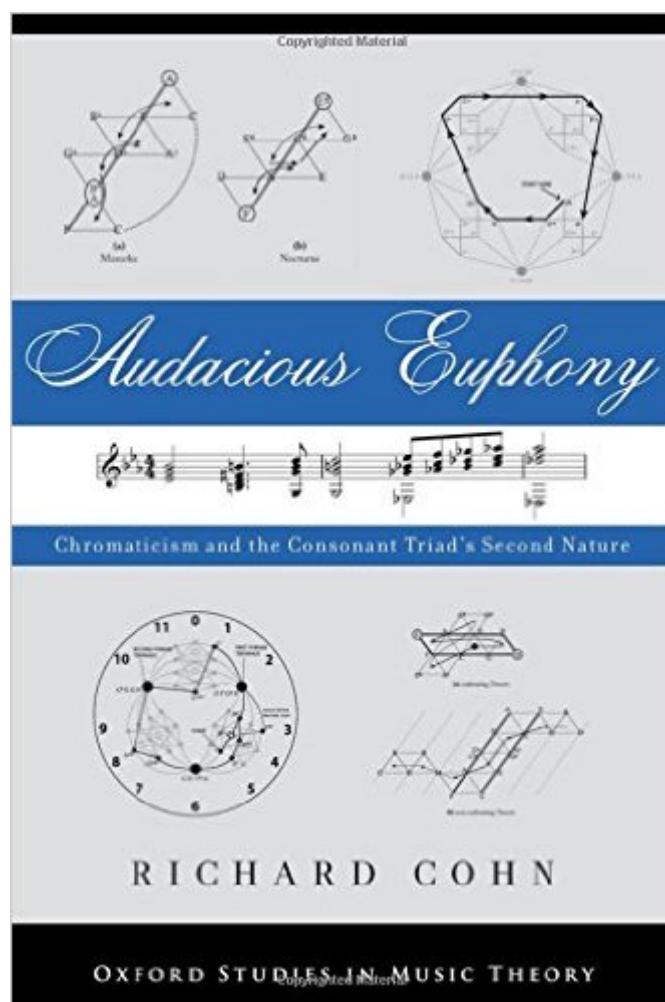


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# **Audacious Euphony: Chromatic Harmony And The Triad's Second Nature (Oxford Studies In Music Theory)**



## Synopsis

Music theorists have long believed that 19th-century triadic progressions idiomatically extend the diatonic syntax of 18th-century classical tonality, and have accordingly unified the two repertoires under a single mode of representation. Post-structuralist musicologists have challenged this belief, advancing the view that many romantic triadic progressions exceed the reach of classical syntax and are mobilized as the result of a transgressive, anti-syntactic impulse. In *Audacious Euphony*, author Richard Cohn takes both of these views to task, arguing that romantic harmony operates under syntactic principles distinct from those that underlie classical tonality, but no less susceptible to systematic definition. Charting this alternative triadic syntax, Cohn reconceives what consonant triads are, and how they relate to one another. In doing so, he shows that major and minor triads have two distinct natures: one based on their acoustic properties, and the other on their ability to voice-lead smoothly to each other in the chromatic universe. Whereas their acoustic nature underlies the diatonic tonality of the classical tradition, their voice-leading properties are optimized by the pan-triadic progressions characteristic of the 19th century. *Audacious Euphony* develops a set of inter-related maps that organize intuitions about triadic proximity as seen through the lens of voice-leading proximity, using various geometries related to the 19th-century Tonnetz. This model leads to cogent analyses both of particular compositions and of historical trends across the long nineteenth century. Essential reading for music theorists, *Audacious Euphony* is also a valuable resource for music historians, performers and composers.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"The culmination of twenty years of thinking about the tonally evasive music of the 19th century, this book is a stunning achievement. The writing is vivid and engaging, the musical close readings are rich and compelling in their detail, and at every turn there is something new to learn about music and musical materials we had thought we already knew well." --Joseph N. Straus, Distinguished Professor, CUNY Graduate Center; Former President, Society for Music Theory

"For sheer virtuosity in theory making and theory-based analysis, *Audacious Euphony* deserves the highest praise. It lights up as never before the universe of triads domesticated in nineteenth-century chromatic music. Were Richard Cohn not already a household name among music theorists, this book would change that." --Kofi Agawu, Professor of Music, Princeton University; Author of *Music as Discourse: Semiotic Adventures in Romantic Music*

