

Paul Zimmer

an excerpt of

*Intense Agitation**

Perhaps I am being arch to apply this metaphor to the AWP. More aptly and gently I could use a letter I recently received from a jazz pianist friend in Los Angeles. He included a clipping about experiencing “9 Beet Stretch” by a Norwegian named Leif Inge, who has taken a recording of Beethoven’s Ninth and slowed it down to twenty-four hours, using digital technology so that pitch and timbre are not affected. My friend says that hearing even part of this is a life-changing experience. He raves about it, says that it puts you right inside the head of the deaf master so that you can almost sense him composing. It is very, very, very, very slow, he says, but not a cheap conceptual trip. It is “a masterpiece of a masterpiece.”

There are lots of things in our world that could be slowed down—and why not start with our greatest art? A very slow reading of *King Lear*, perhaps lasting twelve hours, instead of the usual hell-bent, voice-beautiful two-hour performance? Perhaps a large projection of van Gogh’s *Starry Night* could be cast over the White House lawn, so President Bush could stroll on it and be calmed before making further decisions. How about a version of Count Basie’s “One O’Clock Jump” spread over two hours? When I was a visiting writer at Hollins University, the dance department students would do *very* slow marches at campus demonstrations, with hands on each other’s shoulders, barely moving, to create quite striking statements.

Slow down. Spread out. For this chapbook roundup I must have read twice or three times as many volumes as in past years. The universe *is* expanding. I didn’t slow down, but I took a long while to do all that reading. Usually I treat five or six volumes in these overviews, but this year—doing the “stretch”—I’m going to make briefer comments and include more chapbooks. Spreading out the critical mass and slowing down. One last microscopic blur of intense agitation? No. The poetic “9 Beet Stretch.”