

**Alexei PANOV, Ivan ROSANOFF**

## **TOWARDS THE TACT AND TACTUS IN GERMAN BAROQUE TREATISES<sup>1</sup>**

### **Abstract**

*In music history during the period encompassing the years beginning from the late 15-th to the middle of the 18-th centuries a fundamental significance in music theory and practice had been designated to the definition of Tact and Tactus. Such a broad historical scope of our paper inevitably involves the inclusion of much material, and the authors were forced to concentrate mainly on materials of the 17-th and beginning of the 18-th centuries. In the discussion of the meaning of the terms Tact, Tactus and also the verb tangere we applied not only to treatises on music, as compared with other scholars, but to different kind of language dictionaries of that period, such as: A. de Fulda, P. Dasypodio, I. Serrano, Chr Wase, A. Ornitoparchus, J. Dowland, T. de Santa-Maria, Chr. Demantius, H. Faber, A. Gumpelzhaimer, J. Quirsfeld, A. Wilfflingseder, G. Falck, J. R. Ahle, J. G. Walther and many others. In result it has been certainly defined that the general meaning of Tact and Tactus (along with the verb tangere) was 'to beat the meter', and the last had to be done with great precision.*

**Keywords:** *tact, tactus, tactibus, tactistæ, compas, Tango, tangere, Schlag, Anrühren, Valor, Geltung, to beat, steady/regular/equal, Augenblick, Niederschlag, Aufheben, die Seele der Music, the soul of music.*

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There are considerable differences in the interpretation of the well-known terms *Tact* and *Tactus* both in early treatises and in contemporary studies. And, as it has been ascertained by the authors of this article, one of the most significant meanings of these terms in theory and practice of musical performance is either only briefly mentioned in modern studies or not mentioned at all. However, it was long and well known that the terms *Tact* and *Tactus* did not signify the notions familiar to modern musicians, while as early as in the beginning of XX century G. Schünemann, A. Chybiński and others have been writing about it [1-5]. These notions appear unusual not only to the musicians who are engaged in historically informed performance, but also to musicologists studying the problems of *Tact* on a scientific level. We consider it necessary to write at length on this fundamentally important interpretation of the terms *Tactus* and *Tact* which still remains quite usual for modern music theory and practice.

This fundamentally important interpretation concerns the previous universal understanding of the words *Tact* and *Tactus* as *measurements/beating of meter*. Aesthetic ideas of the musicians of the subsequent historical periods were not always correlated directly with the ideas of earlier times. That is why in the works devoted to these terms the emphasis was shifted later to other elements of the thesaurus. It is also necessary to take into account that in the Western Europe terminological system (terminosystem) these fundamental concepts of late Renaissance and early Baroque, along with those as *de Modo*, *Modus*, *Mood*, *Tempore*, *Tango*, *Prolatione*, *Prolation*, *Mensura*, *Measure*, *Mesure*, could change their meanings in the course of the historic evolution, and it had made and continues to make certain difficulties in the study of these terms both in the past and in the present time<sup>2</sup>.

The terms *Tact* and *Tactus* were given a most detailed and profound investigation by the prominent German scholar Hans Heinrich Eggebrecht. In his textual study *Handwörterbuch der musikalischen Terminologie* [6] one of the sections is devoted to the term *Tactus*. The article is composed in such a way that at first Eggebrecht offers a succinct summary of the main interpretations of the word *Tactus*, and then he examines in detail each of its meanings. Here we have the possibility only to mention the basic definitions.

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<sup>2</sup> In this article the authors consider it necessary to apply not only to music treatises, but also to old Latin, German, French and English explanatory dictionaries – especially bilingual and translational ones.

With due consideration to the Latin origin of the word *Tactus* as its first meaning Eggebrecht offers the following definition: ‘TACTUS: lat., Berührung, Griff, Gefühl; ital. tatto; frz. tacte; dtsch. Tact. Rühren [Tactus: Latin – touching, contiguity, catching/feeling; Italian – tatto; French – tacte [to beat]; German – Tact, to move/touch, to stir]’ [6].

Eggebrecht connects the second meaning of the word with the term *tangere*, which ‘occurs in the late Middle Ages’ and is specially used ‘while playing the organ’.

The third meaning of the word *Tactus* refers to the interpretation given in the work by Georgius Anselmus [Anselmi] from Parma *Dialogi de harmonia*, 1474 [7]. In this work the word *Tactus* is used as ‘touching the keys of a clavichord or zither’.

The fourth meaning of the word is directly related to the concept of ‘Abmessen der Zeit und der Noten in der Mensuralmusic [measuring time and notes in mensural music]’. Dwelling on this subject Eggebrecht also considers the effect of the ‘recurring touch [wiederholtes Berühren<sup>3</sup>] in the measuring of time...’, and further the author introduces another meaning of the term, namely, that ‘tempo itself [during the act of performing music]’ could be denoted by the term *Tactus*. In the context where the problem of measuring/beating time (Taktschlagens) is taken in account, Eggebrecht states that time beat here is to be understood<sup>4</sup>: ‘also the (measurments/beatings of time consisting of down- and up-beats) [auch den (aus Ab- und Aufschlag beschtehenden) Taktschlag]’. For the first time this meaning according to Eggebrecht, was ‘represented in detail in the treatise by Adam Fulda (1490)’.

It should be pointed out that the treatise by Adam von Fulda [8] had been studied as early as 1908 (!) by Schünemann [1, p. 75-76], and the corresponding text is almost verbatim presented in this author’s *Geschichte des Dirigierens* [2, p. 40-41]. Later it is also cited in the monography by Willy Apel [9, p. 91]<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>3</sup> Further it will become clear that the author means repeated actions/movements of a musician’s hand or something else to measure time. But such phrases as ‘wiederholtes Berühren’ or (Latin:) ‘continua motio in mensura’, nonplus many scholars even nowadays.

<sup>4</sup> We should point out that using the word *Tact* as a synonym of the words *Tact* and *Tactus* found in various studies devoted to the period of our concern (XV – early XVIII centuries) completely misleads any reader, because it is from the terminological sense incorrect. *Tact* in that period of time did not at all mean the notion which came into existence approximately in the late XVII – early XVIII centuries. This word along with the word *Tactus* meant measuring/beating of the meter/time while performing music. That is why in this work the authors use, as synonyms of the words *Tact* and *Tactus*, not the word *Tact*, but *meter* or such lexemes as *beatings of meter*, or *beating of time*. Thus, *Tact* and *Tactus* in the early years did not correlate with the term *Tact* in its modern understanding! *Tact* in our contemporary scholarly interpretation, if we have the right to say so, ‘had not been born yet’ at that time! Practically in all modern research works we come across historically baseless interpretations of the words *Tact* and *Tactus*, what leads to a substantial misinterpretation of their meaning considering the context of the subject under discussion.

