

A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS ON THE APPLICATION OF TEMPO ON THE CHOIR SONGS WITHOUT TEMPO MARKINGS

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Abstract : This research was conducted with the aim of understanding and explaining how tempo is applied in singing choir songs that do not have tempo markings. Tempo, in this context, refers to the speed or slowness with which a musical composition is sung, either by human vocals or musical instruments. To measure the speed of a song, a tool called a Maelzel Metronome is used. Tempo markings can be classified into several groups, such as very slow, not very slow, medium, fast, and very fast tempos. This study is conducted using the qualitative research method in which the data collection is carried out through library research and observation. The obtained data are then validated through the process of categorization, editing, analysis and conclusion. The validated data are analyzed using the theory of tempo proposed by Perry Rumengan. This research uses a qualitative descriptive method with data collection techniques through literature study and observation. The research results show that tempo has an important role in the context of choirs. In applying tempo to Choir songs, it is necessary to pay attention to the meaning of the lyrics, the ideas conveyed, the melody and rhythm movement, the time structure, expression techniques, as well as the style and genre of the music concerned.

Keywords : *Tempo, Choir Songs, Tempo Markings*

INTRODUCTION

Music plays a profound role and influences human life. It is the art of sound manifested in tempo or musical composition, expressing the thoughts and feelings of its creator through elements such as rhythm, melody, harmony, song form/structure, and expression. Sound in music is the embodiment of expression, produced through the interaction of vibrations and time to convey ideas (Rumengan, 2021).

A Choir is a type of music involving a group of singers, categorized based on vocal range such as Soprano (high-pitched female), Alto (low-pitched female), Tenor (high-pitched male), and Bass (low-pitched male). Led by a conductor or choirmaster, a choir also serves as a training ground for its members (Arya, 2020).

In musical composition, tempo refers to the speed or slowness at which a piece is performed. Tempo, as a significant musical element, is measured using devices like the Maelzel Metronome, invented by Johann Nepomuk Maelzel. Tempo indications can be

grouped into categories such as very slow, moderately slow, moderate, fast, and very fast (Bawembang, 2022). The application of tempo in a choir requires attention to several aspects such as the meaning of the words, the ideas conveyed in the lyrics, the movement of melody and rhythm, structure of the beat, style, genre, and expressive techniques. This encourages the interest of the composer to understand how tempo can be applied appropriately when singing a song that lacks tempo markings (Rumengan, 2021).

In society, there's a phenomenon where many choir groups encounter difficulties in correctly applying tempo. This leads to variations in tempo when singing songs without tempo markings, thus raising questions about how to overcome tempo challenges in a choir piece that lacks tempo indications (Campbell, 2020). Lead by this issue, the authors are interested in delving deeper into how to apply the appropriate tempo when performing a choir piece that lacks tempo markings.

The sound within a composition cannot immediately be referred to as music. Music is more than just sound; it is living sound. Sound can be considered as music when it contains ideas. Musical ideas can only be expressed, captured, and enjoyed if the sound is brought to life in accordance with the essence contained within those ideas. One significant musical element for expressing ideas in a musical composition is dynamics. Dynamics encompass various types, as elaborated by Rumengan (2021). Volume dynamics, for instance, relate to the strength or weakness of sound, such as piano (soft), mezzoforte (moderately loud), forte (loud), and so forth. Register dynamics or timbre dynamics relate to the tonal color of sound in instruments, where each instrument has a unique color and volume. Sound-mass dynamics relate to the density of sound, where the volume increases along with the increasing density of sound.

In the context of a choir, the dynamics of a composition are influenced not only by the movement of melody, rhythm, tempo, chord progressions, style, and accompaniment structure but also by the content and emotions of the lyrics. Therefore, this article aims to provide a practical guide in applying dynamics to a choir song. This guide will be complemented with concrete examples, aiming for interpreters to naturally apply dynamics to a song, even if it lacks explicit dynamic markings. It will serve as a practical and natural guideline for those involved in singing choir songs.

