



## How to use a musical score

*How does a score help develop the performance?*

### **Catherine:**

So scores contain a huge amount of musical information. So I wonder how you deal with that mass of information, as a conductor, not just notes, but everything else, as well.

### **Mark:**

The amount of information written by the composer evolved very much over time. So if we look at the classical period of music, so the music of Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven, and their contemporaries, there's much less information in the score than there would be for later composers. So if we take a look here at a couple of pages of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, you'll see that you have the notes and the rhythms. And you have forte and fortissimo, and piano, but very little in the way of expression marks, which might indicate crescendo or diminuendo or words which might give an idea as to the character of the music.

Whereas if we fast-forward, from 1808 to the late 19th century, the 1880s when Mahler was writing his first symphony. By this point, composers were becoming much more willing to write-- to give more specific clues as to how they want the music to sound. Mahler himself was a conductor, really. In his lifetime known as a conductor, rather than a composer. And therefore, he was a bit of a control freak. Because being a conductor, he knew the sort of shenanigans that conductors would sometimes get up to in taking liberties over how to interpret the music. So he's much, much more detailed in his verbal instructions.

And so he was one of the first composers to use German, rather than Italian, in his scores. So I have them all translated here into English. But right at the beginning of the third movement, he writes "solemn and measured, and without dragging." He then includes little notes to the conductor throughout the piece, making sure that we know. And this is music-- this is information that's only in our score, and not in the individual parts. So he would give little instructions to the conductor to make sure that they didn't go off piest without feeling the need for the players to know that.

So he says, make sure that all parts, all the pianissimo parts, don't have any crescendo in this opening section. He would then write little instructions here for the oboe. [SPEAKING GERMAN] So slightly to the four, for the oboe part. Holding back at this point, then writing very expressively. He would also write things like don't drag, or don't rush. But that, in a way, then creates its own interpretative decision, because people think, oh, well, he says don't

drag. Does that mean I should speed up? So does he just mean, don't slow down here? Because he knew that there would be a danger, perhaps, of slowing down.

Or is he giving you some kind of subliminal, subtle reference to the fact that maybe he wants it actually to move forward a little bit? So even with all that incredibly specific information, it still, in many ways, creates more questions than answers.

**Catherine:**

Yeah. I know there's a lot of work in deciding how you're going to interpret, really, every sort of mark on the page, from an individual note to instruction that's written. I mean, how on earth do you go about sort of synthesising all that information, I suppose?

**Mark:**

Well, there's no shortcut. It takes time, and thought, and preparation, and experience of doing it. And all this nuance in the music, whether it comes from specific markings of Mahler in his text, or whether it comes from a history of performance practise, or tradition, as in the music of Mozart and Beethoven, where there's less of that information in the text. But nevertheless, there's a great kind of historical tradition of how to do this piece. And the traditions of doing a certain transition or something. The more that you become aware of that, the more that you then just, I suppose, start to come to your own opinions. And that's the thing, in the end.

The conductor has to take the choice as to how they want the piece to go this week. And that's really what makes it different or interesting for the audience and the musicians.

**Catherine:**

Thank you very much.

**Mark:**

My pleasure.