<sup>5</sup> These questions are partially touched upon by Marina Girfanova [10-12], cf. also: [13-15].

Since Eggebrecht writes about the period when mensural notation was used, and since it is connected with the ‘life history’ of the terms, we would like to turn to one of the dictionaries of that time. In the Latin-German and German-Latin dictionaries by Petro Dasypodio (1536) a very significant nuance concerning the interpretation of the word *tactus* along with the related words - *Tango* [*tangis, tangere*] and *Schlagen* can be found.

In Dasypodio’s dictionary there is a reference note to the word *Tango*. The latter is explained as follows: ‘Tango, [*tang*]is, Ich rür an [i.e.: anrür, modern spelling - anrühre]/berühre/ich bewege/schlahe... [*Tango, [tang]is, I touch, I move/stir, beat...*]; Schlagen [i.e.: Schlagen – to beat]. Verberare [I beat], Percutere [I clang/beat],...Tangere [to beat, to touch...].’ [16, without pagination]. Consequently, the word *Tactus* meant *to touch, to move, to beat*.

In Johannes Serrano’s dictionary (1539) there is a similar interpretation of the above-mentioned terms [17]. However, Serrano presents a still shorter, but at the same time – a more definite interpretation: ‘Tango, is, ere, *Anrüren/berüren/bewegen/schlagen*’. And in the same item there is one more very important detail: ‘Tango fit Tactus, a, um, *berürt/angeblasen* [and also:] Tactus, Substant[if]. *Berührung/greifung* [*Tango or Tactus (Tactusum), touched/moved, blown* (derivative from the word *to blow... blown*, and mainly used when music wind instruments are concerned). Tactus, a noun. To touch/ to catch]’. [Our text in round brackets. - A.P., I.R.] Before making a brief preliminary conclusion we should note that in the *Lexicon* published by the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences in 1731 the word *Berühren* is also given as an equivalent of the Latin word *tangere*! [18, p. 82]

It follows from the above-mentioned sources that the verb *tangere* was not necessarily connected, as Eggebrecht writes that it was, with playing the organ, but was to a greater extent integrated with the concept of *Tactus*. Along with this it may be assumed that the name of the part of the clavichord mechanism – *tangent* – is a derivative form from the words *Tango* and *tangere*. It is also very important that the content of the explanations in old dictionaries directly connects the meanings of *Tactus* and *Tango*, and in every meaning one finds the words *to touch, to move* and finally – *to beat*. That is, simply saying, *Tactus* means ‘to beat, to hit, to touch’, and further this will become still more apparent.

The information in the dictionaries of Dasypodio and Serrano coincides with the one that Schünemann had discovered in other sources in his research. As early as in the beginning of the XX century, this renown German scholar used a large number of historic musical sources in his study, and wrote: ‘They had beaten the meter with their hand [Man schlug mit der Hand den Takt]. Throughout the XVI century almost every theoretical and practical work contained a section on

measure [*de tactu*]. The theorist Adam von Fulda (about 1490) ... is also the first to include [in his work] a section on measure [Takt] ... Meanwhile, earlier and more concise information on beating meter [Taktschlagen] is given by Ramis de Pareia in the XV century [19]. A conductor should beat the meter with the hand, the foot or finger [Der Dirigent<sup>6</sup> solle den Takt mit der Hand oder dem Fuß oder dem Finger schlagen]. Despite this very early information there are visual images which demonstrate that even in earlier times meter had been also beaten with the hand' [1, p. 75].

A century later, the interpretation of the Latin words *Tactus* and *Tact* remains the same as that in the dictionaries of Dasypodio and Serrano, and this applies not only to German vocabularies. Let us refer to one of the Latin-English dictionaries of the second half of XVII century – namely, to the then popular; dictionary of Christopher Wase: *Dictionarium Minus*, where it is defined as: 'Tactus, a, um. *Touch'd, struck with lightning...* Tactio, nis. *A touching or the sense of touching.* Tactus, ūs. *A touching, [noun:], or feeling; the sense of touching.* ... Tango, eré. *To touch, to hit, feel, to moove; to strike with lightning ... Tangere aliquid. Lightly to mention or describe any thing... to strike, or gently reptove*' [20].

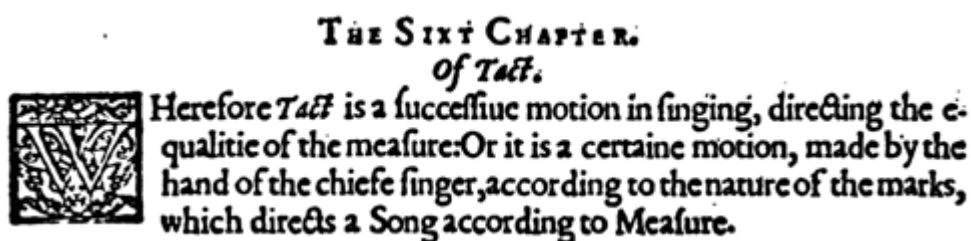
A contemporary musician who comes across the word *Tactus* in old treatises has certain difficulties in disengaging from its current/modern understanding and of substituting the modern meaning by the original one. Thus, the following interpretation by Andreas Ornithoparchus [21] would become much more intelligible, if we were to use the original meanings of the terms. Ornithoparchus provides the next definition: 'Tactus est motio successiua in cantu, mensure equalitatem dirgens. Uel est quidam motus, manu precentoris signorum indicio formatus, cantum dirgens mensuraliter. (Strikes/touches/beatings are consistent [sequentially alternating] movements in singing [while singing], which govern the uniformity of the mensuration [measure]<sup>7</sup>. Or it is a certain movement of the hand made by a master singer<sup>8</sup> which directs a song in accordance with the indicated mensural characters/signs).'

