



## Review of the 3rd Congress for Music Theory, Vienna, Austria, May 10-12, 1996

Gerold W. Gruber



KEYWORDS: compositional technique, analysis, perception, Schubert, Schumann, tempo, rhythm, meter

ABSTRACT: In his last year as teacher at the University of Music and Dramatic Arts in Vienna, Austria, Diether de la Motte organized a congress with the title “Time in Music—Music in Time.”

---

[1] Diether de la Motte, author of “*Harmonielehre*” (Eng. Madison, 1991) and other books on melody, counterpoint and music analysis, is known as an unorthodox music theorist and a very creative teacher and composer (at the Department for Composition at the University of Music and Dramatic Arts in Vienna, Austria). In what is, regrettably, his last year (he has been emeritus since September 1996) he again organized a music theory congress, after two previous congresses, in March 1993 (“Theory Books that Ought to be Written or One Would Like to Write”), and in December 1994 (“Speaking About Music in History and the Present”). The eccentric title of the three-day congress in May was “Time in Music: standing still, stopping, flowing, rushing, backwards against the time, lapse of time, point in time, time crack; Music in Time: timeless, ahead of his time, much too late” which is only a very free translation. It should however encourage theorists and composers to bring forth individual brain-teasers. Theoretical questions predominated, but the theme was also picked up by some speakers in a historical context.

### **Clemens Kuehn on Schubert**

[2] Using selected compositions, Clemens Kuehn tried to demonstrate the striking way in which Schubert uses harmony, rhythm and measure groupings. He detected—not unexpectedly for Schubert scholars—unusual, unpredictable, and pronounced techniques in lancers, waltzes and sonatas (in comparison with Mozart and Beethoven), and also explored the rhythmic and harmonic “pulse” of Schubert’s compositions. Schubert’s extraordinarily musical diction would have appeared yet greater, however, had Kuehn compared Schubert’s lancers and waltzes with the compositions that appear in the same collections (an inspiration which Kuehn left to musicology).

### **Diether de la Motte on Schumann**

[3] Diether de la Motte’s contribution was thematically associated with the ideas “dream, sleep and death,” and he explored

such ciphers in songs of Robert Schumann. Motte discovered a meaningfully “sounding” final fermata (op. 83/2, “Waiting in Quietness”), an awkwardly harmonic “glued joint” in op. 35/5 (“The Tearing of a Heart”), a non-transposable song (op. 90/3, whose original Gb major, in contrast to the E-major version, finds the way “out of harmony,” just as the juvenile dream described in the song is irretrievably lost). Further examples from the harmonic and other subtleties of Schumann’s compositions have led de la Motte to come to the conclusion that the aforementioned ideas and contents force the composer to find possibilities to step, in a musical way, “outside of space and time.”

### **Thomas Dézsy on motion and measures**

[4] The young composer Thomas Dézsy explored the correlative relationship of motion, tempus, and tactus using a collection of definitions derived from Johann Gottfried Walther (1732), Johann Mattheson (1739), and Heinrich Christoph Koch (1782). In a passionately presented attempt, he used Heinrich Schenker’s reductive analysis to show different tempo layers (“Aktionstempi”) based on musical examples from the music of Bach and Webern, actually passing through Schenker’s structural layers with the help of structural levels of tempo (a highly innovative attempt). Designing of time lapses in music is, according to Dézsy, a central idea of the classic composition (a model, we may assume, that also inspires twentieth-century composers).

### **Helga de la Motte-Haber on Time Layers**

[5] Helga de la Motte began with the theoretical assumption that we do not know whether there is time or not. Time, however, is describable as motion and changes of energetic conditions. If one assumes that time is a mental construction, then it is understandable why there are such different views about time. She named three aspects of the structure of time that have endured to the present: cyclically recurring time (biological rhythm), progressive time with a dramatic goal, and time that goes together with ideas of space (Wagner’s “time becomes space” in *Parsifal*). Helga de la Motte gave examples showing that diverging compositional time-shaping is always also a perspective on space. She explained this hypothesis with pieces by Debussy (movement in space, planes, and colors); Charles Ives (echo space); Morton Feldman (time screens); Karlheinz Stockhausen (overlapping tempos that become spatial melodies), as well as with Stravinsky’s structures, which Messiaen called “personnages rythmiques”; and of course with the “Zeiträume” (time spaces) composed by Messiaen.

### **Barbara Barthelmes on Wyschnegradsky**

[6] Ivan Wyschnegradsky, known for microtonality, pursued the idea of a regeneration of musical time together with his idea of a new conception of a musical space. (Barthelmes described a largely unknown project of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, which Wyschnegradsky called “Projet de la mosaïque lumineuse de la coupole du temple,” as an idea of a spatial time.) Wyschnegradsky developed new models (i.e. modes) of the rhythmic movement (additive, increasing, slowing, declining etc.), and described several layers of musical figures in a spatially defined time continuum.

