double fugue on "Seid umschlungen Millionen" (at bar 655) and in the Symphony's very final bars, where conductors often despatch the coda with ecstatic abandon. Essentially, then, it is not exactly that the resulting performance is simply faster, but that the range of speeds from movement to movement, and between sections, is less extreme. Each section, individually, is revived with a new dynamic momentum and freshness, as though stripping back the accumulated layers of varnish and dirt to reveal the litheness and urgency of Beethoven's inspiration. Orchestra and Chorus make a convincing case for the work in this guise by sustaining the tempos with consistent virtuosity, whilst transcending mere observance of the beat to create innate musicality from the notes. The bassoonist and oboist execute the speedy lines of the Scherzo's Trio with accuracy and aplomb, and there is a vibrant edge to the trumpets' timbre which provides extra bite and urgency to such moments as the wild call-to-attention of the fanfares at the opening of the Finale. Alongside that, the strings are fluid and lean, rather than lushly dense, and the choral passages remain lucid but fervent, as well as the four vocal soloists in their slower passage from bars 831 to 842, which benefits here by not dragging as it can do on occasions. Derek Welton sounds a little cowed in heralding the choral Finale, as both his recitative and the earlier instrumental versions at the beginning of that movement are rather hasty and impetuous, instead of exactly mimicking the nuances of human speech.

Nevertheless, there arises the question about the wider validity or desirability of adopting such a literalist approach to the work, apparently preserving it somewhat as though it is an archaeological exhibit. Doubtless some will be enthralled by the performance at these speeds, and individual moments are persuasive, but over the course of fifty-eight minutes the Symphony's course becomes relentless and wearing.

Perhaps in the fast-paced twenty-first century that enables the Symphony to take on a certain emotional veracity or relevance, but for that very reason audiences are likely to require more contrast and deliberate imputed gravitas in order to arrest attention and divert it from everyday conventions (the strict habits and customs of which Schiller's poem speaks) in favour of elevated ideas about the universal community of humankind. Listening practices have surely become so largely altered and diversified – if not necessarily desensitised – over the two centuries since the Ninth's premiere that it cannot be a foregone conclusion that hearers will be won around – afresh, or for a first time – by simply reclaiming the conditions of the composition's creation.

Even if the matter is one of fidelity to Beethoven's markings, there is surely an inconsistency – or at best, an oversight – on Zander's part in not considering any of the other aspects that may constitute an 'authentic' interpretation of Beethoven's intentions or practices, in terms of instrumental timbre, vibrato, rubato, musical interpretation, pitch, number of performers and so on; in other words, matters which the historically-informed practitioners have been considering for several decades. In using the Philharmonia Orchestra, Zander does not seem to be overly concerned with those matters, and nowhere does he explain whether or not they are also important in realising a valid Ninth. In fairness, Zander does state that his intention is not to assert what is the or a correct way of performing the Symphony, and pronounce a judgement against previous interpretations which vary from his own; he regards his vision of the work (which has grown out of a long period of performing, researching and reflection) as an act of homage to Beethoven's achievement, and as creating another lens through which to view it, rather than replacing previous readings.

However, he overstates the novelty of his case somewhat by concentrating only on one aspect of the work's realisation, apparently at the expense of those other matters

of authenticity. He refers to Roger Norrington's groundbreaking interpretation of this (and Beethoven's other Symphonies) by contrasting how even those readings got some of the tempos wrong by using older, uncorrected editions of the music or through misinterpretation of what was meant. It is telling that when staking a claim to his general overhaul of the Symphony he cites the notably weighty accounts by Furtwängler (though not specifying any particular one) and Leonard Bernstein's on the occasion of the fall of the Berlin Wall, though Zander acknowledges that the very particular occasion of the latter called for something profound, and that the undeniable magic of Furtwängler's approach derived from a certain Romantic tradition and a personal, idiomatic philosophy of musical performance. Klemperer is cited in a specific instance for the slowness of his speed, but that was a well-known idiosyncrasy on that conductor's part in his later years in any case. (Testament SBT1177 preserves a live 1957 account of the Ninth from Klemperer, with the Philharmonia Chorus and Orchestra in the Royal Festival Hall, which is not slow at all, seventy minutes, with, like Zander, all repeats observed in the Scherzo and Trio, and an altogether extraordinary experience – Ed.)

It would surely have been more instructive to compare some recent recordings reflecting typical conditions in the concert hall and studio in the last two or three decades. Established orchestras and seasoned conductors generally fall in line with something of the older approach, naturally. But some, benefitting from Urtext editions, have already come close to realising the composer's intentions, such as David Zinman's 1999 account with the Tonhalle Orchestra. The timings of the movements in Zinman's performance are remarkably similar to those of Zander's, as are the relative contrasts in speeds adopted, though the Scherzo's Trio is not so frenetic. But, overall, Zinman finds a more engaging trade-off between the rigours of near-adherence to the metronome markings and making musical and dramatic sense of

the cut-and-thrust of Beethoven's multi-faceted symphonic argument. Zander promotes the discovery from Beethoven's fair copy of the work for the Royal Philharmonic Society (by whom it was originally commissioned) that the striking modulation on the third and final "vor Gott" (bars 329-330) is to be interpreted not with a sustained fortissimo, but with an equally dramatic diminuendo. But he takes no account of Zinman's discovery of a general pause at the chorus's exhortation to "Brüder" at bar 747.