<sup>6</sup> Notwithstanding the fact that the word *Dirigent* is used in contemporary works on musicology, in which the theory of music notation is being studied, in earlier times it had another sense – not the one we find in the XIXth-XXI-st centuries. In earlier times the words *direction*, *Directore*, *Director*, *Dirigens*, and other were often met, but according to the above mentioned dictionary of Dasypodio, the root of the word was *Rego*. Hence from this root derive the other modifications as, for example, *Regolo* – rule/law, *regulare* – uniformly/regularly, *dirego* – to properly/appropriately direct, *direction* and *dirigirung* (*Dirigent*). Consequently, in the relation to the art of music of the XVI – first half of the XVIII centuries, the matter concerns a person (musician) who regulates/beats the meter. The problems of interpretation and of performance were the least ones which bothered the tactist. His task was to beat the measure/pulsation uniformly/regularly in conformity with the requirement of the 'mensura modi, temporis et prolationis'.

<sup>7</sup> We should remind once more that the term *Dirigens* (as has been stated earlier) was not yet conceptually connected with the idea of *conducting*. The use of the word *conductor* in translations of such early documents sometimes might completely confuse the unprepared/unsophisticated reader.

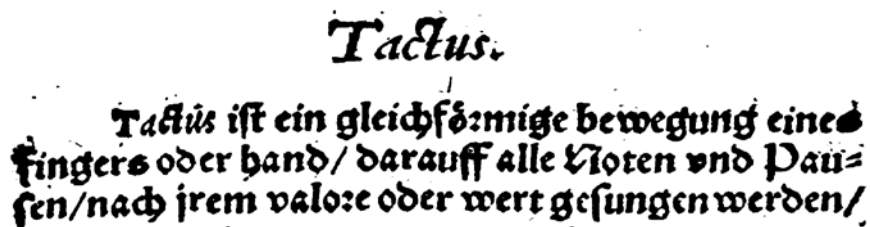
<sup>8</sup> Let us address ourselves once again to the old Latin dictionary of Dasypodio [16]. There the word 'precentor (præcentor)' is defined the following way:

In this definite case there is a possibility to check the correctness of our understanding of the definition by Ornithoparchus with the one, given in the officially published old translation of the whole body of his treatise (1609), published by the prominent English lutenist and scholar John Dowland [22, p. 46]:



This comparison shows that the main idea and the special terms are adequately interpreted in this paper.

If we return to Germany we will find that the German theorist and Cantor from Nürnberg Ambrosius Wilfflingseder (1561) explains the word *Tactus* in his treatise very precisely and compactly: ‘*Tactus* is a uniform motion of the finger or the hand [used] so that all the notes and intervals are sung in accordance with their cost or value [i.e. prescribed by their duration in the notation]’ [23, without pagination].



Special attention should immediately be attracted to the words ‘gleichförmige bewegung’ used in the meaning of a uniform motion. An even more important point should be emphasized here: *Tactus*, as Wilfflingseder interprets it, is neither a measure in our contemporary sense of the word, nor any unit of mensural notation. It is a physical gesture of a person, of whom it has been demanded to perform the act of measuring/beating the meter uniformly/evenly! It is namely this point that seems to us conceptionally important. It seems to be that in modern historically informed performance just the other way about is proclaimed and heard. The general aim of most

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**Præcentio, Das vorgesang. Præcen-  
tor, Ein vorsenger.**

’ [Præcentio, the prior singing. Præcentor – a first/main singer].’

of the musicians adhering to this new idea is to steer of from observing uniformity in the sequence of metric beats.

The requirement of adhering to the uniformity of meter is specifically commented in the basic study by W. Apel: 'Practically every theorists gives longer or shorter explanations on the tactus as the unit of musical time... the important fact is that nowhere is a remark to be found which would give the slightest justification for the assumption that the duration of a note could be varied according to the text, the character or feeling of the piece, or whatever other romantic ideas a modern conductor may have in his mind' [9, p. 190]. On the same page Apel states that to achieve the ability of uniformly/evenly meter, i. e. 'the fundamental and unchangeable' units of time, it was required to go through hours of training: 'To the singer of this period *proportia tripla* or *proportio sesquiertia* meant a definite and fixed tempo, derived from the *integer valor*, and familiar to him through his long training in a normal tempo which represented for him the natural pulse of music.'

However, it is necessary to emphasize that this direct conclusion, which Apel brought forth, should be understood purely contextually, namely, only in relation to 'uniformity' of measuring meter at that historical period. If we give a broader meaning to the notion of musical performance encompassing about a hundred-year period of 1550-1650 in Europe (especially in Italy) we can see that profound changes were taking place: firstly, the composers were writing music portraying very certain affects, and, secondly, the performers were able to transfer adequately those musical affects. Thus, in the third volume of the famous treatise by Prætorius *Syntagmatis Musici*, based mainly on Italian musical theory and practice, in the paragraph, where along with other Italian terms the terms *Presto*, *Adagio*, *Lento* are explained, it is written that 'these words are often used by Italians in various places in concerts'<sup>9</sup>... because of the necessity to make alternate changes in [the loudness] of voices and choruses, and I am not displeased about that. Though, there are some persons, especially in the churches, who consider such usage wrong. I myself do not consider such changes [solche Variation] to be neither unpleasant nor unsuitable, if they are performed with fine moderation and with proper/good gracefullness, expressing the affect and moving people's feelings [die affectus zu exprimiren vñ in den Menschen zu moviren] ...

<sup>9</sup> Prætorius treats the word *Concert* not as 'a concert' in the modern sense of the word, that is, as a music piece composed in a certain structure [24, p. 4-5], but, firstly (briefly speaking) he meant by it a musical performance of a musical piece: motet, madrigal and so on, created for 3-4-5-6 voices or instruments accompanied by the organ, secondly (after Ludovicus Viadana): such pieces as 'a Mutet [i. e. Motet] in 5. 6. or more voices performed on the organ', it could also be a 'Madrigalia', composed for 'dreyn vnd vier Stimmen cum Basso generali pro Organo...'; thirdly, the word *Concert* [lat. by Prætorius: *Concertare*] could also be used especially when two choruses (one lower, the other - higher) were singing 'one opposite the other [ein ... gegen einander]', on this subject he writes in detail in the 3-rd part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> volume [25, p. 152-168; the page-numbers are confused].

Often the composition itself along with the text and the meanings of the words require that sometimes the meter/beat [Tact], but not too often and not too much is taken now fast and now again sometimes slow ...'<sup>10</sup> [24, p. 132].