Songs that contain prayers, reflections, sad narratives, lyrical or melancholic themes tend to be expressed with gentle dynamics. These dynamics create an ambiance that aligns with the meaning and emotions conveyed by the lyrics. Conversely, songs that narrate stories or discuss general themes generally have moderately strong dynamics. However, there are often variations in dynamics that create nuances, dramatizing the content of the ideas, both with soft and strong dynamics interspersed throughout the song.

Songs that invite, call, exclaim, express joy, or anger often have moderately strong dynamics, and in some parts, they can even be very loud. These dynamics become an integral part that accompanies the expression of emotions in the song. In the initial parts of the melody towards the middle or end of the

antecedent phrase, dynamics tend to rise or crescendo. Conversely, from the middle towards the end of the consequent phrase, dynamics tend to decrease or become softer. In the context of melody, if three consecutive notes of the same pitch are sung, a slight crescendo can be applied. However, if after those three notes, a lower note follows, the dynamics decrease slightly. Conversely, if followed by a higher note, the crescendo continues

It is also important to note that dynamics in music are influenced not only by the movement of melody, rhythm, tempo, and chord progressions but also by the content and emotions of the lyrics. In a careful analysis, dynamics are not only applied to the melodic elements but to the entire compositional aspects, including the lyrical components that play a crucial role in determining the appropriate dynamics. Thus, this research was conducted with the aim of understanding and explaining how tempo is applied in singing choir songs that do not have tempo markings.

RESEARCH METHOD

This research adopted a qualitative research method, where the approach used is to describe the research subject without testing hypotheses. The qualitative approach allows researchers to gain a deep understanding of the phenomenon under study through the collection and analysis of descriptive data, such as interview transcripts, field notes, drawings, photographs, audio-video recordings, and various other forms of non-numeric data (Fatkhurrohman, 2023).

The data collection was carried out by utilizing library research and observation. Library research stands as one of the primary methods in which relevant literature serves as valuable sources of information. Data is gathered through the exploration of books, journals, theses, dissertations, and scores related to the topic of this research. This approach provides a solid theoretical foundation and enriches the understanding of relevant concepts. Additionally, an observational approach is utilized in data collection. The observation's focus is directed towards the research object, specifically the application of tempo in choir songs. By involving direct observation of a range of works that encompass tempo aspects, the obtained data becomes more contextual and

profound. These observations are carried out by detailing the crucial aspects of tempo usage in choir settings, as Harikusuma (2020) stated.

By combining literary sources, musical sheets, and previous researches as theoretical foundations, this research aimed to build a comprehensive understanding of the research subject. The qualitative approach allows researchers to explore complexities and contexts that might not be fully revealed through quantitative research methods. Therefore, the qualitative approach is considered suitable for providing in-depth insights into the phenomena investigated in this study.

To check the data in this study, the following sequence was used (Nasir, 2021):

1. **Categorization.** The data obtained, whether in the form of texts, literature, writings or compositions in the form of scores and audio-video recordings were categorized according to the needs of this research.
2. **Data Editing/Manipulation.** After the texts, writings, literature, recorded compositions and scores are categorized, they are organized (editing) again through improvements regarding grammar and originality of the data obtained.
3. **Analysis and Inference.** After the data editing process is complete, the authenticity of the manuscripts, texts, writings and audio-video recordings is analyzed.

After checking and validating the data, the data are analyzed descriptively based on the music theory proposed by Perry Rumengan (2021).

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Tempo is a term commonly used in the world of music to describe how fast or slow a musical composition can be performed. This applies to performances with human vocal sounds as well as the use of musical instruments. Beyond just speed or slowness, tempo plays a central role as the character of motion in the elements of music.

It is important to acknowledge that tempo has a significant impact on the overall aesthetics of a musical piece,

especially in the context of choir music. The speed or slowness of a song not only affects the overall duration of the work but also provides a distinctive expressive dimension. Therefore, tempo becomes one of the musical elements that cannot be ignored.

When applying tempo to a choir, several aspects need attention to achieve accurate and unified interpretations. One crucial aspect is understanding the desired character of movement within the context of choir music. Whether it involves an energetic speed or a more relaxed pace, each tempo choice will impart different emotional tones to the performance.