Another apparent inconsistency is that Zander takes a modicum of liberty in re-interpreting the score when circumstances vaguely permit. In that third variation of the Adagio's principal theme, he ignores Beethoven's express request that this be taken not at the slightly faster speed of crotchet = 63 of the immediately preceding, contrasting Andante section (Beethoven marks 'at the same tempo') but reverts to the crotchet = 60 tempo for the previous appearances of this Adagio principal theme, as it is apparently too difficult for the violins to manage the semiquaver arabesques comfortably. In bars 619 to 626 of the Finale, he reinforces the stirring and syncopated viola line which leaps around over two octaves with the addition of horns; the fanfares near the end of the Adagio are underpinned on all their chords with relevant notes by pedal timpani, being easily re-tuned to fit all harmonies, as opposed to the fixed pitches of the instruments that were available to Beethoven in 1824; and the violent storm at the centre of the first movement (from bar 301) is bolstered by the addition of a piano (though not explicitly audible in the recording as such) based upon circumstantial evidence that this is what happened at the premiere. These are musically sound interventions, but if Zander is permitted this creative flexibility, why should not other conductors be permitted theirs in other respects?

Zander's musicological analysis and argument merit and reward careful attention, as they offer valid and stimulating insights; but, ultimately, justification for Zander's vision of this symphonic masterpiece rests upon more than merely technical considerations but must appeal to what works musically and emotionally within the parameters (rather than instructions or recipe) laid out by Beethoven. Listeners either jaded through overfamiliarity, or too easily satisfied with one interpretative style will have their minds and ears opened afresh, and Zander's thoughts challenge us to re-examine our own about the Symphony. But whether his interpretation, in the round, succeeds in making the visceral impact upon minds and hearts to which the breadth of Beethoven's vision clearly aspires is another matter, and there the value of this recording is probably limited to enriching or qualifying received experiences and preferences rather than replacing them. The booklet contains texts and translation along with a detailed general background of the Symphony's composition and first performance, along with a description of its music, making it an informative release.

Curtis Rogers

Gramophone

Much as I admire Benjamin Zander's gifts as a musical proselytiser and polemicist, I approached the two discs' worth of discussion that accompany this recording somewhat warily. Two hours and forty minutes? That's a lot of talking. Zander is so fervent, however, that I found myself engrossed from start to finish. He wisely doesn't concern himself so much with the Ninth's historical background – the late Michael Steinberg's superb booklet note covers that ground – but rather with why he believes the composer's metronome indications and dynamic markings make musical sense. Zander's argument is wide-ranging and includes copious musical examples, with snippets of recordings by Toscanini, Furtwängler, Bernstein and Norrington, among others. Beginning with the 'least controversial' of the score's 14 metronome markings and working gradually to the most contentious, Zander's reasoning is consistently sensible, scholarly and compelling. By this point, admittedly, many of his ideas are hardly revolutionary. Setting aside his own scrappy account with the Boston Philharmonic (Pickwick, 9/92), recordings by David Zinman (Arte Nova, 7/99) and Philippe Herreweghe (Harmonia Mundi, 6/99) cut a similar interpretative profile. But in explaining his efforts to take the composer at his word, Zander gets to the crux of musical interpretation.

And the performance itself? Well, much of it is quite good, thanks largely to the commitment and collective virtuosity of the Philharmonia. Although the tension occasionally slackens in the opening movement, the tempestuous climax is ferocious (start at 7'07"); and in the coda, Zander's meticulous attention to the dynamic markings intensifies the music's emotional disquiet (from 11'21"). There's visceral excitement in the *Molto vivace*, which gallops along, agile and animal. The woodwinds even manage to make shapely music in the Trio, despite the breakneck

pace. Note, too, how passionately the violins sweep through the elaborately embroidered passage in the Adagio at 6'18".

At times, though, a feeling of pedantry creeps in, and particularly in the finale. The jubilant restatement of 'Freude, schöner Götterfunken' at 11'13", for instance, is too hectic. And in the Allegro energico (at 15'07"), Zander relentlessly pounds the main beats, as if the *sempre ben marcato* indication trumped all else. Bass-baritone Derek Welton blurs some pitches in his opening recitative but both the solo quartet and the Philharmonia Chorus sing with gusto. It's a pity that so much crucial orchestral detail is buried whenever the chorus sings above piano.

Near the end of his discussion, Zander acknowledges that, in realising the composer's metronome marks, the Philharmonia's musicians were 'stretched to the limit', even under studio conditions. Would this even be practicable in a concert? I have a hunch that the frisson of a live performance might have helped quite a bit. As it is, Zander's eloquent disquisition is the more satisfying and valuable part of this set.

Andrew Farach-Colton

The Epoch Times: A New, Yet Familiar Piece - Beethoven's Ninth Symphony

Benjamin Zander's new recording of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 ("Benjamin Zander Conducts Beethoven Symphony No. 9 'Choral'" available on Brattle Media) is the result of a lifetime's study of Beethoven's score. But spend any time with Zander and you come to realize both how absorbed by the music he is, and how his study of it has not been intended to perfect his own interpretation but to divine Beethoven's intentions.

I recently met up with Zander to talk about the new recording and the ideas behind it, particularly with regard to his interpretation of Beethoven's metronome marks. Does the world need yet another recording of Beethoven's Ninth Symphony? Zander feels very strongly that it does. He has worked on the symphony for over 40 years and given many performances of it. He is passionate about investigating Beethoven's original score and feels that the new recording is the first time that all the best musicological points have been made in the same recording.

