

http://
kennethwoods.net/blog1/

What do those multi-coloured circles scrawled over the score actually mean? Conductor **KENNETH WOODS** reveals all

I thought I might wade in and try to slightly de-mystify the question of score marking by conductors. Orchestral players and audiences alike can often be quite overwhelmed by, even suspicious of, the complex systems of red and blue, circles and so on that appear in many conductors scores.

Score marking has grown out of a simple fact – a page of a score for full orchestra is an incredibly dense set of symbols, and very few human beings can actually take all of that in simply from looking at it once.

That said, not everyone does mark their scores. Leonard Slatkin told me that he used to as a young conductor, but that he now prefers to work from clean scores. Erich Leinsdorf was completely against marking of any kind – he felt that anything put into the text of the score by the conductor was a defilement of what had already been put there by the composer. My own teacher, Gerhard Samuel had conflicting feelings. On seeing some of my heavily marked scores, he told me (rather emphatically) that I shouldn't need all those marks if I actually learned the music well enough, but he himself often marked his scores almost as thoroughly. There are a few reasons why one puts a marking in a score.

One, and certainly the rarest, is to make a non-performable approach to notation performable. Gerhard did many of the earliest performances of Penderecki's early orchestral works in the US, and later told me he always went through score and parts adding bar lines, rehearsal numbers and so on. This used to make Penderecki quite annoyed – he always felt that his music could and should

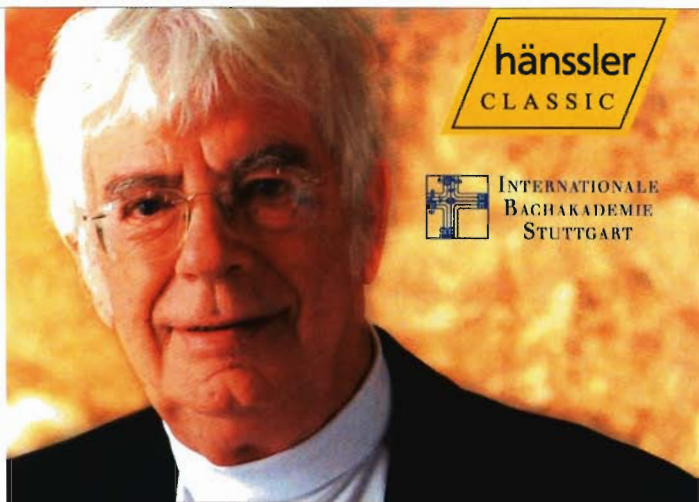
be performed as he'd written it. However, back in the late 60s/early 70s, when Penderecki was finally starting his own conducting career he apparently sent an SOS to Gerhard requesting that he send copies of all his edited and annotated Penderecki scores, and, as I understand it, the composer himself ended up using all of those "spurious" bar lines.

A second reason is somewhat similar, which is to create a performing edition which captures as vividly as possible a given conductor's approach – this also extends to detailed editing and marking of the parts. The Mahler "versions" of the Schumann and Beethoven symphonies are famous examples – these were not made for publication but for his own performance. Certain composers almost beg for this approach, especially Beethoven, and to a lesser extent Haydn and Mozart. I'd say most busy conductors have their own parts and matching score to some or all Beethoven symphonies.

The third reason for marking a score is really the most common – to facilitate the conductor's study, mastery and performance. There have been some very famous conducting teachers who insisted on a very rigorous and inflexible marking method (you can tell their students from a mile away by looking at their scores for a second: "hey, purple highlighter for the secondary thematic material! How did you like studying with Bob?"), but most conductors, over time, develop their own personal technique. One teacher of mine insisted that you could use any system you liked, but that you should never, ever change it. That is advice I continue to ignore.



Woods: Making his marks



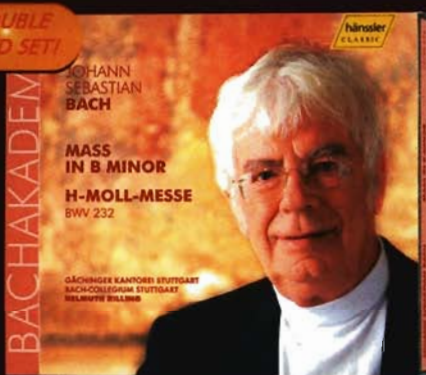
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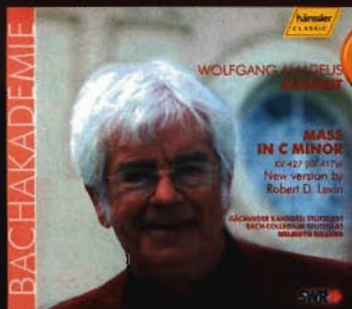
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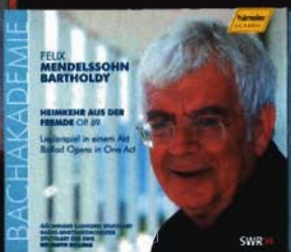
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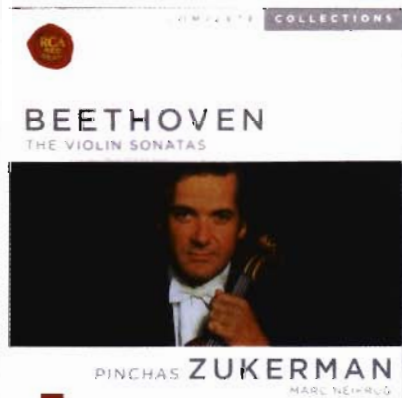
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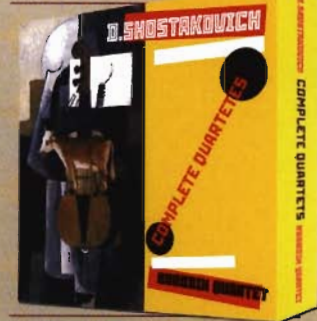
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