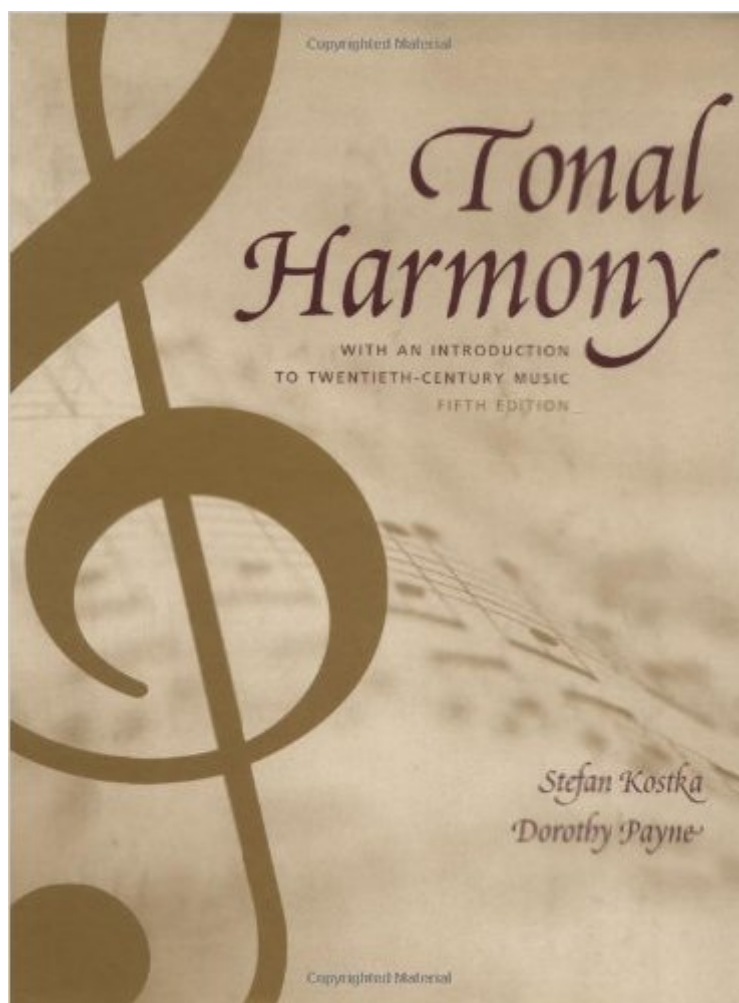


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Tonal Harmony, With An Introduction To Twentieth-Century Music



Synopsis

Designed to meet the needs of the two-year theory curriculum for music majors, this straightforward market-leading text emphasizes practicality and ease of use for both the student and the instructor. Its outstanding ancillaries, which include a collection of audio examples on CD (for both the text and workbook), Finale Workbook Software, and an extensive Instructor's Manual, round out the comprehensive teaching package.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I've used this book for my first-year theory class for nine years, through three editions. I haven't found any better but that doesn't mean I think it's perfect. I agree with some of the other commentaries about the errors and the poor choice of musical examples. Students of mine have frequently complained about this. In addition, the book is very keyboard-centric and thus creates difficulties for people who don't play the piano and who aren't used to reading keyboard score. One can argue, of course, that keyboard facility is a skill any serious musician ought to have (being a pianist myself, I agree in principle), but still, there ARE good musicians who are not pianists who will struggle unnecessarily with this material. Other, specific things I would change about the book: 1) The chapters on part-writing emphasize too heavily the minutiae of voice-leading and thus obscure the point that we're talking about the relative motion of complete melodic lines. More exercises involving only two parts, to give students a thorough grounding in the basics (i.e., no parallel fifths and octaves), would really help. 2) Although including discussions and examples from popular

music is a good idea, the section that tries to explain the concept of "suspension" in pop chord symbols is skimpy and confusing. 3) I find the whole explanation of harmonic progression, based on the circle-of-fifths progression, unconvincing. Piston's looser cataloging for me better fits the reality of tonal music.

I've been teaching music theory for 35 years, and have seen a lot of texts that I like less than this one. However, it doesn't make this one wonderful. As other reviewers have mentioned, there are a lot of errors. Also, there are far too many places in the examples where they say, "Ignore this note", or "Forget about this for now". You'd think they'd have found better examples without making the interested student wonder what's really going on, and the less involved student confused with excess. This book is heavy in overkill. It's the same problem as in computer manuals: they obviously feel like they have to tell you EVERYTHING, and that nothing is more important than anything else. For example, they go on for pages and pages about chord spacing and voice leading, where a simple grounding in how to write and recognize decent melodies would go a lot farther and reduce dependence on mastering mountains of scrupulous finicky detail. The authors obviously feel that the inner voices are no more or less important than the soprano-bass counterpoint, whereas perceptually, the soprano and bass carry most of the weight of what's heard and experienced. The emphasis is on recognizing the vertical component of harmony at the expense of the horizontal, but music is experienced as ongoing linear motion, not as successive blocks of stuff. On the other confused hand, they treat Alberti Bass as a note-to-note melodic line, where it's experienced as just a rhythmised chord with the bass predominant. Minor scales and harmony are introduced as soon as major, and this much complexity before students know what's going on is pedagogically weak. It's the same with triads and seventh chords. And so on. You need to understand the simple before getting into the complex. If you are good at taking a long string of finicky detail where all is of equal importance, and developing it all into a bigger picture with hierarchies, this book might be good for you. Otherwise, keep looking.

I am quite amused by the complaints I hear from students and professors about this text. Perhaps these folks who exude grunts and groans about this text have not had the grave misfortune of encountering Gauldin's bare-bones tonal-harmony survey. I would jump quickly to recommend Piston's original text, but the DeVoto bastardization destroyed any sense of "fun" or instructional continuity present in the original version (which I am lucky - and old enough - to own). Let's face it: expository writing is tedious. It is not meant by nature or design to be a page-turning writing device.

Nonetheless, Kostka's survey is complete, providing adequate and clear examples, and written in a very succinct manner. True, Kostka does dwell in a few places, but these minutiae-explanations are necessary (if you have ever taught elementary theory, you will understand immediately). The organization of the text is second to none, and the authors are consistent in explanations and refrain from "inventing" jargon or becoming unnecessarily nebulous (Gauldin, for one, is notorious in this regard).

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