Recording the work with the Philharmonia Orchestra, the Philharmonia Chorus, and soloists Rebecca Evans, Patricia Bardon, Robert Murray, and Derek Welton, Zander received an enormous amount of rehearsal time, particularly for a work that the orchestra could probably play in its sleep. There were three rehearsals (the last one with chorus and soloists) and five recording sessions.

The response of many of the orchestral musicians was to comment that they had never really studied the piece. And the chorus members, who had not been looking forward to the recording, found it a revelation, and many came out ecstatic.

The History Behind the Recording

One of the focuses of his new recording is Zander's interpretation of Beethoven's metronome marks. Ever since he was a small boy, Zander has been fascinated both with Beethoven and with the tempos of his symphonies.

Back in 1967, Zander conducted his first performance of Beethoven's Symphony No. 5 in Boston, and it caused a sensation because of his approach to the tempos and to the music. No one had heard Beethoven that way, and everyone was talking about it. This was the period before historically informed performance had reached Beethoven. So, in a sense, Zander has spent a lifetime as a pioneer and is proud of it.

He points out that now news travels fast and new interpretations are heard and shared rapidly, but back in the pre-internet days things happened slower. He readily admits that there were other pioneers before him, who experimented with Beethoven's tempos, but none of these made a global impact.

Zander took the Ninth Symphony and the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra to Carnegie Hall in 1992, and critic Andrew Porter wrote a long review of the concert, discussing Beethoven and the metronome and saying, "If Mr. Zander is right, we have been listening to the music of the greatest composer only in misrepresentation."

Zander took the idea to the BBC, and they were interested in his theories about Beethoven's tempos but insisted it had to be done on period instruments. Eventually, a BBC performance was given by Roger Norrington with a period instrument ensemble.

Zander was livid at the time, but is now grateful because he feels that it has taken another 30 years to absorb the music into his bloodstream. Now when he picks up the score, he hears the music at Beethoven's tempos. It is not enough to just play Beethoven's tempos; you have to have the music in your DNA. He quoted Debussy on the conducting of André Messager at the premiere of "Pelléas et Mélisande": "You succeeded in awakening Pelléas to musical life, with a delicate tenderness, ... the inner rhythm of any composition is called forth by the conductor."

Beethoven and His Metronome

Beethoven was very keen on the newly invented metronome, as it enabled him to be even more detailed about tempos. His Italian tempo markings in the score are quite complex in an attempt to come to grips with delicate variations of tempo.

But the metronome Beethoven was using had limitations: The speed only went down to 50. And the transcription of Beethoven's metronome marks was not done without error, so Zander went back to Beethoven's conversation books, where an interaction with his nephew Karl clarified Beethoven's exact intentions.

Many of Beethoven's metronome marks are uncontroversial, and in the narration that accompanies the new recording, Zander goes through them in detail, showing how the majority of conductors adhere to them.

But a few are controversial. The final movement of the March is one example. Originally it was thought to be a slow tempo, but by examining the original conversation book, Zander came to realize that the tempo Beethoven was aiming at was far faster.

With the new tempo, in the final movement of the March, when the full orchestra is released, the musicians have to play stupendously fast. At the recording takes, they only once managed the correct tempo—“a white knuckle ride,” Zander recalled. But the leader of the orchestra, Stephanie Gonley, suggested that the string players bow the fast passage on the string rather than off it—something that would have suggested itself easily to period performances—and this made the increased tempo possible. Zander uses this as an example of how the orchestra was very much on his side for the recording sessions.

One of the more controversial areas is the trio of the Scherzo, which one observer at the very first performance referred to as having unusual exhilaration—something that does not happen with the traditional, slower speed. And, as Zander points to a motif that repeats some 27 times, he feels that the faster tempo makes sense of the repetition.

Another of Zander’s key points is that orchestras rarely play Beethoven’s exact dynamics. Repeatedly during our study of the score together, he pointed out places where pianissimos are ignored and where fortes are played fortissimo. For example, the orchestra is marked pianissimo at the beginning, and the first entry of the soloists is another key point, rarely taken quietly enough so that the soprano soloist doesn’t swamp the mezzo-soprano.

Zander asked the soloists and the chorus members to express the emotion of the words instead of shouting them, because there is a remarkable amount of piano marked in the score. Some of these details were tricky: The final ensemble “vor Gott” is fortissimo with a diminuendo because the following passage is piano, and then in the

following passage, the piccolo is supposed to be pianissimo. It is to achieve such details that the three rehearsals were needed.

The Bigger Picture

Zander calls himself essentially a teacher. His new recording of Beethoven's Symphony No. 9 includes two discs of introduction, explaining how he reached the conclusions he did regarding the tempos and other issues. The aim is something more than purely academic. He hopes that the general populace will listen to the explanations and get a deeper understanding of the music, and he hopes that he is teaching people how to listen to the music.

With that in mind, Zander takes a practical view of the score as well. There is a viola passage in the last movement that is usually never heard; Zander attributes this miscalculation to Beethoven's deafness. To compensate, he doubled the violas with the horns, making the musical line present in the overall texture for the first time, something he finds very satisfying. And he has adjusted the timpani parts, as Beethoven was limited by the timpani of the time whereas modern timpani are more flexible.

Hearing the results of the performance, which Zander calls electrifying, he believes that we can come to understand that Beethoven was in extremis, living on the edge of the universe and pointing to things which we can only imagine. There are passages that reach maximum joy, yet Beethoven himself was in the depth of darkness.