Particularly in choir music, where several vocal voices unite, the harmony of tempo becomes an important element. The coordination among vocal sections and the preservation of overall balance can be more effectively achieved through the application of the right tempo. Therefore, applying tempo in a choir is not solely about speed or slowness but also about creating unity and artistic expression that align with the musical characteristics being performed.

Tempo Application Based on Words' Meaning

The application of tempo based on word meaning involves applying a tempo that aligns with the meaning of a word found within a choir song. Understanding words with specific meanings can aid in applying tempo to a song. In the lyrics of a choir piece, there are surely words that convey the meaning of the song. For instance, words expressing praise to God might be sung with a fast tempo, while those conveying prayerful meanings might be sung with a slower tempo. Example can be seen below:

1. Song with Praising Words

14 *Allegro* (1732 - 1809)

The he - vens are te - lling the glo - ry of God.



Picture 1. *The Heavens Are Telling* (Composer: Franz Joseph Haydn)

Based on the excerpt of the song above, it can be seen within bars 1-19 with the existing lyrics, which is: *The heavens are telling glory of God, the wonder of His work displays the firmament*, means: The sky narrates the glory of God, His wonders display the horizon. In the lyrics of the song, there is the word "Glory," which means "kemuliaan (glory)". "Kemuliaan" in the song represents praise to the Almighty God for the wonders of His creation. Therefore, the song is sung with a fast tempo as it is a form of praise song.

2. Song with Praying Words

In the song entitled *The Lord Bless You and Keep You*, composed by Peter C. Lutkin, there is a lyric:

"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord life His countenance upon you; and give you peace, the Lord makes His face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you."

In the lyrics of the song, the word "Bless" means "memberkati". Based on the meaning of this word, which signifies a request and prayed to God with a calm and peaceful feeling, the song is sung with a slow tempo.

Tempo Application Based on Lyrical Ideas

The application of tempo based on lyrical ideas involves applying a tempo that aligns with the meanings of the existing lyrics in a choir song. Similar to applying tempo based on word meanings, in this aspect, it is necessary to consider the overall meaning of the song's lyrics. For example, lyrics expressing praise to God and those inviting participation might be sung with a fast tempo, whereas lyrics conveying prayers or expressing

admiration might be sung with a slower tempo. It can be seen from the songs below:

1. Song with Admiration Lyrics

In the song entitled *For the Beauty of The Earth*, composed by John Rutter, the lyric is like the following:

"For the beauty of the earth, for the beauty of the skies

For the love which from our birth, over and around us lies,

For the beauty of each hour, of the day and of the night

Hill and vale, and tree and flow'r, sun and moon, and stars of light

For the joy of human love, brothe, sister, parent, child

Friends on earth, and friends above,

For all gentle thoughts and mild

For each perfect gift of time, to our race so freely given

Graces human and devine, flow'r of earth and buds of heaven

Lord of all to thee we raise, this our joyful hymn of praise"

Based on the lyrics of the song above, it can be seen that the song narrates admiration and expresses human gratitude and thankfulness for the beauty of the Earth, God's creation, and exalts God for creating the heavens and the earth. Therefore, the song is performed gently and sung with a slow tempo because the lyrics convey admiration.

Another example is taken from *Kidung Jemaat* No. 64, with the song entitled *Bila Ku Lihat Bintang Gemerlapan*. The lyrics is like the following:

"Bila ku lihat bintang gemerlapan

Dan bunyi guruh riuh ku dengar

Ya Tuhan ku tak putus aku heran

Melihat ciptaan Mu yang besar

Maka jiwa ku pun memuji Mu

Sungguh besar Kau Allahku"

Based on the excerpt of the song above, it can be seen from the existing lyrics that the song narrates human admiration for the natural creation of God, leading individuals to praise the greatness of God.

Hence, the song is sung with a slow tempo.

The last is the song entitled *The Majesty and Glory of Your Name* composed by Tom Fettke. Bars 6-16 of the songs has the following lyrics,

"When I gaze into the night skies And see the work of your fingers The moon and stars suspended in space. Oh, what is Man that you are mindful of Him?"

