

Chapter 2: Making the Part Fit

Time

L'Orchestra è Mobile

Here's why we should all be glad not to have the role of human metronome: **In most pieces of classical music, especially orchestral music, time is not metronomic.** I'm not referring to *rubato*, a kind of pushing and pulling around the steady beat. I mean the beat itself, the underlying tempo of the piece, which in classical music is constantly shifting.

What about a piece like Ravel's *Boléro*?

Example 1



Ravel: *Boléro*, mm. 1-2, snare drum part

Wasn't that snare drum part written specifically to keep the whole orchestra on a steady course?

The snare drum certainly establishes and helps to maintain the *sound* and *feel* of a bolero, but this is not the same thing as keeping everyone in time. The snare drum is an important instrument in various styles of dance music. By giving the underlying rhythm to the snare drum, Ravel was introducing his *Boléro* as a dance. When I play this snare drum part, I want to infuse the piece with the right groove, but my goal is not to maintain an unbending tempo. In any case, as we will see, trying to control the tempo would be a