"*Audacious Euphony* synthesizes and extends the influential neo-Riemannian approach to chromatic tonality that Richard Cohn's earlier theoretical work helped develop. Lucid and engagingly written, this book is indispensable reading for music theorists and indeed for anyone deeply interested in 19th-century chromatic harmony." --Fred Lerdahl, Fritz Reiner Professor of Music, Columbia University

"This book is a major contribution to the field of music theory, but Cohn targets not only music theorists but also music historians, conductors, performers, and any interested music listener with a modest level of music-theory training...A companion website presents longer scores, analytical animations, and audio files. Highly recommended." --Choice

"*Audacious Euphony*, as the definitive account of one of the most important recent theoretic systems for nineteenth century music, is above all an argument for the essential independence of the logic of chromatic harmony. As such, it will frame the continuing debate about nineteenth-century chromaticism and be an essential reference point for the non-integrationist perspective. It is also necessary reading for anyone interested in nineteenth-century music, reflecting a comprehensive picture of nineteenth-century composers' use of harmony that penetrates deeply into the repertoire. It will become an indispensable source for future research." --Music Theory Online

"An important contribution to the field of music theory in general. While many of the essential concepts and analytical tools have been developed in previous scholarship, this book successfully unifies and expands upon these diverse ideas, providing the reader with a theoretically rigorous and historically informed approach to understanding the complex harmonic innovations of the long nineteenth century." --Music Research Forum

Richard Cohn is Battell Professor of Music Theory at Yale University. His work on chromatic harmony has been the topic of a series of summer seminars convened by the late John Clough, and has been developed in about a dozen doctoral dissertations, at Chicago, Indiana, Yale, Harvard, and SUNY-Buffalo. His articles have twice earned the Society for Music Theory's Outstanding Publication Award. Cohn edits the Oxford Studies in Music Theory series. In preparation is a general model of meter with applications for European, African, and African-diasporic music, and a co-edited collection on David Lewin's phenomenological writings.

Apparently many copies that purchased has a printing defect!! Each even page has a very light band of print running down the edge. I ordered one to replace the first one I bought and it has the same issue. Returning all and buying from somewhere else.

As a European composer, used to the myth told about the emancipation of the dissonance, the necessity of burning bridges to the past instead of repairing them, the mixture of utopic modernism and nihilistic post-modernism, this is the book I didn't know existed: four theories on pitch and harmony merged into one. Perfect! And this time, the e algorithm (wich I'm sceptical to, since it only gives me what it think I want, and not the opposite) suggested the right book. This book is one of a kind.

The gentleman for whom I bought this book is ecstatic with it. He has added it to his permanent library and since he is a composer of note in Mexico, he anticipates that one day a public institution will have possession of his library and he is so proud that this book will be a part of that!

I read several chapters of this book for a course in chromatic harmony. Having had zero exposure to Neo-Riemannian theories, I found Cohn's writing lucid and engaging. Because his style is so accessible, I was able to appreciate his well-thought-out and illuminating new theory of triadic space, especially in nineteenth-century music. As a music student, I think it's important that basic theory courses at least broach this very important subject! After finishing the basic sequence, I could basically analyze Haydn, Mozart, and most Beethoven - but the Romantic repertoire was totally out of reach. Cohn's work is helpful not only for theorists but for musicians beginning at the undergraduate level. I would recommend this text to anyone who loves Romantic music and has a background in basic music theory (Roman numeral analyses, basic chromatic chords). Cohn's book really changed the way I understood Romantic-era music as well as the historical transition from

tonality to atonality.