While Zander is comfortable that other interpretations and views of the music will co-exist, he feels that Beethoven's vision is so much more powerful when you do

what he says, not just following the metronome marks, but every detail of the score. One of Zander's comments sums up his attitude: He isn't a god, he's a conductor, "so let's not be careless with Beethoven's music."

Robert Hugill

MusicWeb International

I probably won't be challenged by anyone when I assert that this new Benjamin Zander Beethoven Ninth on Brattle Media will stir a good measure of controversy, maybe a huge measure. It is the fastest version I know of from among the twenty or more recordings I possess of the work and the numerous others I've heard either in live performance or from another recorded source. An average-length Beethoven Ninth will last around seventy minutes, while brisk versions reduce that timing by five minutes or so and slow ones increase it by several. The previous fastest rendition I'm aware of was by Philippe Herreweghe with the Orchestre des Champs Elysées on Harmonia Mundi which clocked in at a very lean 62:29. This new effort by Benjamin Zander has a timing of 58:39! For some it will be hard to imagine this symphony coming in at under an hour: is the conductor going beyond the outermost limits, edging toward breakneck speeds? Maybe. But we must remember that the stopwatch, when serving as judge and jury is quite fallible.

The first movement opens at a brisk tempo, which is maintained throughout, but Zander's pacing is actually not egregious at all. In fact, I rather like his take on this opening panel: he draws precise and fairly-detailed playing from the Philharmonia players and manages to convey a sense of urgency, of struggle and conflict in the music, which is exactly what Beethoven wanted. The Scherzo opens in a rather standard tempo, somewhat brisk but hardly unusual. Again, Zander imparts a feeling of urgency, but it doesn't override the overall celebratory character of the music. Fortes and percussion are potent, but fit in well with the conductor's epic vision of the score here. What may raise eyebrows though is the very quick tempo in the Trio section: I've never heard it taken this fast or even nearly this fast. But, of course, the

marking is Presto and the conductor's tempo is arguably a Presto. Still, the music sounds a little too hurried and some detail gets lost.

More than a few Beethoven mavens may also object to the tempo of the Adagio, which, once again, is faster than I've ever encountered before. With a timing of 11:07 for a movement typically lasting fifteen or sixteen minutes in other performances, the music may strike some as more of an Andante or even Moderato. Yet, I think Zander's tempo is arguably in the Adagio range; moreover, I like his more animated take on the music here: the mood is brighter and less solemn than customary, even if at times the playing sounds a little aggressive and pushy.

What may be Zander's greatest success is the finale, a movement which has always been a little problematic: Verdi thought the vocal writing was bad and Beethoven's friend and contemporary Louis Spohr, with possibly a bit of envy, called the music here "monstrous and tasteless". Well, it's hardly "monstrous and tasteless," but it is somewhat bombastic and the vocal writing is extremely taxing on some of the singers. Still, it's great music. In Zander's version the flaws one might associate with the music seem less apparent, thanks to the brisk pacing and intelligent phrasing. In sum this is a thrilling account where the feeling of final triumph vanquishes any sense of bombast or garishness. Here, not only does the orchestra play with utter commitment, as they do throughout the work, but the chorus is simply splendid, especially in the latter half. The vocal soloists are fine too, if not outstanding.

The sound reproduction from Brattle Media is clear and well balanced. As indicated in the heading, this is a three-CD set, with two of the discs being devoted to the conductor explaining his interpretation, including his very brisk tempos. That's a nice bonus but hardly the reason to acquire this set: this is perhaps the most valid new

interpretation of a Beethoven symphony in decades. Some will call it revelatory and I won't challenge that assertion. If you admire Beethoven and his symphonies (who doesn't?), this Ninth is definitely worth your attention.

Robert Cummings

MusicWeb International - Recording of the Month

This is a fascinating and in many ways epoch-making issue. Benjamin Zander is not only a fine conductor – he is at present principal conductor of the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra – but also a true scholar; someone who not only feels deeply where music is concerned, but thinks deeply too, something that far from all conductors do.

The question of the metronome tempo markings in Beethoven's scores (though he actually inserted metronome marks in his scores for only a relatively short period of time) is one that has occupied musicians and musicologists for many years. The argument often went "Beethoven's metronome marks are so much faster than the way I think his music should be played; therefore there must have been something wrong with his metronome" – a clearly somewhat self-serving case. Over the past half century, numerous musicians have decided to give the markings a chance, and have often surprised listeners with how convincing this can be.

I would certainly recommend listening to Zander's detailed discussion before listening to his interpretation (all two and a half hours' worth!). He tackles the whole issue in an engaging and, largely, rigorous way, then explains in detail how he has applied it to the 9th Symphony. He is often politely but firmly critical of the interpretations of great conductors such as Furtwängler, Karajan, Bernstein and others; but the nice thing is that he is equally critical of his own earlier readings of Beethoven's works!

There are so many aspects of this performance that are surprising, some will say 'shocking'. And passages that some will find revelatory and others simply bizarre. But nothing is done for effect, everything is backed up by Zander's impressive blend of

scholarship and musicianship. Perhaps the most extraordinary moment of all comes in the finale, as the chorus arrives at that moment of great power – ‘Und der Cherub steht vor Gott’ – and the mind-blowing harmonic shift that takes place under the final repetition of ‘Gott’. Normally, that F major chord is sustained fortissimo; but Zander’s researches have found that Beethoven had added a diminuendo to this chord. The effect is unquestionably startling and rather wonderful.

