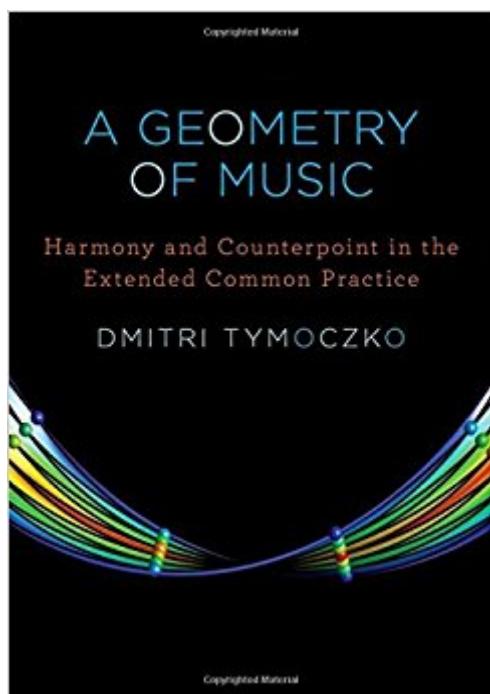


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# A Geometry Of Music: Harmony And Counterpoint In The Extended Common Practice (Oxford Studies In Music Theory)



## Book Information

Series: Oxford Studies in Music Theory

Hardcover: 480 pages

Publisher: Oxford University Press; 1 edition (March 21, 2011)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0195336674

ISBN-13: 978-0195336672

Product Dimensions: 10 x 1.4 x 7.4 inches

Shipping Weight: 2.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.4 out of 5 stars 28 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #200,039 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #117 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Theory, Composition & Performance > Composition #371 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Theory, Composition & Performance > Theory #462 in Books > Humor & Entertainment > Sheet Music & Scores > Forms & Genres > Popular

## Customer Reviews

Product Description How is the Beatles' "Help!" similar to Stravinsky's "Dance of the Adolescents?" How does Radiohead's "Just" relate to the improvisations of Bill Evans? And how do Chopin's works exploit the non-Euclidean geometry of musical chords? In this groundbreaking work, author Dmitri Tymoczko describes a new framework for thinking about music that emphasizes the commonalities among styles from medieval polyphony to contemporary rock. Tymoczko identifies five basic musical features that jointly contribute to the sense of tonality, and shows how these features recur throughout the history of Western music. In the process he sheds new light on an age-old question: what makes music sound good? A Geometry of Music provides an accessible introduction to Tymoczko's revolutionary geometrical approach to music theory. The book shows how to construct simple diagrams representing relationships among familiar chords and scales, giving readers the tools to translate between the musical and visual realms and revealing surprising degrees of structure in otherwise hard-to-understand pieces. Tymoczko uses this theoretical foundation to retell the history of Western music from the eleventh century to the present day. Arguing that traditional histories focus too narrowly on the "common practice" period from 1680-1850, he proposes instead that Western music comprises an extended common practice stretching from the late middle ages to the present. He discusses a host of familiar pieces by a wide range of composers, from Bach to the Beatles, Mozart to Miles Davis, and many in between. A Geometry of Music is accessible to a range

of readers, from undergraduate music majors to scientists and mathematicians with an interest in music. Defining its terms along the way, it presupposes no special mathematical background and only a basic familiarity with Western music theory. The book also contains exercises designed to reinforce and extend readers' understanding, along with a series of appendices that explore the technical details of this exciting new theory.

"As far as I know, the intersection of those who are distinguished composers and those who have published in Science contains one member: the author of this book. If you are interested in tonality in music, you must read it, because it describes by far the most comprehensive theory of what makes tonal music work." --Philip Johnson-Laird, Stuart Professor of Psychology, Princeton University

"A Geometry of Music is an epoch-making publication in music theory and will certainly stimulate other new and innovative work in the field. Tymoczko has produced an outstandingly original synthesis of new music theory that unifies quite a large number of separate subfields and realizes the theorist's dream of finding the rational basis for tonality and tonal-compositional practices in music." --Daniel Harrison, Allen Forte Professor of Music Theory and Chair, Yale University Department of Music

"A provocative and ingenious melding of music, geometry, and history that promises to change the way that composers, music theorists, and cognitive scientists view music." -- Gary Marcus, Professor of Psychology, New York University and author of *Kluge: The Haphazard Evolution of The Human Mind*

"Tymoczko's A Geometry of Music is an appealingly written, substantial treatise on tonal harmony. The author introduces his original concepts with clarity and fearlessness. Musicologists, musicians, and listeners with an analytical bent will find plenty of ideas to chew on in this intriguing, rewarding book." --Vijay Iyer, musician