### **Gerold W. Gruber on different time perception**

[7] Gerold W. Gruber examined different levels of perception and varied models of presentation when speaking about “composed time— interpreted time—analyzed time.” Composed time is, on one temporal level, the struggle of the composer for formal and dramaturgic solutions and, on a second level, the realization of material, idea and musical figures. (Analysis generally deals with the second level.) The achievement of the composer in the time and space continua lies in the combining of both levels, which is unique within the arts. In interpretation, minute nuances in the balance between detail and general view open new time structures in the composition. Composition and analysis are incompatible insofar as in analysis new courses of time are constituted. In rare instances, however, composition and analysis approach each other, as in Hans Keller’s attempts at analytical expansions of composed time (e.g. in his Functional Analysis scores).

### **Heinz von Loesch**

[8] After Helga de la Motte and Gerold W. Gruber, Heinz von Loesch raised once more the problematic question of time structures and their concepts. Loesch criticized Carl Dahlhaus and Helga de la Motte, who have spoken in publications of

the idea of a “linearly directed time,” and of “works directed to the finale” (above all in Beethoven’s works), where time is experienced through music as a process. Loesch saw here a purely symbolically oriented concept of time, which he contrasted with a concept in the physiology of perception. In the first case the concept of time seems convincing but not noteworthy, in the second case it is significant, but untenable. Similarly, Loesch considers Aristotle’s concept of time to be problematic. Many participants articulated the view that a solution of the conflict was scarcely offered.

[9] In a lecture entitled “Time in motion—Motion in Time,” Werner Schulze united ideas from the Greek classical antiquity (Plato, Aristotle), from the Middle Ages (Kepler), and from modern times (Schopenhauer, Messiaen). He described the similarities and differences between space and time, between architecture and music (as artistic forms of expression of space and time).

[10] Marie-Agnes Dittrich examined from a temporal distance an impressive cultural event: the performance of Mozart’s *Der Schauspieldirektor*, and Salieri’s opera buffa *Prima la musica e poi le parole*, and showed the perfidious irretrievability of works of art as related to time and their surrounding world—their irony being understandable only with difficulty.

[11] Annegret Huber dedicated her lecture to the questionable designation of “Biedermeierzeit,” and asked to what extent the works of that time can be conceived of as homogenous.

[12] Wolfgang Auhagen began his investigations on tempo-feeling while listening to music, after he had encountered the publications of Willem Retze Talsma. Talsma stated that present interpreters play classic allegro movements twice as fast as intended by the composer because one has to count two “ticks” of the metronome instead of one. Talsma’s view not only directly contradicts exact research of the sources but, moreover, Auhagen stated that the interpreter has the capacity to judge the correct tempo by examining the structure and expression of a piece of music. Many composers trust the interpreter to find the right tempo automatically. An empirical investigation of this interesting thesis followed. According to Auhagen, musical movement is more comparable with gestures than with sequences of discrete events.

[13] A further empirical investigation with music students was carried out by Guenther Roetter. Roetter’s thesis contrasts two types of tempo perception, the type experienced while performing music on the one hand, and, on the other, the type experienced while reading music. With electrodes, he also looked at the motor aspect while subjects were reading music. Subjects with distinctive motor activity while reading an unknown piece of music had an especially high level of precision when playing music. Roetter’s hypothesis is that, when learning music, body motion has a beneficial influence on the result. This body motion is transferred through increasing experience from exterior to interior, and transforms into a cognitively structured process.

[NOTE: The congress report will be published next year by Peter Lang.]

---

**Gerold W. Gruber**  
**University of Music and Dramatic Arts**  
**Institute for Music Analysis**  
**Lothringerstrasse 18**  
**A-1030 Vienna, Austria**  
[t0061dab@vm.univie.ac.at](mailto:t0061dab@vm.univie.ac.at)

---

### Copyright Statement

Copyright © 1996 by the Society for Music Theory. All rights reserved.

[1] Copyrights for individual items published in *Music Theory Online (MTO)* are held by their authors. Items appearing in *MTO* may be saved and stored in electronic or paper form, and may be shared among individuals for purposes of scholarly research or discussion, but may *not* be republished in any form, electronic or print, without prior, written permission from

the author(s), and advance notification of the editors of *MTO*.

[2] Any redistributed form of items published in *MTO* must include the following information in a form appropriate to the medium in which the items are to appear:

This item appeared in *Music Theory Online* in [VOLUME #, ISSUE #] on [DAY/MONTH/YEAR]. It was authored by [FULL NAME, EMAIL ADDRESS], with whose written permission it is reprinted here.

[3] Libraries may archive issues of *MTO* in electronic or paper form for public access so long as each issue is stored in its entirety, and no access fee is charged. Exceptions to these requirements must be approved in writing by the editors of *MTO*, who will act in accordance with the decisions of the Society for Music Theory.

This document and all portions thereof are protected by U.S. and international copyright laws. Material contained herein may be copied and/or distributed for research purposes only.

Prepared by Lee A. Rothfarb, General Editor and Tahirih Motazedian, Editorial Assistant