The ineffable slow movement is a particularly interesting case; it has two main themes, and each occupies its own tempo, the first Adagio – very slow – and the second Andante moderato, suggesting a more flowing speed. The implication of those verbal descriptions is that the second theme will be somewhat quicker, yet its metronome mark in the score is 63 crotchets to the minute, while the Adagio’s is just 60 – hardly any difference at all. Zander’s point is that the sublime opening theme is best felt in two very slow beats to the bar – minims – rather than four crotchets. But that would require a marking of $\text{minim} = 30$ – and the lowest possible mark Beethoven had on his metronome was 50! It may sound nit-picking; but that consideration enables Zander to find, for me, the perfect tempo relationship between the two themes. Thus the whole movement makes even better musical sense than I had heard hitherto. These are crucial decisions, because, as any musician will tell you, finding the right tempo for the music is always the most significant key for unlocking the music’s expressive character.

Then there’s the scurrying Scherzo, with its more relaxed Trio. But is it more relaxed? This is far too complex to go into in detail here; but Zander’s findings suggest that the Trio really should go much quicker than it is usually played, and his argument is convincing. There are of course practical problems; there is a famously finger-twisting oboe solo here, which at this tempo becomes even more challenging. But the

Philharmonia's principal oboe, Gordon Hunt, surmounts the challenge magnificently - thereby setting a daunting new benchmark for succeeding generations of oboists!

There are so many other novelties and things to make you sit up and take notice – who knew that Beethoven had a piano at that first performance? It presumably fulfilled some sort of continuo function; but Zander feels that the piano's bass notes can bolster the 'cellos and basses in that terrifying storm that is the recapitulation of the first movement's main theme. You won't be able to hear it separately, but it's there in the midst of the torrent of sound.

So, whether one 'agrees' with Zander's interpretation or not, this issue is a vitally important addition to the Beethoven discography, and indeed to Beethoven studies generally. Yes, there are one or two places where I'm not quite sure yet that the innovations really work; but the important thing is that Zander has clearly convinced his orchestra, choir and soloists that the changes are worth implementing. The singing and playing is magnificently passionate and imaginative, and therefore 100% worth hearing.

Gwyn Parry-Jones

Seen and Heard International - Benjamin Zander's Refreshing and
Thought-Provoking Approach to Beethoven

As pre-concert talks go, Benjamin Zander's ranks amongst the finest. An engaging raconteur and passionate advocate of Beethoven's own metronome markings, over the course of an hour he dissected the Ninth movement by movement, even providing handouts for those of us quick enough to get to the platform to pick one up after he finished speaking: a copy of his article, "Did Beethoven get it wrong? Further thoughts on Beethoven's tempo indications for the Ninth", a list of Beethoven's own metronome markings and a photocopy of an excerpt from one of the composer's "Conversation Books" from September 27, 1826 between the composer and his nephew Karl around these same metronome markings. This, plus copious music examples from an electric piano by Zander himself and various gems of wisdom: Mahler "was born in the coda of the first movement"; a description of the Scherzo as "a trance-like dance"; the opening of the finale as a "Scherekenfanfare". Admissions of tweaks to Beethoven's scoring, even adding some timpani strokes, were also included. The audience was, for a pre-concert talk, huge. Zander clearly has a following, and deservedly so.

Although the orchestra was the Philharmonia, this was not part of their main subscription series. Whether or not that had anything to do with the number of deputies (it did look like a different orchestra), who knows; certainly ticketing and related arrangements were very different. The audience, too, was different, applauding between movements – only Mei Yi Foo's correct decision to move straight into the concerto's finale headed off the worst of it in that instance.

Zander made the interesting point that both Coriolan and the Ninth begin “atemporally” – that is, initially one cannot tell the tempo. In the case of the orchestra this comes in the form of a sustained unison “C”, in the symphony the famous sustained tremolando fifth. A nice link (and of course Coriolan links to the Third Piano Concerto via key centre). The performance of Coriolan itself was remarkably disciplined, with very tight string articulation. Unsurprisingly there was no slowing for the second theme; a diminuendo over a sequence of chords was beautifully managed. A thought-provoking as well as exciting account.

The soloist for Beethoven’s Third Piano Concerto was Mei Yi Foo, a winner of the BBC Best Newcomer of the Year Award. It was interesting that Zander chose to conduct the whole first movement in four despite the sprightly tempo (including the second subject). There was a lovely sense of detail, such as the nice viola counterpoint in the orchestral exposition. Mei Yi Foo’s contribution was characterised by a penchant for clarity, but her tone tended to become brittle at the louder end of the dynamic scale. The central Largo was expansive, most notable perhaps for the orchestra’s beautifully shaped initial response to the soloist’s opening statement. Clarity was paramount here, with the wind solos coming through well. The dexterity required for the finale was all in place from the soloist, and it is a testament to the intelligence underlying this reading that the coda was fast but not frantic. Light on pedal throughout, Foo clearly saw this concerto as gravitating towards Beethoven’s first couple of offerings. A most stimulating performance.

And so to the great Ninth. Now batonless, Zander commanded a phenomenally involving performance of this great masterwork. Although Zander eschewed any slowings, this added to the tension rather than forcing the music towards breathlessness. There was a huge amount of detail that shone through, also.

