

Performance Markings Shown in the Opening Movement of Bach’s “Herr, gehe nicht ins Gericht” (BWV 105/1), Their Sources and Purposes

We have elsewhere described a proportional method that may be used to determine the tempo and duration of Bach’s music.¹ There are three rules in this method.

1. The speed of the shortest note value of a piece is proportional to one of two standard beats, called the common tactus (72 BPM) and the accelerated tactus (81 BPM).
2. Where the shortest note is the eighth, there are three eighth notes per tactus. Where the shortest note is the sixteenth, there are four sixteenth notes per tactus. Where the shortest note is the thirty-second, there are six thirty-second notes per tactus.
3. Performance markings such as *Adagio* and *Allegro* sometimes specify a divergence from these rules. When they do, a slow marking such as *Adagio* indicates to use the next lower number of shortest notes per tactus, while a fast marking such as *Allegro* indicates to use the next higher number of shortest notes per tactus.

The question arises, why do performance markings only sometimes specify a divergence from the rules of the proportional method, rather than always? In this essay, we suggest that markings Bach places on original performing parts, but not on the autograph score, never specify such a divergence.

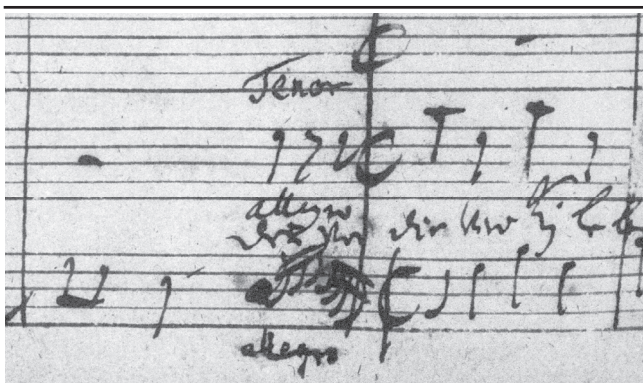
A two-section movement from *Cantata 105* illustrates two performance markings, only one of which is shown on the autograph score. Bach composed this cantata for the 9th Sunday after Trinity during his first year in Leipzig. It was first performed on July 25, 1723. The autograph score is the only extant original source for the cantata. Its many erasures and corrections indicate it was a composing score. While the original performing parts are lost, two contemporaneous score copies derived from the parts survive.² One score,³ of movements 1 and 5 only, was copied by Bach’s student and son-in-law Johann Friedrich Agricola. The other score⁴ was copied by C. P. E. Bach’s choir prefect in Hamburg,⁵ S. Hering.⁶

1 Leslie Kenney, *The Tempo Implications of Bach’s Notation, Part 1: The Proportional Method*. (Saunderstown, RI: WTB Press, 2021).
2 Robert L. Marshall, NBA *Kritischer Bericht*, vol. I/19. (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1989), 33–34.
3 Library Catalog Number: D-B Am.B 37–38, Faszikel 1.
4 Library Catalog Number: D-B Mus.ms. Bach P 48, Faszikel 4.
5 Dietrich Kilian, *Kritischer Bericht* vol. I/13. (Kassel: Bärenreiter, 1960), 91.
6 Marshall, *Kritischer Bericht*, vol. I/19, 31.

The cantata's opening chorus, "Herr, gehe nicht ins Gericht," begins with a forty-seven-measure section that is marked *Adagio* in both the *Bach Gesellschaft* and the *Neue Bach Ausgabe*. In this section, the meter signature is C and the shortest note is the thirty-second. When using the proportional method, the marking *Adagio* suggests decreasing the number of thirty-second notes per tactus from six to four, yielding a tempo of 36 BPM.⁷ This tempo is too slow.

The NBA *Kritischer Bericht* (KB) specifies the sources of performance markings, information that is mostly missing from the BG and NBA scores themselves. Consulting the KB, we find that this first section has no performance marking on the autograph score⁸ but that it is marked *Adagio* on the two score copies (see facsimile, below).⁹ Because *Adagio* is shown on both score copies, which according to the KB were separately constructed from the original performing parts,¹⁰ it is highly likely that *Adagio* was shown on at least some of those lost parts. Clearly, Bach intended that the marking *Adagio* provide information to at least some of the performers regarding musical effect. Because *Adagio* is not on the score, it cannot provide any information to the conductor, who sets the tempo. If it does not provide tempo information, then the number of shortest notes per tactus would remain six, and the tempo would be 54 BPM,¹¹ a musical tempo. Thus, the marking *Adagio*, which is not shown on the autograph score, does not change the number of shortest notes per tactus.

Facsimile of the autograph score. The transition to the second section of "Herr, gehe nicht ins Gericht" (BWV 105/1); mm. 47–48



7 4 (rather than 6) thirty-second notes per tactus \times 72 BPM \div 8 thirty-second notes per quarter note.

8 J. S. Bach, "Herr, gehe nicht ins Gericht," *Faksimile nach dem Partituraautograph*. (Leipzig: Zentralantiquariat der DDR, 1983).

9 Marshall, *Kritischer Bericht*, vol. I/19, 40.

10 Marshall, *Kritischer Bericht*, vol. I/19, 36.

11 6 thirty-second notes per tactus \times 72 BPM \div 8 thirty-second notes per quarter note.

The second section, which begins in the middle of measure 47,¹² is marked *Allegro* in both the BG and the NBA. The time signature is C , the shortest note is the eighth, and the beat note is the half. When using the proportional method, the marking *Allegro* suggests increasing the number of shortest notes per tactus from three to four, yielding the musical tempo of 81 BPM.¹³ Consulting the KB, we find that this second section is marked *Allegro* in two places on the autograph score, under the tenor system in the handwriting of J. S. Bach himself, and under the continuo system in the handwriting of his son, C. P. E. Bach.¹⁴ Thus, the marking *Allegro*, which is shown on the autograph score, serves to increase the number of shortest notes per tactus.

Summary

- For a performance marking to provide tempo information to the conductor, who sets the tempo, it would need to be shown on the score.
- Not all performance markings shown in the BG and/or the NBA appear on Bach's autograph scores. To discover the source of the markings one must consult the NBA KB or the original sources themselves.
- Both the BG and the NBA show two performance markings in the chorus "Herr, gehe nicht ins Gericht."
 - The *Adagio* at the beginning of the first section is not shown on the autograph score. It is shown only on score copies derived from the original performing parts and does not change the number of shortest notes per tactus.
 - The *Allegro* at the beginning of the second section is shown on the autograph score and does change the number of shortest notes per tactus.
- This chorus exemplifies the importance of changing the number of shortest notes per tactus only for performance markings placed on autograph scores. Performance markings placed only on parts provide information about musical effects but not about tempo.

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12 In the second half of measure 47, the original half note in the continuo part has been overwritten with two groups of four sixteenth notes. But, the 82-measure passage that follows is written with eighth-note motion, rather than sixteenth-note motion. Nonetheless, the sixteenth notes in measure 47 are clearly intended to be played at the same speed as the ensuing eighth notes. This means that the first half of measure 47 represents the end of the first section, and the second half represents the first full measure of the second section.

13 4 (rather than 3) eighth notes per tactus \times 81 BPM \div 4 eighth notes per half note.

14 Marshall, *Kritischer Bericht*, vol. I/19, 29.