"Tymoczko confronts with apparent relish the daunting challenge of selling his ideas to a broad audience of theorists, composers, musicians, and students, and his ability to capture the intricacies of complex material while presenting it clearly and comprehensibly is praiseworthy...If the author's way of doing music theory or promulgating his results is not quite like most of the music theory that we have learned and taught, that is hardly a sufficient reason why we should not give his powerful ideas the attention they deserve." --Music Theory Online

"A tour de force, a rich and suggestive summation of an exciting new perspective, -a jumping-off point for further explorations. His geometric diagrams provide new kinds of spatialized representations of the aural facts of tonal experience. They may help composers and musicians to 'see' new possibilities within that intricate labyrinth, as well as to bring the old ones to life anew." --Times Literary Supplement

"Formidable...The strongest aspect of Tymoczko's book is the case that he gives for voice-leading in the common practice." --Reason

## Papers

An interesting academic read with little practical utility imo. While technically very accurate, tediously mapping voice leading onto multidimensional graphs isn't overly superior than just looking at the notation or other easier methods. And while geometry validates rules of thumb that are already common practice (no pun intended), those rules of thumb are still a lot easier than the analysis methods presented in this book. A lot of "lecturing birds on flying" i'm afraid. So yes as an academic work, pretty good. But for the "ideal composer" as the book was intended...meh. Theory with little practical application.

Looks interesting, but it's a gift so I don't know much about the book.

The tip of the iceberg. An exciting analysis and synthesis of musical styles and development, hopefully this work will become the progeny of many future works as it is rich in ideas. This work adds additional ways of seeing music that are not clearly apparent with standard notation. I was surprised that so many of the composers artists and works were ones that I had noted to be significant in there avant-garde expansion of musical boundaries. A joke punchline is achieved by misdirecting the audience to believe that the joke is taking them in one direction when it is actually taking them where they did not expect. Likewise, many of the clusters of tones in jazz, Tristan, Shostakovich, Debussy, Chopin and others, create ambiguity about the intended direction and resolution and these clusters may contain many possible future paths, thus making anticipation difficult and surprise likely.

I have been in Prof. Tymoczko's music theory classes for one year (MUS105 and MUS106, Princeton), it was a tough (his psets are time-consuming >\_

For those of us that did not go to music college and who are self taught and study music daily, this book is an invaluable resource. It explains music theory in a unique way that I have yet to see from any other source (if there is another book out there that offers such an approach, I would like to know about it). Music is in many respects a mathematical language and basing the study of it around including its geometrical forces is a great way of finding a new understanding. Maybe many of his ideas aren't (completely) new as some reviewers have asserted, but they are presented in a way that is accessible and understandable to those of us without a higher education (I would also

think that many with music degrees would ALSO benefit from this book as well though).Having said that, the novice -should- study a traditional harmony book- such as Piston's Harmony -before- reading this book. Had I not done that, much of the terminology, ideas and principles would not have made sense to me.This book has made me want to re-tackle my old Piston Harmony book and others yet this time, with a fresh insight and a new perspective. I will be studying this book alongside the old standard curriculum such as Piston's for a very long time to come. It has already helped my learning and my teaching as well (I teach beginner and intermediate piano students).I have read some of the egg-headed reviews that cast aspersions on this book and I completely disagree with them, so much so that I chose to write this review, something that I do not normally do.My response to them would be that if you are that learned, that smart, that all-knowing, then why are you even bothering to read this book or any other book for that matter?Great book, get it, study it and it will give you a fresh view on many old ideas perhaps some that you have been already been studying for many years prior.I would like to add that this book is most helpful with regards to the study of harmony and chords in classical music though it is ALSO very insightful for the study of 20th century music and jazz as well. The last couple of chapters are about these more contemporary genres and it has sparked my interest in music that I don't generally care for or seek out.I would love to sit in on the Professor's classes one day, though I live in Louisville, and I doubt that will ever happen! But, who knows, at least I have this book!

The utility of this book is highly overstated, IMHO. As someone who has taught college math I am not intimidated by the 'multi-dimensional space' concept, and I've been a composer for decades (a film for which I wrote the score is doing fairly well on Prime). I find his explanation of tonality wanting (really, the augmented and diminished chords are more 'natural' than the major and minor?), and I found nothing in here that inspired me with fresh approaches to composition. All the diagrams look pretty, but once I got past all the flash, at its core I found myself asking: "where's the beef?"

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