Antiphonal violins really worked in the rapid-fire exchanges; hard-stick timpani shot through textures like thunderbolts. And, indeed, that coda did have a sense of the monumental, referring back to Zander's comments about Mahler. The sprightly Scherzo was beautifully shaped by Zander; the "surprise" tempo for the Trio was so rapid that one felt lucky to have the Philharmonia here; the challenge to the bassoon, particularly, must be huge.

The slow movement was so fast it was almost two in a bar; as Zander acknowledged, he is at the antithesis of the Bernstein approach to this music. It was interesting how the opening and the Andante were so close in basic pulse but the difference came in mood. Rightly, it was the fourth horn who played the solo (it is often purloined by the first), here possessed of a properly fruity low B flat. As to the finale, this was of remarkable energy. The low string recitatives were relentless in execution. Zander clearly likes the dramatic gesture as the baritone soloist, Derek Welton, entered at the last moment, holding his hand up in a "no further" motion to the performers as if to mirror his opening words of "O Freunde! Nicht diese Töne". The remaining soloists entered just prior to their entrance, minus the top gesture. Taking a break from Partenope over at St Martin's Lane where she is taking the role of Arsace, Patricia Bardon was a superb mezzo; Rebecca Evans a good soprano despite overenthusiastically holding out at the very end of the movement and retreating to the near-inaudible. The tenor, Robert Murray, was asked to sing "Froh" as a whispered confidence, and despite Zander's comments on how difficult it is to get a tenor to sing quietly in the pre-concert talk, it was executed expertly. The result certainly caused my eyebrows to raise, but that is all part of hearing the work anew.

The Chorus was staggeringly good throughout; nice to hear the diminuendo, pencilled-in on the score in the British Library, on the choral "Vor Gott" so perfectly

managed. The orchestra, too, stunned in the fugue, taken at a massively fast pace. The performance as a whole was refreshing; Zander clearly has much to say in this repertoire.

Colin Clarke

World Music Report: Benjamin Zander: Light of The Ninth

“Don’t only practice your art, but force your way into its secrets for it and knowledge can raise men to the divine.” - Ludwig van Beethoven

The Journey of the Spirit

The life and work of Benjamin Zander seems to come together in a space where the sacred Psalms of King David and the secular Song of Solomon meet: a place where creation is celebrated with the deepest meaning and expectation of life – in all of the loving glory of its creator – as expressed in the profound beauty of music and poetry. Zander has written music in his early years, like King David did; but whatever love poetry he composed unlike King Solomon, remains unpublished. Nevertheless his sensibility has been formed by the artistry of both these figures of our common ancestry. While on the subject of music and poetry it is probably a matter of no small significance that Maestro Benjamin Zander is Jewish.

Significant also is this fact: Zander is blessed in a way few men are and because of this he may have completely unlocked the secrets of his art – the art of music – leading him to its greatest treasure: that which makes it first and last “heart music”. And so no matter what its sophistication as we know from the Great Masters it is as if Zander had managed to do – and continues to do – what Beethoven advised; that he not only practice his art, but “force your way into its secrets for it and knowledge can raise men to The Divine”.

In a seemingly less celestial (or is it more celestial) manner; certainly as a nevertheless important matter of fact, Benjamin Zander has recently released what could easily be seen as his “Holy Grail” recording of Beethoven’s last and greatest work, his Ninth Symphony. The disc – simply albeit significantly entitled Nine – is a tour de force and features the iconic Philharmonia Orchestra together with the Philharmonia Chorus and the late Stefan Bevier, Chorus Master. Why is it a “Holy Grail”? The answer is simply this:

Benjamin Zander has been “working” at his “definitive” version of The Ninth for almost four decades. He has been studying it, researching its background, reading its score – possibly several published versions of it – and even recording it in 1983 with the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra and the Chorus Pro Musica (Masters/Pickwick Group, UK) and again in 1992 with the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra (including using Beethoven’s suggested tempi and metronome markings . In short relentlessly pursuing it and in a manner of speaking, its creator as well, just as Beethoven himself might have advised Benjamin Zander has been “forcing” his way into “its secrets”. Predictably and proverbially, Zander discovered what he believes to be the true tone and manner of The Ninth; the one that Beethoven himself had intended for it. It takes courage to pursue The Ninth so relentlessly. But it also took a sense of childlike wonder, which Benjamin Zander, at nearly 80 years old, has plenty of.

Remarkably it also took an enormous amount of time – over forty years, by some estimates; almost the exact amount of time that it is believed it took the Israelites to journey to reach Canaan and Galilee for those of us who are keeping track. At any rate (and even if you aren’t beholden to the magic of numbers) it took an extraordinarily long time to arrive at this interpretation of Beethoven’s magnum opus, a definitive one in every way; technically perfect, according to the intentions of Beethoven’s personal

markings indicated in the one published by B. Schott's Söhne (Mainz) in 1826. The results might shock – even dismay – many. But there can be no doubt that the greatest work of “heart music”, Beethoven Ninth Symphony in D Minor Opus 125 “Choral” has turned out to be one of the great defining events in music; a performance that properly expresses Beethoven's intentions and in all its transformative power and glory.