Since earlier we stepped outside the German borders, and addressed ourselves to materials from English works, we cannot omit mentioning the interpretation of the term *Tactus* by the prominent Spanish musician Thomas de Sancta-María (1565) [27]. Concerning the treatise by de Sancta-Maria and his interpretation of *meter* (and *Tactus*) Otto Kinkeldey [28, p. 29] as early as 1910 already cited in his study: '*Meter* is the amount of time which is needed for passing from one downbeat to another ... *meter* [i.e. the measuring/beating of the meter] is subdivided into two parts – downbeat and upbeat. Both of them should be equal ...'<sup>11</sup>

It is evident that de Sancta-Maria demanded the meter/measure (*compas*, i.e. *tactus*) to be beaten precisely uniformly. We should remind that this most significant characteristic of the term *Tactus* found in many early treatises is either not mentioned at all in modern studies, or it is only briefly named (as it was already stated above).

A hundred years later in Germany Christopher Demantius in his treatise [30] wrote the following:

Quid est Tactus?  
Est æqualis motio manûs, notarum, puncto-  
rum, ac pausarum, valorem dirigens.

'What is *Tactus*? It is an equal [uniform] movement of the hand, [so that] the notes, the dots [of augmentation] and pauses would be directed by [their] value [note duration]'. It is possible to confirm the authenticity of our translation from Latin, as later Demantius offers a German version also. We should pay attention to the fact that in the German version the word *Tact*, is used instead of *Tactus*:

<sup>10</sup> The necessity to change tempo while performing madrigals is prescribed in the prefaces to G. Frescobaldi's *Toccatas*. He also considers it necessary to use many other elements of the madrigal performance style in the execution of his toccatas [25, 26].

<sup>11</sup> In the dissertation by Warren E. Hultberg [29, p. 32-33] its author offers a citation from Thomas de Sancta Maria in full, providing the original terminology in round brackets: 'There are four requirements for carrying the compas [i. e. meter] forward: (1) steady downbeat (baxo) and upbeat (alto); spending no more time on one than the other; (2) the hand striking on the downbeat remains for the duration of a half-compas, not raising until the upbeat is struck; similarly, the hand striking the upbeat remains until the downbeat is struck; (3) all notes which occur on the downbeat or upbeat must be struck together, neither before, after, stronger, nor weaker; (4) all the ensuing compasses (measures) are determined by the duration of the first'.



**Was ist der Tact?**  
**Er ist eine gewisse oder gleiche Bewegung**  
**der Hand / darnach der Noten / Puncten und**  
**Pausen *Valor* und Geltung geschäzet nnd ge-**  
**halten wird.**

‘What is meter/measure? It is a definite or uniform [equal/even] movement of the hand, so that the notes, the dots [of augmentation] and pauses would be properly estimated and held according to their value and duration’ [30, without pagination].

The following text from Demantius’s treatise, presented in the form of a table, giving parallel Latin and German versions, offers a fuller idea of the then-existing understanding of the Latin musical terminology, and in our case we should pay special attention to the treatment of the terms *Tact* and *Tactus*.

Quid est Tactus?

*Est equalis motio manûs, notarum, puncto-  
rum, ac pausarum, valorem dirigens.*

Quotuplex est Tactus?

*Duplex: Simplex vel Communis, & proportio-  
natus.*

Quid est tactus communis sive simplex?

*Quando Semibrevis notula uno motu mensu-  
ratur; aut etiam omnes notula suam essentiam &  
valorem retinent.*

Ejus signum quod est?

*Ejus signum post clavem signatam à principio  
est semicirculus, cum linea recta  $\frac{1}{2}$  & notat Can-  
tum imperfectum, vel vulgare  $\frac{1}{2}$  sive Com-  
munem: Nonnunquam etiam semicirculus absq;  
lineola ponitur  $\frac{1}{2}$  qui monstrat Cantum Tactu  
pleniore vel remissiore canendum.*

Quid est Tactus Proportionatus?

*Quando notula majori, & quasi triplicato  
vel potius saltatorio motu mensurantur, &  
tres*

Was ist der Tact?

Er ist eine gewisse oder gleiche Bewegung  
der Hand / darnach der Noten / Punkten und  
Pausen *Valor* und Geltung geschähet nnd ge-  
halten wird.

Wie mancherley ist der Tact?

Zweyerley: Der schlechte oder gemeine / und  
der proportionirte Tact.

Was ist der gemeine oder schlechte Tact?

Wann eine *Semibrevis* auf einen Schlag ge-  
het oder auch alle Noten ihren wesentlichen ge-  
wissen zugeeigneten *Valor* und Geltung behal-  
ten.

Welches oder was ist dessen Merckzeichen/  
daran er erkand wird?

Sein Zeichen ist nach dem gesetzten *Clavi*,  
oder Musc Schlüssel / im Anfang ein halber  
Circel mit einer gleichen Linien  $\frac{1}{2}$  und bedeu-  
tet *Cantum imperfectum*, oder ge-*meinen* und  
gewöhnlichen Gesang / bißweilen wird auch ein  
halber Circel / ohne eine Linien gesetzt und ge-  
funden / also:  $\frac{1}{2}$  welcher deutet / daß der selbe Ge-  
sang etwas *Flan*asamer / und mit einem völli-  
gern Tact muß gesungen werden.

Was ist der proportionirte Tact oder Mensur?

Wenn der Gesang in einer größern nñ gleich-  
sam dreyfacher *Mensur* ja fast tangende unnd  
sprungsweise gesungen / oder abgetheilet wird /

$\frac{1}{3}$  ij und

Particular attention should be paid to the *Compendium* written by Heinrich Faber (? - 1552) and published later by the precentor Melchior Vulpius in 1608 [31] as a bilingual edition (Latin and German). A previous edition had been translated into German by Christoff Rid (1586) [32].