The lyrics above narrates about the magnificence and greatness of God who created the earth and all His creations, and is sung with reverence at a slow tempo.

In bars 17-50, the lyric is, *"You have given man a crown of glory and honor, And have made Him a little lower than the angels. You have put Him in charge of all creation: The beasts of the field, the birds of the air, the fish of the sea. But what is man that you are mindful of him?"* It tells about humans praising God for granting them the power to care for all His creations and is sung at a faster tempo than the previous section.

2. Song with Persuasion Lyrics

In *Kidung Jemaat*. No. 64, there is a song entitled *Hai Mari Berhimpun* (A Christmas song). Based on its title alone, the song narrates about humanity being invited to rejoice as the King is born into the world. Hence, the song is sung with a fast tempo as it is an invitation song.

3. Song with Prayer Lyrics

In the song entitled *Syukur* composed by H. Mutahar, the lyric is like the following:

"Dari yakin ku teguh, hati ikhlas ku penuh, akan karunia-Mu, Tanah air pusakan Indonesia merdeka, syukur aku sembahkan ke hadirat-Mu Tuhan."

Based on the song excerpt above and its lyrics, the song expresses a prayer as a gratitude to God for His blessings, enabling Indonesia to gain independence. Hence, the song is sung with a slow tempo because it is a prayer song.

4. Song with Praise Lyrics

In the song entitled *Glory To God* composed by Georg Friedrich Handel, the lyric is like the following:

"Glory to God in the highest, and peace on earth, Good will towards men,"

Based on the lyrics from the song excerpt, it can be seen that the song narrates the praise of humans to the Highest God. Therefore, the song is sung with a fast tempo as it is a form of praise song.

Tempo Application Based on Melodic Movement and Rhythm

One of the references that can be utilized when applying tempo to a choir song is by paying attention to melodic movement and rhythm. Rhythm is the musical motion characterized by the interaction between the duration of one sound to another or silence, or the interaction among sounds and silence. (Tangon, 2021). In applying tempo based on melodic movement and rhythm, it can be observed that within a measure, if the emphasized beat starts with a smaller count and is followed by a longer count, it usually results in a slower tempo. The songs below can be seen as examples:

1. My Lord, What A Mornin' (Composed by H. T. Burleigh)

Picture 2. *My Lord, What A Mornin'* (Composed by H. T. Burleigh)

Based on the excerpt above, it can be seen from bars 1-18 that shorter or quicker notes fall on the emphasized beats,

followed by longer notes, resulting in the song being sung at a slow tempo. Other examples can be seen in the following songs: *The Lord Bless You and Keep You* and *Look at The World*, both composed by John Rutter. Meanwhile, if on the emphasized beat, the note that starts has a longer count or duration, followed by a shorter note, it typically results in a moderately fast or fast tempo. Similarly, for the lighter beats, a short or small-count note followed by a longer note also leads to a fast tempo.

2. *Soon Ah Will Be Done* (Composed by William L. Dawson)

Picture 3. *Soon Ah Will Be Done* (Composed by William L. Dawson)

Based on the excerpt above, it can be seen from bars 1-17 that longer or larger-count notes fall on the emphasized beats, followed by shorter notes, which usually results in a fast tempo.

3. *All We Like Sheep Have Gone Astray* (Composed by Georg Friedrich Handel)

Picture 4. *All We Like Sheep Have Gone Astray* (Composed by Georg Friedrich Handel)

Based on the song excerpt above, the song represents the application of tempo based on melodic movement and rhythm. It can be observed from bars 1-17 that shorter or smaller-count notes fall on the lighter beats, followed by longer notes, which typically results in a fast tempo. Other example can be seen from the following songs: *Old Time Religion* by Moses Hogan and *Glory To God* by Georg Friedrich Handel.

Tempo Application Based on Time Signature Form

In applying tempo to a choir song, one can also consider the musical meter. Meter is a rhythmic pattern or musical style in a specific unit or certain pattern, resulting from the interaction of stressed and unstressed beats (Rumengan, 2009).

