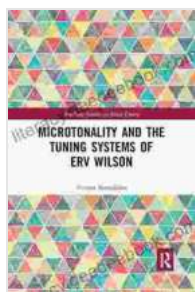


Microtonality and the Tuning Systems of Erv Wilson: A Comprehensive Exploration

Microtonality, the use of musical intervals smaller than a semitone, has gained increasing prominence in contemporary music. This article examines the microtonal music of American composer Erv Wilson, whose distinctive tuning systems have expanded the boundaries of musical expression.



Microtonality and the Tuning Systems of Erv Wilson (Routledge Studies in Music Theory) by Tim Pettingale

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

Language : English
File size : 15445 KB
Text-to-Speech : Enabled
Screen Reader : Supported
Enhanced typesetting : Enabled
Word Wise : Enabled
Print length : 235 pages



Wilson's tuning systems, which he developed over decades of research and experimentation, provide a unique lens through which to explore the nature of harmony, melody, and musical space. By manipulating the size and arrangement of microtonal intervals, Wilson has created novel sonic landscapes that challenge conventional notions of pitch and tonality.

Microtonality in Contemporary Music

Microtonality has a long history in non-Western musical traditions, but its adoption in Western classical music is more recent. In the 20th century, composers such as Charles Ives, Alois Hába, and Harry Partch explored the possibilities of microtonal tuning systems, creating works that expanded the expressive range of musical instruments.

With the advent of electronic music and digital technology, microtonality has become increasingly accessible to composers. Microtonal instruments, such as the microtonal guitar and the theremin, allow musicians to explore microtonal intervals with precision and flexibility. Software-based microtonal synthesizers further enable composers to create and manipulate their own tuning systems, opening up a vast array of sonic possibilities.

Erv Wilson's Tuning Systems

Erv Wilson's tuning systems are unique in their comprehensiveness and sophistication. Wilson, a mathematician and composer, developed his systems using mathematical principles and psychoacoustic research. He sought to create tuning systems that were both aesthetically pleasing and theoretically sound.

One of Wilson's most notable tuning systems is the 31-tone equal temperament. In this system, the octave is divided into 31 equal parts, creating a highly chromatic scale that allows for subtle melodic and harmonic variations. Wilson also developed a series of just intonation tuning systems, which are based on the natural harmonic series and produce pure and resonant intervals.

Musical Expression and Perception

Wilson's tuning systems have had a profound impact on his musical expression. By expanding the range of available pitches, these systems allow him to create intricate melodic lines and rich, complex harmonies. His compositions often explore the interplay between familiar and unfamiliar intervals, creating a sense of disorientation and wonder.

From a perceptual standpoint, Wilson's tuning systems challenge our conventional expectations of how music should sound. Listeners may experience a heightened sense of awareness and sensitivity to pitch distinctions, particularly when listening to intervals smaller than a semitone. This perceptual shift can lead to a deeper appreciation of the expressive capabilities of microtonality.

Cultural and Ethnomusicological Significance

Beyond their musical significance, Wilson's tuning systems also have cultural and ethnomusicological implications. They offer a glimpse into the diversity of musical practices around the world, where microtonality is prevalent in many traditional musical styles. By incorporating elements of non-Western tuning systems into his own compositions, Wilson bridges cultural boundaries and expands our understanding of musical diversity.

From a research standpoint, Wilson's tuning systems provide valuable data for psychoacoustic studies. His carefully crafted intervals allow researchers to investigate how the human ear perceives and processes microtonal stimuli. This research has contributed to our knowledge of auditory perception and the cognitive processes involved in music listening.

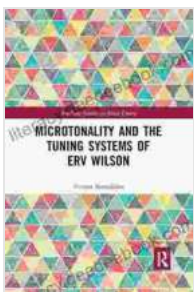
Microtonality, as exemplified by the tuning systems of Erv Wilson, is a transformative force in contemporary music. It challenges conventional

notions of pitch and tonality, expanding the expressive range of musical instruments and opening up new sonic possibilities. Wilson's work has not only enriched the musical landscape but also contributed to our understanding of musical perception and the cultural diversity of musical practices.

As technology continues to advance and our knowledge of microtonality grows, we can expect to see even more innovative and groundbreaking applications of this fascinating musical phenomenon.

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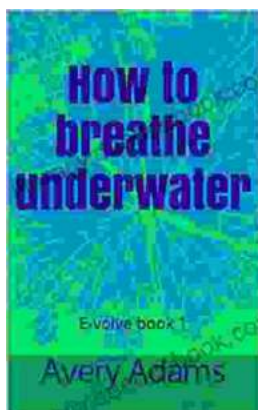
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