Version by Rid (1586) [32]:

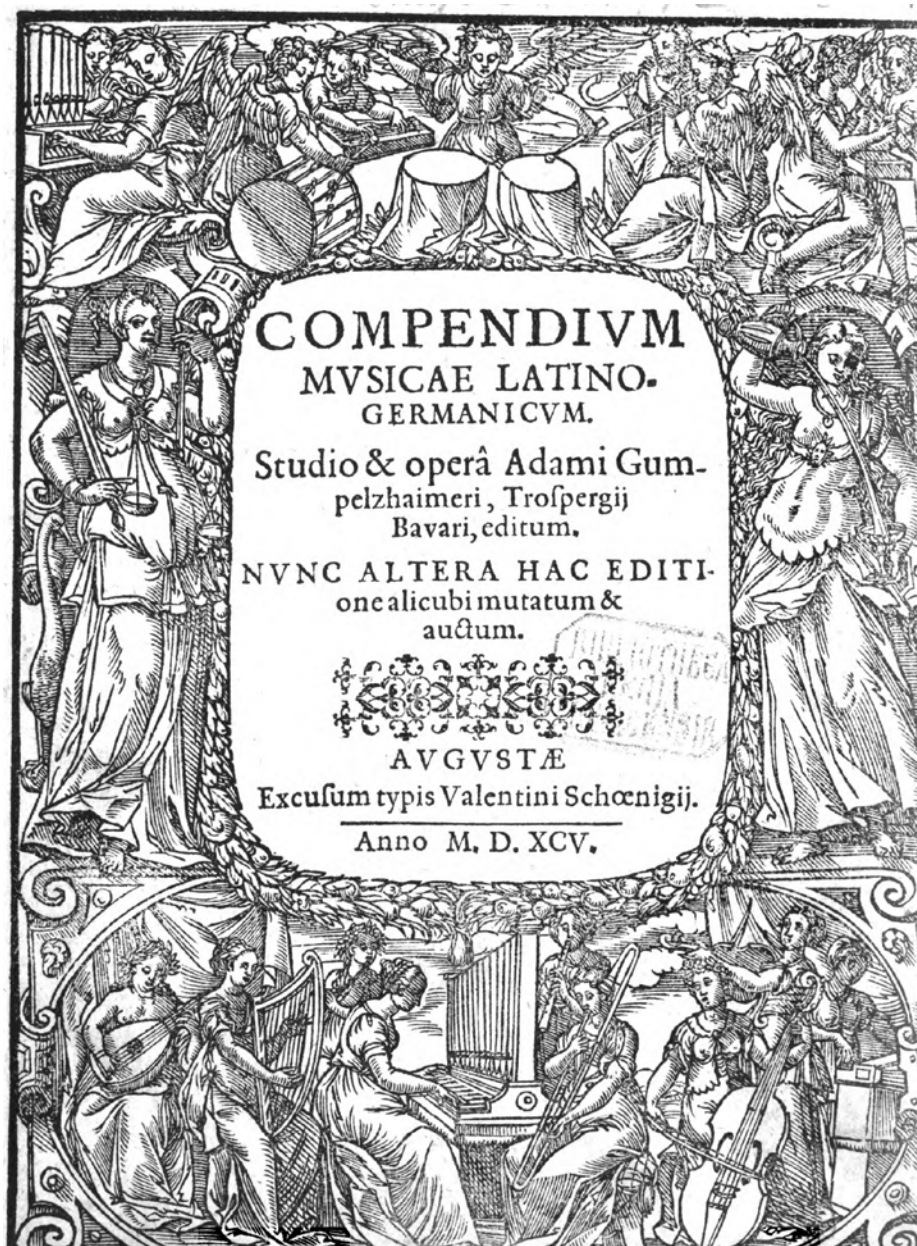
Version by Vulpius (1608) [31]:

Maxima	Die mit sol- cher figur gema- let wird.	vnd in diesem zeichen	+	}	8	schlag.
Longa					4	
Brevis					2	
Semibre- vis					1	
Minima				}	2	einen schlag.
Semimi- nima					4	
Fusa	8					
Semifusa				16		

[illegible]

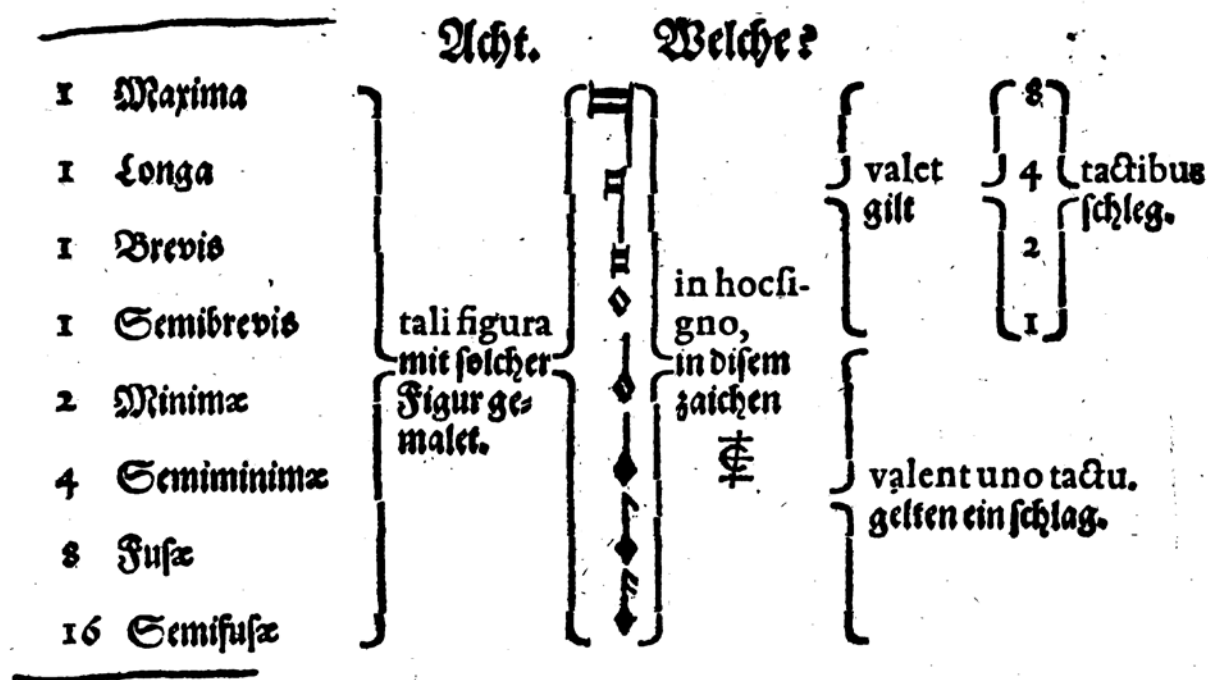
	Octo.	Quæ!	
Maxima		8	ualet
Longa		4	tactis
Breuis		2	bus.
Semibreuis		1	
Minima		2	
Seminimia		4	
ma		8	tactu
Fusa		16	mensu
Semifusa			ratur

The identical scheme is presented even more precisely in an excellent (what concerns its content and its design) *Compendium* by Adam Gumpelzhaimer [34], based on Faber's ideas.