The application of tempo based on musical meter is equally essential and should be considered as a reference in applying tempo to a choir song as it helps to strengthen the rhythm of a piece. Examples can be found in the following songs:

1. *Der Greis* (Composed by Franz Joseph Haydn)

Molto Adagio Franz Joseph Haydn

Soprano: Hin ist al-le mei-ne Kraft, alt und schwach bin ich,
 Alto: Hin ist al-le mei-ne Kraft, alt und schwach bin ich,
 Tenor: Hin ist al-le mei-ne Kraft, alt und schwach bin ich,
 Bass: Hin ist al-le mei-ne Kraft, alt und schwach bin ich.

we-nig nur er-quik-ket mich, we-nig nur er-quik-ket mich Scherz und Re-ben-
 we-nig nur er-quik-ket mich, we-nig nur er-quik-ket mich Scherz und Re-ben-
 ich - we-nig nur er-quik-ket mich, we-nig nur er-quik-ket mich Scherz und Re-ben-
 ich - we-nig nur er-quik-ket mich, we-nig nur er-quik-ket mich Scherz und Re-ben-

satt, we-nig nur er-quik-ket mich, we-nig nur er-quik-ket mich
 satt, we-nig nur er-quik-ket mich, we-nig nur er-quik-ket mich
 satt, we-nig nur er-quik-ket mich, we-nig nur er-quik-ket mich
 satt, we-nig nur er-quik-ket mich, we-nig nur er-quik-ket mich

Picture 5. *Der Greis* (Composed by Franz Joseph Haydn)

Based on the song excerpt above, it can be observed that the song has a 2/2 time signature containing 2 1/2 beats, which has the same count as a 4/4 time signature. However, in a 2/2 time signature, the tempo might seem slow, but when the song is sung, it is performed at a fast tempo due to 2 beats within 1 measure. Other examples can be seen in the following songs:

- *Graduale Pro Dominica I Quadragesimae* by Michael Haydn
- *Dominus Deus Meus* by Levente Gyongyosi

- *He Trusted In God That He Would Deliver Him* by Georg Freidrich Handel

2. *Beautiful Home* (Composed by Horatio Richmond Palmer)

1. There is a home e-ter-nal, Beau-ti-ful and bright,
 2. Flow-ers for-ev-er are spring-ing In that home so fair,
 3. Soon shall I join that an- them, Far be-yond the sky;

Where sweet joys su-per-nal Nev-er are dimmed by night;
 Thousands of children are sing-ing Prais-es to Je-sus there;
 Je-sus be-came my ran-som, Why should I fear to die?

White-robed an-gels are sing-ing Ev-er around the bright throne;
 How they swell the glad an-thems Ev-er around the bright throne;
 Soon my eyes will be-hold Him, Seat-ed up-on the bright throne;

When, oh, when shall I see thee, Beau-ti-ful, beau-ti-ful home?
 When, oh when shall I see thee, Beau-ti-ful, beau-ti-ful home?
 Then, oh, then shall I see thee, Beau-ti-ful, beau-ti-ful home!

Picture 6. *Beautiful Home* (Composed by Horatio Richmond Palmer)

Based on the song excerpt above, it can be observed that the song has a 6/8 time signature containing 6 1/8 beats within one measure. Similar to the 2/2 time signature, the tempo in a 6/8 time signature might seem slow, but when sung, the song is performed at a fast tempo due to the division of 1 beat into 3 notes. Other examples can be found in the following songs: *Love Lifted Me* by Joseph M. Martin and *Kidung Jemaat. No. 92 Malam Kudus Sunyi Senyap*.