The Ninth Symphony Opus 125 “Choral” by Ludwig van Beethoven has been performed by some of the world's most iconic orchestras, conducted by some of the greatest maestros – including on its debut in 1824 with Beethoven on stage. Wilhelm Furtwängler first performed it with The Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra in 1942; then again with the Choir and Orchestra of the 1951 Bayreuther Festspiele (EMI). Herbert von Karajan has done so several times including a masterful performance in 1951 with The Philharmonia Orchestra that was founded by the great Walter Legge, who also produced Mr Furtwängler's iconic (1951) performance in Bayreuth. Among others is the great Erich Kleiber's version with the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra as well as phenomenal versions by Bruno Walter, Otto Klemperer and Georg Solti. Another touchstone was the René Leibowitz's performance conducting The Royal Philharmonic Orchestra and The Beecham Choral Society released 1961 by Reader's Digest (but probably recorded earlier). There is also a historically informed performance by Sir Roger Norrington, using Beethoven's suggested tempos, with his London Classic Players (Virgin Classics, 1987).

Benjamin Zander acknowledges all of the above as being performances of great significance and importance. Truth be told, the ones by Furtwängler and Von Karajan are probably likely better known for their historic nature and the elegance of the performances. However, Benjamin Zander reading Beethoven's score over and over,

and over again “heard” something different; more than likely what Beethoven himself heard as he was writing and polishing his Ninth Symphony and it had to do with his discovery of the Metronome thanks to the device invented by Dietrich Nikolaus Winkel in Amsterdam in 1814 but perfected by Johann Nepomuk Maelzel. Beethoven began introduce metronome markings to his compositions in 1817, seven years before the celebrated premiere of The Ninth, much to the consternation of some critics after that performance on 7 May 1824 in the Theater am Kärntnertor in Vienna audience but also – judging by confirmed reports of the prolonged and ecstatic applause – to great appreciation.

Zander’s Ninth is Beethoven’s Ninth

We know that the idea of setting Fredrich Schiller’s “Ode to Joy” came to Beethoven as early as 1793, but it was not until the winter of 1823-24 that he completed the work for which that poem provided its climax – the “Symphony No. 9 Opus 125” or the “Choral Symphony”. It is a work so stupendous that later composers felt a superstitious dread of completing their own ninth symphony, as if it were tempting fate to attempt to venture beyond the number marked by Beethoven’s final work in the genre. For others, however, this ninth symphony was a catalyst. Beethoven’s fusion of poetry and orchestral music inspired Berlioz’s epic vision and was the starting point for Wagner’s obsession with developing an art form that would make possible the expression of unbounded feeling.

Zander’s “Ninth” sounds faster than most of the other iconic versions of “The Ninth” mentioned above, but clocks in at 58:39, while most of the others last over an hour. But it is electrifying and captures the extraordinarily diverse (and draining, for performers) four movements in all their glory. And in the tempi and at the metronome

values that Beethoven had so assiduously marked. As a result the rhythm of Movement I assigned by Beethoven with words *Allegro ma non troppo, un poco maestoso* at $\text{♩}=88$ (marked by Beethoven) turn the long opening movement into one combining the unbridled excitement of innovative orchestration with formal restraint. The fiery scherzo, Beethoven's *Scherzo: Molto allegro – Trio: Presto – Molto allegro* marked $\text{♩}=116$ (by Beethoven) becomes in Zander's hands, expressed by the members of the Philharmonia, as a most amazing piece of music that seems to be on the brink of being forced apart under its own head of steam.

And yet nothing in those two movements can prepare one for the deep solemnity of the seemingly interminable *Adagio*, a creation that's almost unbearably moving in its troubled tranquility. But Beethoven's instructions: *Adagio molto e cantabile* marked $\text{♩}=60$ (by Beethoven) through several *tempi* changes, make for its unequalled and songful beauty at the hands of Zander and the Philharmonia. The finale's clamorous introduction leads to a review of all of this great symphony's themes. Delving into each one the music settles in favour of Schiller's "Ode to Joy" theme, an amazingly simple melody that employs a mere five notes. But genius that he is, Beethoven introduces it gently at first, and then allows it to grow in boldness. A repetition of the opening is halted by the poem's opening lines, delivered like a clarion by the baritone Derek Welton:

*“O Freunde, nicht diese Töne!
Sondern laßt uns angenehmere anstimmen,
und freudenvollere.
Freude! Freude!”*

The chorus and other soloists respond to the call magnificently. Beethoven's melody then transforms into a jaunty march reaching ♩=84, but only after Beethoven challenged his performers with a staggering array of tempi: from Presto ♩=88 through Allegro assai ♩=80, Presto ("O Freunde"), Allegro assai ("Freude, schöner Götterfunken"), then Alla marcia; Allegro assai vivace ♩=84 ("Froh, wie seine Sonnen"), Andante maestoso ♩=72 ("Seid umschlungen, Millionen!"), Allegro energico, sempre ben marcato ♩=84 ("Freude, schöner Götterfunken" – "Seid umschlungen, Millionen!"), followed by Allegro ma non tanto ♩=120 ("Freude, Tochter aus Elysium!"), and finally Prestissimo ♩=132 ("Seid umschlungen, Millionen!")