Gumpelzhaimer's treatise – also prepared and published both in Latin and in German languages – was issued more than ten times and had a deep influence on German musical science of that time.

Gumpelzhaimer [34, part 2, p. 7] – the scheme and the interpretations are much more improved:

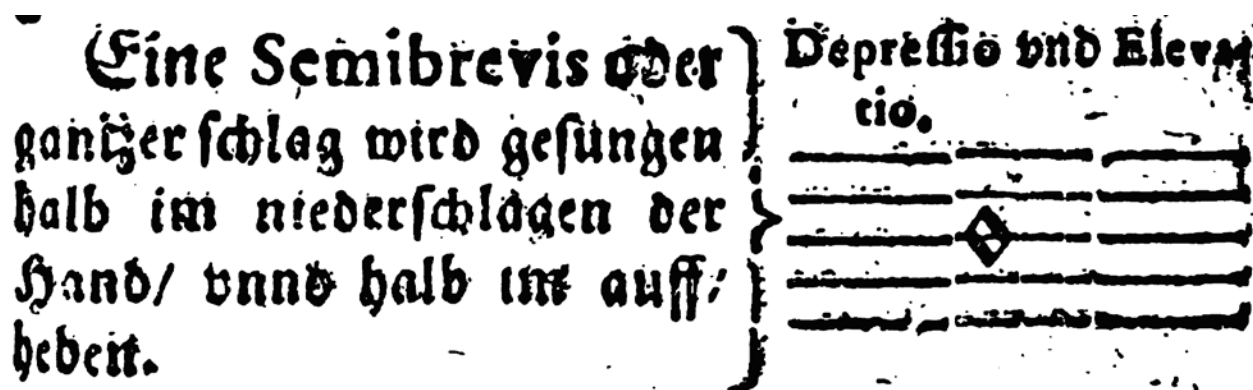


From the examination of the above-given schemes it becomes evident that the Latin word *Tactibus* was translated/understood as *Schleg* (plural: old spelling) and *Schlag* and *Schläge* (plural – other spelling). In the table from Vulpus's edition of Gumpelzhaimer two terms are even placed

one under the other: <sup>tactibus</sup>  
~~Schlag~~. The same interpretation exists in Gumpelzhaimer's scheme.

So, *Tactibus* is definitely understood as *Schlag*, i.e. strike (beat), having in mind the 'strike' by a hand, foot or a strike with a certain object while beating/measuring meter.

In one of the footnotes in the *Musica Nova* by Nicholas Gengenbach there are also very precise definitions of the words *Schlag* and *Tactu*: 'Schlag [strike] or Tactu is retained as long as it is necessary for the hand to accomplish the down-stroke [literally: to strike down – mit der Hand niedergeschlagen. - A.P., I.R.] and to make the up-beat, as, for example, on a maxima the up-and down-beats will be done eight times. On a longa – four times. On a brevis – two times, and so on ... A Semibrevis or [one] full stroke is to be sung a half [during] the hand [carrying out] the down-beat [im niederschlagen], and a half – [during] the hand [carrying out] the up-beat' [35] (see the ill. below). According to this explanation one *Schlag* embraces two gestures of the hand: one – down, and the other – up.



Approximately beginning from the middle of the XVI century German musicians often used the word *Schlag* instead of the terms *Tactus* and *Tact*. For example, one finds the same explanations of the notation (note duration/value) where the word *Schlag* is used in the works by Martin Agricola [36], Johan Quirsfeld [37] and in the works by many other authors. In neither of the mentioned works the very notion *Schlag* is explained in detail. It is evident that everybody at that time perfectly knew and understood what was meant. As a result of the investigation undertaken here this notion has also become completely clear to us: what is meant are the strikes by a *Tactistae* or the main singer (and so on), who is measuring/beating meter. For example, we meet this very interpretation given in the form of a scheme in the works of the next authors:

Agricola/Figulus [36, without pagination]:



Quirsfeld [37, p. 12]:



The term is explained by Quirsfeld briefly and clearly in the paragraph 'On Tact/measure': 'What is Tact? Tact is the movement by the hand, and consists in lowering [Niederschlagen] and rising [Auffheben], by which the notes and music are measured [the word *Gesang* in this context might possibly mean singing]'<sup>12</sup> [37, p. 15].

<sup>12</sup> 'De Tactu. I. Was ist der Tact? Der Tact ist eine Bewegung mit der Hand/ und bestehet im Niederschlagen und Auffheben / nach welcher die Noten und der Gesang abgemessen wird.'

## Was ist der Tact?

Der Tact ist eine Bewegung mit der Hand/  
und bestehet im Niederschlagen und Aufheben/  
nach welcher die Noten und der Gesang abgemessen wird.

During the same years *Tact* and *Schlag* receive an analogous interpretation in the explanatory Latin-German and German-Latin dictionary by J. Frisius: ‘Tact [is] a strike in singing [Takt; schlag im gesang]. *Modus* – is singing in accordance with Tact. [Modus – das singen nach dem tact]. *Modulatio* – is the beating of the Tact [Modulatio – den tactt schlagen].’ [38, p. 234 (from the second German-Latin section)], further: ‘Schlag or Tact in singing. See / *Tact*’ [38, p. 205 (from the same section)]. In the first section (Latin-German) there exists a translation of the given words from Latin almost fully coinciding with the interpretations given in above mentioned dictionaries by Demantius and Serrano.

In the *Betreu und Gründliche Anleitung* written by the cantor, organist and composer Georg Falck [39, p. 51] the term *Tact* is correlated with the term *Mensur*, and this gives a new shade to the general meaning. Further, the explanation where it is stated that the meter is not simply ‘beaten’, but serves to assist music players is also new: ‘What is *Mensur* or *Tact*? Tact – is a proper/appropriate and invariable/steady lowering and rising of the hand or any object in it, with the help of which [by which] the whole chorus of musicians, both singers or instrumentalists is to be regulated and to be conformed to’.