Tempo Application That Is Influenced by Expression Technique

Tempo in a choir can also be applied based on the expressive techniques used by the choir, as it can help convey the meaning in a song. Expression represents the composer's portrayal of the atmosphere in a choir work through melody or lyrics. Examples can be seen in the song entitled

Forgive Blessed Shade, The Tributary Tear
(Composed by John Wall Callcott)

John Wall Callcott (1766-1821)
Accompaniment added by William Horsley (1774-1858)

$\text{♩} = 80$ Moderately slow

expressivo

Treble
For - give bless'd shade, the tri - bu - ta - ry tear, That mourns thy ex - it from a

Treble
For - give bless'd shade, the tri - bu - ta - ry tear, That mourns thy ex - it from a

Bass
For - give bless'd shade, the tri - bu - ta - ry tear, That mourns thy ex - it from a

8

Tr.
world like this, For - give the wish that would have kept thee

Tr.
world like this, For - give the wish that would have kept thee

B.
world like this, For - give the wish that would have kept thee

13

Tr.
here, And stayed thy pro - gress to the seats of bliss.

Tr.
here, And stayed thy pro - gress to the seats of bliss.

B.
here, And stayed thy pro - gress to the seats of bliss.

Picture 7. *Forgive Blessed Shade, The Tributary Tear* (Composed by John Wall Callcott)

Based on the excerpt above, it can be seen that in bar 1, the word 'expressivo' is written. In that section, it is sung at a slower tempo than the tempo indicated at the beginning of the song because there is an 'expressivo' mark, which means it should be sung more expressively than other parts of the song. Another example can be seen in the song *A Sacred Day* by M. Torumtay Altan.

Tempo Application Based on Songs' Style and Genre

The tempo in music can also be influenced by the style and genre of the song performed by a choir group. Each music style and genre has its own characteristics and distinctive features, including in terms of tempo. The appropriate use of tempo according to the style and genre of music can help reinforce the character and distinctive traits of the song, making it more easily accepted and understood by listeners, and enhancing the intended impression by the song's composer. Therefore, understanding the

style and genre of the song is necessary in selecting an appropriate tempo for the song to be sung. An example can be seen in the song entitled *The Battle of Jericho* (composed by Moses Hogan)

Arranged by MOSES HOGAN
Traditional Spiritual

With spirit ($\text{♩} = 80$)

Soprano

Alto

Tenor

Bass

mf marcato

Joshua fit the Bat-tle, the Bat-tle of Jer-i-cho, Josh - ua fit the Bat-tle, the Bat-tle of Jer-i-cho

mf marcato

Joshua fit the Bat-tle, yes, the Bat-tle of Jer-i-cho, Josh - ua fit the Bat-tle, yes, the Bat-tle of Jer-i-cho

3

Women: 3-way drill

mf marcato

Joshua fit the Bat-tle of Jer-i-cho, Jer-i-cho, Jer-i-cho, Josh -

mf marcato

Joshua fit the Bat-tle of Jer-i-cho, Jer-i-cho, Jer-i-cho, Josh -

mf marcato

Josh - ua, the Bat-tle, Josh - ua, the Bat-tle, Josh - ua, the Bat-tle, Josh - ua, the Bat-tle,

mf marcato

Josh - ua, the Bat-tle, Josh - ua, the Bat-tle, Josh - ua, the Bat-tle, Josh - ua, the Bat-tle,

5

Josh - ua, the Bat-tle, Josh - ua, the Bat-tle, Josh - ua, the Bat-tle,

Picture 8. *The Battle of Jericho* (composed by Moses Hogan)

Based on the excerpt above, the song is of the Rock genre because it is sung continuously with a gradually rising melody from the beginning until it reaches the climax of the song, and it is sung at a fast tempo.

CONCLUSION

Choir is a type of music comprising a group of singers categorized based on vocal range: soprano (high-pitched female voice), alto (lower-pitched female voice), tenor (high-pitched male voice), and bass (lower-pitched male voice). Choirs are usually led by a conductor or choirmaster, often serving as the choir's trainer. Within musical compositions, there is a term called tempo, used to indicate

the speed at which a musical piece is performed. Tempo is a crucial musical element in choirs. When applying tempo to a choir song that lacks tempo indications, several essential considerations significantly influence the tempo application process: applying tempo based on the literal meaning of words, applying tempo based on the lyrical ideas while considering the song's meaning, applying tempo based on melodic movement and rhythm, applying tempo according to the musical time signature, applying tempo influenced by expressive techniques, and applying tempo considering the style and genre.

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