Hugo Riemann and the Birth of Modern Musical Thought

Generally acknowledged as the most important German musicologist of his age, Hugo Riemann (1849–1919) shaped the ideas of generations of music scholars, not least because his work coincided with the institutionalisation of academic musicology around the turn of the last century. This influence, however, belies the contentious idea at the heart of his musical thought, an idea he defended for most of his career – harmonic dualism.

By situating Riemann’s musical thought within turn-of-the-century discourses about the natural sciences, German nationhood and modern technology, this book reconstructs the cultural context in which Riemann’s ideas not only ