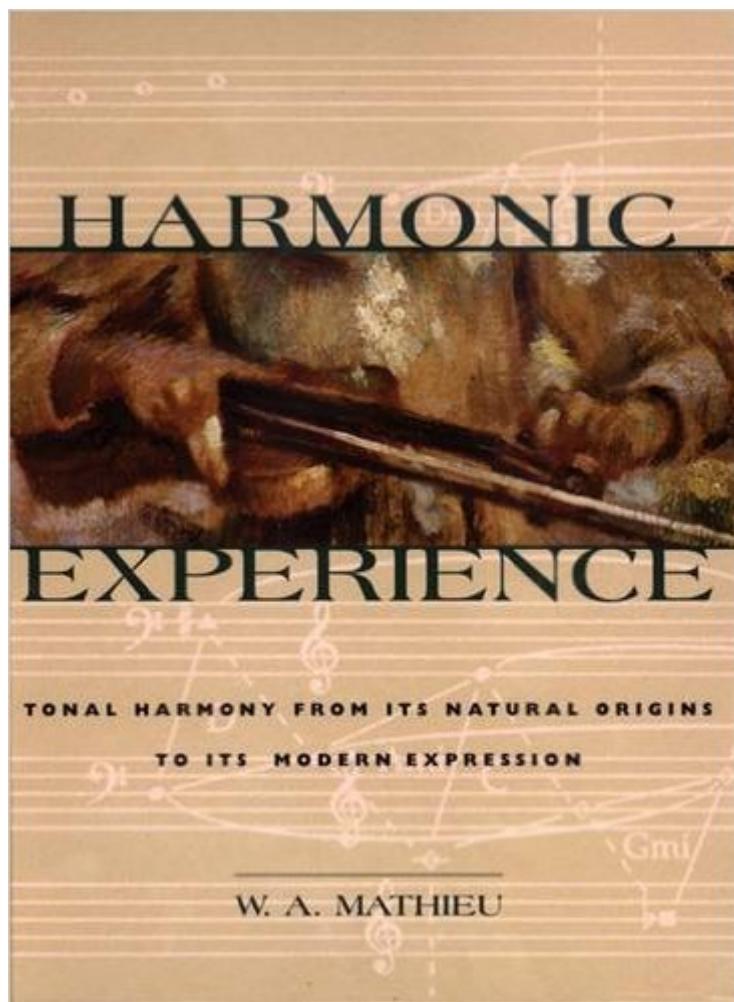


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# Harmonic Experience: Tonal Harmony From Its Natural Origins To Its Modern Expression



## **Synopsis**

An exploration of musical harmony from its ancient fundamentals to its most complex modern progressions, addressing how and why it resonates emotionally and spiritually in the individual. W. A. Mathieu, an accomplished author and recording artist, presents a way of learning music that reconnects modern-day musicians with the source from which music was originally generated. As the author states, "The rules of music--including counterpoint and harmony--were not formed in our brains but in the resonance chambers of our bodies." His theory of music reconciles the ancient harmonic system of just intonation with the modern system of twelve-tone temperament. Saying that the way we think music is far from the way we do music, Mathieu explains why certain combinations of sounds are experienced by the listener as harmonious. His prose often resembles the rhythms and cadences of music itself, and his many musical examples allow readers to discover their own musical responses.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

What a great book! This should perhaps be the very first required reading for any music education. Mathieu first steps back from our usual musical assumptions and examines how sound works. The physics of sound is integral to our experience of it and western music uses a tuning system which is arbitrary (if advantageous in many ways). This is the book that answers so many questions I couldn't even identify - Why does music 'work' the way it does? How do overtones work and what implications do they have for music as a whole? Why does a minor third sound 'sad' and a major third 'happy' (is it all cultural conditioning)? Mathieu definitely addresses the spiritual side of all this,

of sound and music and intervals, but never presumes to have answers to such questions. I've only explored a part of the book - it goes on to look at so many facets of the structure and possible organizations of sound and music, really advanced theory. Oh, and throughout, exercises are given, singing the pure intervals at hand, for instance, which serve to hone the ear and the voice and to make all of this sink in to where it counts. Anyone interested in music and theory should check this one out, a definite classic!

As a string player, I am very opinionated about what constitutes proper intonation; fine adjustment of intonation is an integral part of my understanding of music theory. Mathieu's book is possibly the best guide to this subject that I have ever seen. Mathieu builds up a system of scales, musical intervals, and chordal music theory based on building from a small set of resonances and the overtone series. Unlike other technical descriptions of this process, Mathieu makes it practical as a tool for everyday use, giving many musical experiments and examples, to be played at the keyboard or against a drone. I recommend this book to anyone who has been turned off by a mathematical approach to music, to musicians (especially brass and string players) who want to build an intuition about proper intonation, and to keyboard players who want a better understanding of music theory.

I am so glad to see jzmckay's excellent review of this book, posted here. He said many of the things that I feel about this book. I have studied music, including theory, for thirty years, and nothing has expanded my understanding (and perception!) of music as much as the information in this book. I have studied music with the author of this book -- he's a great writer about music and an even better teacher! I know that this work is the result of a lifetime of profound consideration of what is at the very heart of the musical experience, and of why music affects us as it does. W. A. Mathieu's highly intelligent exposition is a great gift to all who wish to deepen their understanding of music. I would like to express my personal thanks to the author for this book, which has enhanced my sensitivity to music.

Mathieu's *Harmonic Experience* is a delight to read and look at and ponder over. Incredibly, one day I ordered some CDs of his piano compositions, mentioning that they would provide nice listening while I make my way through the book. The next thing I knew, I got an email, "Hello. Allaudin Mathieu here. I'm glad you are reading "*Harmonic Experience*" and evidently getting something from it. I'm glad you bought some of my records. I have a wee request. Please don't even THINK about using my music as a background for reading my book. It will do both of us more good if you really

listen to music when you listen to it, and really read my book (and do the practices best you can) when that's what you're doing." And this is still my problem, I am reading but not practicing, and I am still missing the real point of this book, which is EXPERIENCE, not just technical mastery of his elegant method of fathoming harmony. Perhaps this admission will prompt me to finally take the bold step of actually playing the drones and singing the intervals and really gathering the experience. Meanwhile, I love and treasure the book; it's beautifully written, profound, complicated but within our grasp, and fun. It's time to take a swim beneath the surface - I think I'll start right now.

While i can't say i've read everything on the subject, far from it, i have read Schenker's and Hindemith's books on harmony, Forte's book and a number of others commonly found in University libraries. (My BA is in Music Theory & Composition - fyi) I've found that many of these authors are genuinely interesting and insightful (Schenker in particular, much to my own surprise) however none come close to Mathieu's book in terms of illuminating the essence of the modal/tonal universe for me. Beginning with the actual physics of sound, Matheiu's book builds a theoretical framework like no other, with fewer assumptions and on a more solid footing than anyone else i am aware of. More excitingly, he has helped me to expand greatly the harmonic universe within my own compositions. As one who has been involved all his life in the field of music (40+ years), i can say that this is the most important book i know for anyone interested in music theory, improvisation and composition.

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