

"Das Tempo in der Musik von Barock und Vorklassik. Die Antwort der Quellen auf ein umstrittenes Thema." By Klaus Miehling

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Klaus Miehling. *Das Tempo in der Musik von Barock und Vorklassik. Die Antwort der Quellen auf ein umstrittenes Thema.* Wilhelmshaven: Florian Noetzel, 1993. 528p.

Klaus Miehling's extensive study on tempo was begun as far back as 1984, its initial impetus being to disprove the "half-speed" theories which were "in the air" at the time (thus the *umstrittenes Thema* in the title). In 1974 (*Musical Quarterly*, p. 389) Erich Schwandt had proposed, in respect to Michel L'Affilard's tempo indications for French court dances, that the designated durations represented a movement of the pendulum back and forth, rather than merely one way. Because of this, Schwandt maintained, the compositions designated by such pendulum markings were originally played at half the speed that modern performers were realizing them. In 1980 Willem Retze Talsma set forth a similar theory covering a much broader scope of music, mainly from the 18th and early 19th centuries. Talsma, however, modified the idea, by applying it solely to fast movements (Allegretto, Allegro, etc.). Slow movements did not need to adhere, since, as he argued, the terms "vibration" or "beat" might refer to a (pendulum or metronome) motion either one way or both ways. By this means Talsma was able to circumvent the problem of the tempo of many movements being absurdly slow due to a halving of the tempo.

Against these theories Miehling amasses an impressive array of theoretical evidence from the 17th and 18th centuries. Aside from showing that Schwandt's and Talsma's ideas were unfounded, these sources demonstrate that a great deal of the music from the baroque and pre-classic periods was by no means played as leisurely as in many of today's performances.

Miehling divides his book into four parts. Part 1 (which is like an introduction) lays out the basic premises: that a basic tactus (of about one second) existed for many Renaissance and baroque compositions, that a definite link can be found between speeds and particular note values (as was set forth for instance by Kircher in 1650), and that a great deal of 18th-century music was originally performed more quickly than it is today. (One error in this section should be removed from the next edition of the book: the article concerning the metronome in *Allgemeine musikalische Zeitung* appeared in 1814, not 1804.

Part 2 is the most substantial, and presents nearly every historical source from the late 17th to late 18th century that provides any information concerning tempo. Here Miehling proceeds systematically through all the French, then the German, and then the English theoretical writings. These sources clarify the tempo implications of time signatures, of verbal designations, of kinds of dances, and even of particular compositions. Historical means of determining the speed include the pulse, the pace of walking, or the swinging of a pendulum. Another kind of information was that of an overall time indication, which Handel, for instance, provided for his *Solomon* and *Judas Maccabäus*, and Heinichen for several of his oratorios. From these total lengths Miehling proceeds to determine the tempi of individual movements, which is somewhat speculative. In fact, Miehling himself confesses that different solutions may be possible (i.e. of one movement being shorter or lengthier in respect to the others).

This part of the book presents a profusion of information, and Miehling criss-crosses from theoretical writings to particular musical works. The theoretical statements are eminently clear; in addition to translations of the original texts (into German), segments of the original are reproduced in facsimile. (Among the few errors noted in this section concerned Saint Lambert's statement that a dotted quarter in 6/8 was "du moins aussi pressez que ceux du Signe binaire," which Miehling translates (p. 63) as "a little slower than" rather than "at least as fast as" the [note value] in the binary sign. And Saint Lambert's reconstructed tempo of half note at 126 should refer to a measure of \mathcal{C} , not to one of C.

In Part 3 Miehling applies many of the theoretical statements of Part 2 to specific dances. Some of the dances are shown to have varied only slightly from one time period to another, while others such as the minuet deviated rather widely (i.e. from ca. MM 70-75 per measure in the mid-17th century to about 48-60 later in the 18th century).

Part 4 deals with a number of other factors that can have a bearing on tempo. These include the type of text being presented, the basic affect of the piece, and the presence of virtuosic elements. Another difficult problem treated here concerns the meaning of tempo words such as *andantino* or *tempo giusto/tempo ordinario*, which cannot easily be made to correspond to a particular metronomic value. Of special interest is a chapter concerning how well the historical tempo values for certain dances might correspond with attempts to realize them through modern dancing. Miehling's conclusion is that the original tempi were quite appropriate, whereas a halving of the speed (as in Schwandt or Talsma) would make the execution of the dances quite difficult.

In sum, it is apparent that anyone concerned with historical performance might benefit greatly from Miehlings book. In fact, I know of no other volume that proffers such a wealth of detailed information concerning tempo (from 17th and 18th century sources) as does this one.

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