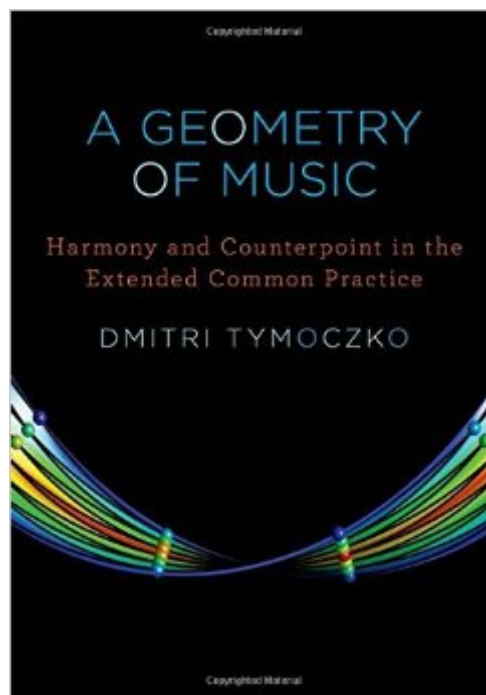# A Geometry Of Music: Harmony And Counterpoint In The Extended Common Practice (Oxford Studies In Music Theory)

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

For a work purporting to be an "epoch-making publication in music theory," one thing immediately stands out before the book is even opened. Why are 2 of the 4 supportive quotes on the dust jacket from psychologists, instead of music theorists? The first informs us that the author of this book had publications in the journal Science; therefore we should pay attention to his work in music theory. But the journal Science is not generally concerned with fields like music theory, and the two articles in question (the genesis of this book) were not really music theory publications, but rather a mathematical description of a type of n-dimensional space which the author claimed could encompass all previous geometrical models for music. I humbly submit that I can easily make the same claim, by pointing out that the n-dimensional space of real numbers also could encompass all previous geometrical models for music, with suitable transformations introduced as necessary. Defining an all-encompassing numerical or spatial model is easy (and, honestly, trivial); claiming that it is specific enough to model music and interesting enough to provide analytical insight is a different thing entirely.The geometrical space defined (not "discovered," as the author claims in this book) in the journal Science is the underlying rationale for the "Geometry of Music" mentioned in the title.

The premise of this book is highly laudable, at least if one is of the same opinion of the author.

"Tonal music" need to come back, and yes, the excesses of modernism and in particular the unforeseen consequences of strict atonality and twelve tone techniques have produced a lot of baffling music that has perfectly achieved what seemed to be the goal of at least some of their proponents: the public does not listen. (Witness the desolate emptiness of any new music concert outside of Universities or Conservatories and their captive audiences.)The book is interesting, and besides being positively provocative it is especially stimulating because it points (by omission) to the elements that are actually missing in it and should be the focus of attention for a truly comprehensive theory of music.I found chapter one, the introduction, an interesting one. It spells out a rational (the five features) for what constitutes "tonality" that, if far from complete, is simple and clear, and would constitute a great platform to build on.Where I find the book less convincing is in its four claims, and in particular on the insistence on efficient voice leading, circular pitch class and the geometric space that emerges as a consequence. The main objection is that circular pitch class does not really describe how music sounds. Why? Just starting with chords: (1) contrary to the author claim, chord inversions do matter, because they do sound different. Western music from 1600 to this day treats voice leading in such a way to reach inversions or root position at certain crucial places in a composition.

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