## CAPUT IX.

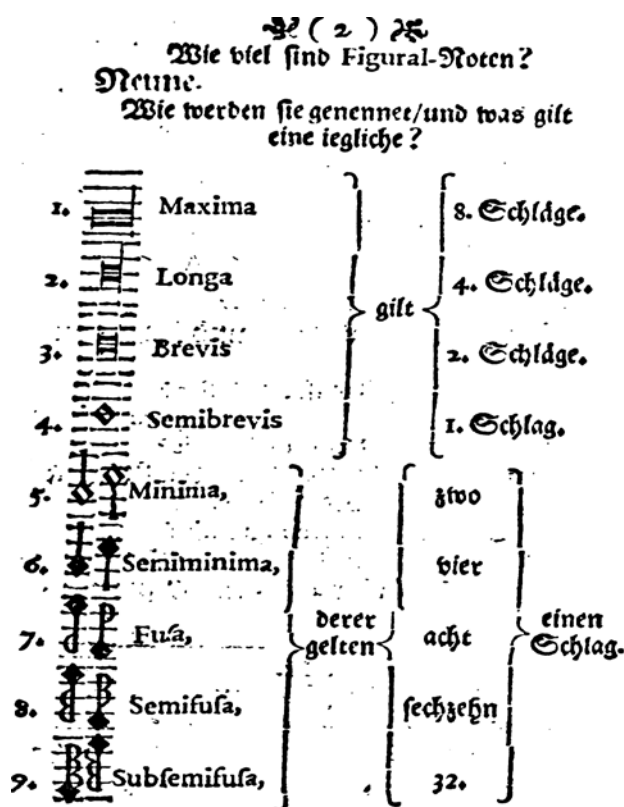
### Von der Direction, Mensurá oder Tactu.

#### Was ist die Mensur oder Tact?

**D**er Tact ist eine richtige und beständige Niederlassung und Aufhebung der Hand / oder dessen / was in derselben gehalten und geführet wird / wornach der ganze Chorus Muficus, beydes der Vocalisten und der Instrumentisten/ sich zu reguliren und zu richten hat.

In the treatise written by the prominent German composer and theorist J. R. Ahle and issued by his son J. G. Ahle in 1690 an even more detailed table of the note durations is given, and each of these durations, alike in the works of the previous-mentioned authors, receives a certain number of ‘strikes [Schläge]’:





Thus, the whole-note [Semibrevis] is equal to one strike. The definition of *Tactus*, compared to the definitions of other authors, is formulated somewhat differently, although the general meaning is constant: 'What is then the *Tact*? *Tactus* is the time necessary for lowering [literally – for striking down] and lifting the *director's* hand'<sup>13</sup> [40, p. 11].

J. S. Beyer [41, p. 10] uses the word *Tact* instead of the word *Schlag* in an analogous scheme in the treatise devoted to teaching singing. This term can as well be found in many other sections of the treatise, for example, where the signs of the metric measures are explained. It might be possible to suppose that the word *Tact* began to acquire the meaning which it received afterwards. But Beyer continuous to adhere to the former point of view, and writes on page 25, where the definition of the word *Tact* is given: 'What is the *Mensur* or *Tact*? *Tact* is a proper/appropriate lowering or rising of the hand which a singer or an instrumentalist [Instrumental - Musicus] should observe/follow [to conform with]'<sup>14</sup>.

Towards the end of the XVII and at the beginning of XVIII century the word *Tact* continued to designate the lowering or rising of a musician's hand who was appointed to

<sup>13</sup> 'Was ist denn der Tact? Der *Tactus* ist die Zeit des Niederschlagens und Aufhebens / so mit der Hand des *Directoris* geschicht'.

<sup>14</sup> 'Was ist die Mensur oder Tact? Der Tact ist eine richtige Niederlassung oder Aufheben der Hand / wornach sich so wohl der Vocal-als Instrumental – Musicus zu richten hat'.



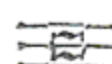
measure/beat the meter. One might presume that probably, this usage of the word was accepted by not very prominent musicians? But even if we apply to the study by J.G. Walther (the manuscript of 1708 r.) [42, p. 28], here in Chapter 5 *On Tact* we can read: ‘§ 1. *Tact* – is a regular [i.e. steady/regular/equal] movement produced by the hand or even if [it is] formulated only in one’s idea/intentions/mind [im Sinne formirte reguläre Bewegung], by which the sound as well as the time is measured’<sup>15</sup>. Interpreting the word *Tact* in his famous *Musicalisches Lexicon* [43, p. 592] Walther, as we consider, applied for information to the notions given in other explanatory dictionaries and in special musical studies, because if we return to his manuscript we shall find there references to dozens of musical sources including Ahle, Printz and many others who wrote on *Tact* and which were also abundantly used in his *Lexicon*. The interpretation in Walther’s *Lexicon* is next: ‘*Tact*. [French and German] *Tactus* [Lat.] *Tatto* [Ital.] is the measurment of time and of the musical notes; undoubtedly [the origin is] from *à tangendo*, from [the meaning] to touch [to move, to stir, to strike], because in old times such measurment was produced by the feet ... just as well as now it is usually performed/carried out by the hand ...’<sup>16</sup>. However, in Walther’s *Lexicon* the term *Tactus* is used also in another sense, i.e. to define metric measures, for example, *Tactus Totalis* [43, p. 29]. The term *Tact* has an analogues usage in the basic work *Der General-Bass in der Composition* by J. D. Heinichen [44, S. 263].

If we shall turn to the works of the prominent German theorist and composer W.C. Printz we will find detail information about the functions of ‘a director’ or ‘a shlagist’ (a ‘measurist’ in France). According to his explanations ‘brevis or a double strike [doppelter Schläge – i.e. two movements of the hand measuring meter on Semibrevis’es], lasting for two strikes should be held as long as the Tactirer [der Tactirer, i.e. a person measuring/beating meter] makes the third strike, when, **in the wink of an eye**<sup>17</sup>, the next note or pause should be started/taken’ [46, without pagination, Chapter IV; compared to the first edition (1689) in Latin the text of the title is a changed in some details].

<sup>15</sup> ‘§ 1. Der Tact ist eine mit der Hand, oder auch nur im Sinne formirte reguläre Bewegung, womit der Klang, und mit diesem auch zugleich die Zeit abgemeßen wird’.