The "jaunty march" is led by the choir, conducted by Stefan Bevier (who passed away suddenly after the release of this recording). This is followed by a long orchestral interlude which leads to the core of the movement – a religious invocation to universal brotherhood:

*"Alle Menschen werden Brüder,
Wo dein sanfter Flügel Weilt.
Freude, schöner, Götterfunken,
Tochter aus Elysium,
Freude, schöner Götterfunken!"*

The Unique Light of Benjamin Zander

It has been variously suggested that Benjamin Zander is a musical "disruptor" and a "stirrer up of strife", and if you believe any one of his (predictable) detractors, you

will be led to the conclusion that very little can come of such so called “impetuosity”. But the world has not seen anyone like Zander – some say, “not yet”, but I rather think that there will not be another like him in our lifetime. His uniqueness arises from first being of German Jewish origin – a very powerful combination in a human being as history has proved it to be. But his and here I like to believe that he is, like Beethoven and Mahler (he is closer to the latter, I believe), a socialist at heart. Whether a lifetime in Britain had anything to do with this is a moot point. I believe his socialism – which is more like a kind of “prophetic humanism” – has been inspired by his father, a musician and lawyer, and sculpted by the notes of music that continue to leap off the page and embed themselves into his psyche.

These are the notes of the music of the great composers and as men like Beethoven and Mahler has gone on to express their unique and life-transforming visions Zander has opened his heart and soul to their message and intended effect. This is why he has been able to use expressions of tempi and mathematical figures into wondrous auditory sculptures, made seemingly from air. Many thousands, indeed millions of audience-members and viewers sit and watch rapt as he speaks taking music on the road with him everywhere. He talks to me about his Nine, as the project is called, expanding on his own words on the two “Discussion” discs that accompany the performance of Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony. And I am at once transformed into a neophyte of a master. I am transported into the Romance of Beethoven’s quest to write his magnum opus. And as we crisscross the subjects that range from “Beethoven and Tempo: the miracle of the metronome” and “what, exactly constitutes a “slow” tempo?” to what he refers to in these discussion discs as the “Extremely Controversial Points & Explanations” of the “March”, “Double Fugue”, “Scherzo, Trio and Prestissimo” sequences.

Everything albeit glued by daunting and dense pedagogy suddenly becomes clear as day. I hear his words over the earpiece of my telephone, but Beethoven's music in my head. This is also what has made Zander unique in the world of music: you are transported twice; once by the music and for a second time just being seduced into a place of great light just listening to (and/or watching) Benjamin Zander be Benjamin Zander. This is what has endeared him generations of musicians. He says he draws his power from the musicians who surround him. But somehow you know that it is not fear that makes them willing to follow him to heaven or hell, but an unconditional love that assures them that he (and the music) will lead them to the former, celestial place.

If you are not one of his musicians – of the Boston Philharmonic Orchestra and/or the Boston Philharmonic Youth Orchestra – you will get a sense of this aura of light that surrounds Benjamin Zander when you read the book *The Art of Possibility*, which he co-authored with his brilliant wife and leading psychotherapist, Rosamund Stone Zander. This is another wonderful way to undertake a life – your life – journey with Zander and Zander. You will find that nothing short of “scales will fall away from your eyes” as you negotiate the breathtakingly beautiful narratives chapter after chapter. These range from the practice of “Giving an A”, an “enlivening way of approaching people that promises to transform you as well as them. It is a shift in attitude that makes it possible for you to speak freely about your own thoughts and feelings while, at the same time, you support others to be all they dream of being.” How appropriate for a conductor and his orchestra is that? Impressive, you think? And then you come across this too: the art of being a “one buttock” musician, where Zander coaxes and inspires his musicians – young and old alike – to lean their bodies into the music as they play it, and shifting the weight of their proverbial posteriors from “one buttock” to the other depending on where the emotion of the music leads,

of course. Then there is the art of Zander's "White Sheets" a technique he initiated by which he puts a blank white sheet on every (music) stand before a rehearsal with instructions to each musician "to write down any observation or coaching for me that might enable me to empower them to play the music more beautifully." And on and on it goes as Zander and his wife change places to exhort readers no matter where they are or what they are doing to practice *The Art of Possibility* with a promise that they are more than likely to transform their lives in process.

It is not simply Maestro Zander who is the enabler here. Rosamund Stone Zander is equally inspiring and together they are the formidable team that swathes you in – quite remarkably – the possibility you end up seeing in yourself. I asked Zander if he could recall something that had happened while he was in the process of completing another project, Gustav Mahler's Ninth Symphony, which he and the musicians of his beloved Boston Philharmonic Youth Orchestra will be taking across the world later in June 2018. In response he read to me the words of 15-year-old violinist (of the Boston Philharmonic Youth Orchestra) Ashley Kim's spontaneous "White Sheet" after the final rehearsal for Mahler's 9th in Symphony Hall this March (2019):

"I had the most surreal experience during the 4th movement. At measure 70, as my bow arm went from frog to tip and my left hand was doing the richest vibrato I could, Mahler's message suddenly became very clear to me. My soul seemed... apart from my body for a moment. In that vulnerable moment, the melting pot of Mahler's grief, pain and undertones of exhausted acceptance poured scaldingly on my body, piercing every nerve. I will never forget that moment of realization and exposure that I had yesterday in the 4th movement of Mahler's Symphony that truly changed my mind and the intensity of my passion for life, love and music. In the whole last 3 measures of the Symphony, my breath refused to leave my body. My pounding heart seemed like an intruder in the room as Mahler's last breath embraced every soul in the hall.

Somehow, my Being became part of Mahler's breath at that moment, and my soul cracked with him like that of a broken soldier, that had fought the battle of life.

“I cannot wait to share our magic of Mahler's 9th Symphony with the world. We will make each and every note a letter of Mahler's message a monumental experience to every soul in every Hall, starting tomorrow with those in Boston Symphony Hall and then in Europe in June. Every person who has the chance to listen to BPYO will have their life changed and their eyes opened.”

Raul da Gama