I got this book because I wanted to learn about the next level of music theory and had heard about Cohn from my professor at the time. When I completed my formal study of classical music theory, it left me wondering what else there was to learn, because there were so many different techniques and sounds that only got glossed over by classical harmony as either 'coloristic' chord progressions or endless tonicizations. I think this strictly tonal idea of music is probably influenced a lot by Schenker, and there are aspects of it that have become outdated. Jazz theory, on the other hand, is to a large degree about finding the right scale and chord tones to improvise over any chord and thus largely based on practice and practical application. This book is totally different. It takes what you know about harmony and flips it on its head, in the greatest way possible. If you've never read anything by Cohn or don't know about the Tonnetz, then you are in for a wild ride! While the writing is extremely academic and at times I found myself looking up a word every couple of pages, the tone of the writing is pleasant and fun. There is no snobbery here; he is simply laying down every discovery that he has made about a different way that triads can relate to each other. Also, as he says, you only need to have a very basic understanding of theory to understand what he is explaining here. There are moments when the sentences get dense with information but once you take it in slowly for a second time you will probably understand it. I think that having a background in music theory sometimes slowed me down because he explains things in a new way. Every anomaly that has ever tickled the edge of your awareness pertaining to music theory, 'borrowed' chords or scale degrees, and chord progressions that twinge the ear and drive curiosity (chromatic mediants, anyone?) are all opened wide and explained so thoroughly (with maps to navigate!) that you will become aware of a whole new system of thinking about consonance and dissonance; and, better yet, of controlling them to a much larger degree than the tonal (or jazz) system allows for. This theory of how triads relate is on another level, and completely explains many anomalies from classical theory when applied to popular music, or the music of the 19th century- Debussy, Wagner, etc. I found myself reaching profound understandings that the Beatles used this mode of relation, it is what composers for film use, it is that 'surprising' sound that is becoming less and less foreign to us as time goes on. They used this subconsciously, but this explains how they got there- and explains a way to take it in any direction that you want. Just like tonally classical theory explains how classical composers composed to create their specific system of music, this explains how lots of composers who have veered away from classical rules and dogma have chosen to compose. This is a harmonic realm where consonance and dissonance is temporarily suspended, allowing more

subtle control between the two and it really is a beautiful realm of huge possibilities. If you are a composer or a musician of any kind, I highly recommend this book to you, as a tool to write more beautiful and "new" sounding songs. This is another system to use as a tool, like classical or jazz theory. I myself am not a huge proponent of strictly following any theory, but learning tonal theory has led me to some of my most satisfying songs, and I anticipate that mastering the ideas of this type of music theory will lead to me create even more beautiful music which is expressive of life on a deep level. Already, learning this has allowed me to "spin" out of tonally-controlled compositions, into harmonic realms of an almost alien beauty, like a controlled but seemingly chaotic orbit on the edge of perfection and complete wreckage, and then without missing a beat, drop into a completely new tonality. It's freaking mind-blowing, and for that experience alone, I highly recommend it! As the book points out, very intuitively, in one of the earlier chapters, there are basically 3 different ways of organizing music: Tonal, Not strictly tonal- using tonal ideas like triads and such to skip around to different tonics and tonalities (jazz probably falls somewhere in this second category as well), and Atonal. While tonal music is great I think there may be too many rules to still be entirely relevant. While atonal music can be beautiful in its own way, the "structure" of that can literally be determined by rolling dice, so that's just not good enough for me yet. The cutting edge type of theory here straddles the boundaries between these two **PERFECTLY**. Using this system allows composers a way to flirt with or have a lengthy affair with dissonance- while using concepts that are familiar to them (like triads) and being in **TOTAL CONTROL**. That, to me, is the biggest part of this book. It gives me a way to be in total control of where I am going and to understand what I am going to do next. If you want to spice up your compositions- get this! If you want to have a system for understanding non-traditional harmonies, then **GET THIS!!** I can't recommend this enough, it is an amazing book, and if you don't have it already then you are missing out on tons of possibilities which you probably aren't even aware of right now.

Great book, but as a lay person (not a music major or scholar) I wouldn't have been able to get through it without reading Tymozcko's book "Geometry of Music" first. Having said that, this book picks up where that one left off. The writer sprinkles in some hilarious metaphors once in a while to make the subject less dry and overall he has a great writing style which makes the content of this book far more accessible to "the rest of us." I especially appreciate how he breaks the triadic cycles down to 6 primary movements which singularly and in combinations allow a performer, improviser or composer to cycle through all of the 24 consonant triads using his explanation of the augmented triad as the bridge between the four hexatonic groups. It's a fascinating subject, I will be studying

the "Cube Dance" for a very long time, I think it is one of the missing pieces of the puzzle for me as a musician. Would have given it 5 stars had it been a little more down to earth for less scholarly folks such as myself, like I say it required (at least for me) prior experience with the study of Harmony and the perspective gained from reading Tymoczko's book. Highly recommended

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