<sup>16</sup> ‘Tact. [gall & german] Tactus [lat.] Tatto [ital.] die Abmessung der Zeit, und Music=Noten: ohne Zweifel à tangendo, von derühren, weil in den ältesten Zeiten solche Abmessung durch den Fuß ... gleich wie jetzo gemeiniglich durch die Hand verrichtet...’.

<sup>17</sup> Marked out by us. – A. P., I. R. We should stress the point that the notion ‘*in the blink of an eye*’ can be found many times in Printz’s explanations. It definitely indicates that the regularity/evenness of producing the sound or its pausing performed under the actions/Schläge of the director should not be upset even for the smallest time-lapse (‘not in the blink of an eye’ – that is: ‘not for a split moment’). It means that no ‘inner-measure agogic’ or prolongation of note duration is intended/presumed by Printz, and, still more, it is unequivocally forbidden (cf. also: [45]).



Brevis , oder ein doppelter Schlag / welche zweien Schläge gilt / und so lang ausgehalten werden muß / biß der Tactirer den dritten Schlag thut / da denn denselben Augenblick die folgende Note oder Pause anfängt.

Next Printz gives a basic, well-grounded and even more exact explanation concerning all note durations: ‘§ 2. When a Spondee Tact<sup>18</sup> is subdivided into four most even fractions/parts [vier gantz gleiche Theile], namely, into Niderschlag and Auffzug<sup>19</sup>, and each of these fractions/parts [i.e. Niderschlag and Auffzug] is once more divided into two equal [fractions], and spondee meter in whole will be subdivided/distinguished into four most even fractions: a singer must pay extreme attention [gantz genau Acht geben] to properly/appropriately very precisely hold [gantz richtig ausgehalte] a semibrevis [the whole-note], namely, as long as these four fractions are held, a minima [a half note] – as long as the two, and semiminima [a quarter note] – as long as this one fraction; and two fuses [quavers] or four semifusas [semiquavers], in such a way so as to comprise [in result] the value [duration] of the one fourth fraction [of the whole part of the *Spondaische Tact*] [and] that none [of them] even for a blink of an eye [keine einem Augenblick] one could be longer or shorter than the others’ [46, without pagination].

<sup>18</sup> Spondaische meter; it should not be forgotten that the word *Tact* by Printz, as well as in this context by Walther, does not mean Tact/measure in the modern understanding, but it most definitely means the process of ‘beating/measuring meter’.

<sup>19</sup> In the previous sections of the *Compedium* Printz explained that Niderschlag and Auffzug are beaten in four measures: two semiminimas each.

§ 2. Weil nun der Spondaische Tact in vier gang gleiche Theile / nehmlich in den Nieder-  
schlag und Aufzug und jeder dieser Theile wie-  
der in zween gleiche / und also der ganze Spon-  
daische Tact in vier gang gleiche Theile unter-  
schieden wird: so muß ein Sängers gang genau  
acht geben / daß er Semibreven so lange / als  
vier solcher Theile wären / Minimum so lang/  
als zween / und Semiminimum so lang / als ein  
solcher Theil wäre gang richtig ausgehalte / und  
zwo Fusas oder vier Semifusas dergestalt unter  
Wahrung eines solchen vierden Theiles einthei-  
le / daß keine einem Augenblick länger oder kür-  
zer wäre als die andere.

The widely emphasized importance of measuring/beating meter recommended by early musicians resulted in the forthcoming into existence of a completely new definition unusual for a modern reader. Thus, in French and German works the authors began to name *Tact* as 'the soul of music'! For the first such mentioning, to our knowledge, is written in the treatise by de la Voye [47, p. 11].

*De la Mesure, & des signes, ou nombres  
qui en despendent.*

## CHAPITRE. VI.

**O**N peut dire que la mesure est veritablement l'ame  
de la Musique, puis qu'elle luy donne tous ses mou-

A similar description can be found in the well known French treatise by C. Masson [48, p. 6]:

## *De la Mesure & de la difference de ses mouvements.*

**L**A Mesure est l'ame de la Musique, puisqu'elle fait agir avec tant de justesse un grand nombre de Personnes, & que par la variété de ses mouvemens elle peut encore émouvoir tant de differentes passions, pouvant calmer les unes & exciter les autres, ainsi qu'on l'a toujourns remarqué.

Among German treatises, we can cite from the works by J.L. Steiner [49, p. 15]: 'Tact is the soul in music [Der Tact ist die Seele in der Music]' and by M.H. Fuhrmann [50, p. 44]: 'What is Tact? Tact is a proper/appropriate movement of the hand, when I am marking/beating down and again up ... Tact is the soul of music'.

§. 5. Was ist ein Tact?

Ein Tact ist eine richtige Bewegung der Hand/da ich niederschlage und wieder aufhebe/ wor- nach die Noten, Paulen, Punct &c. genau eingetheilt mit dem Tact müssen gesungen oder gespielt werden.

NB. Der Tact ist die Seele in der Music; Nam sine lege & mensura canere, est Deum ipsum offendere, qui omnia numero, pondere & mensura disposuit, hat Plato weislich geredet. Denn wenn die Musicanten den Tact verrücken/ so wird in der Music eine Anarmonia, auff Deutsch/ ein Zerfel; Und wo sie nicht bald zusammen wieder in den Tact hincinkommen/ so wird aus dem Zerfel eine Sau/ ja eine ganze Heerde voll solcher Bergeseni- schen Creaturen/ wodurch aber die ganze Music vor die Hunde gehet.

It is very interesting that in the treatise by one of the famous musician of the last decade of the XVIII century, namely J.A. Hiller, it is also said that *Tact* and everything what pertains to measure, and what is called *tactrichtige singen oder spielen*, but not melody or performance, as it should be expected in the period when the Classical style flourished, is determined as the soul of music [die Seele der Musik] [51, p. 38]<sup>20</sup>:

### §. 49.

Diese Kenntniß der verschiedenen Tactarten ist allerdings nöthig, um das zu lernen, was man tactrichtig singen oder spielen nennt, und die Seele der Musik ist. Diese Sache, die vielen Anfängern so schwer wird, könnte ihnen

<sup>20</sup> But at the same time in Germany there also existed other viewpoints! 'Interpretation or performance is the soul of melody, and Tact/measure is a mechanism where [it] exists' – as was written in 1781 by G.S. Löhlein in his violin treatise [52, p. 101].

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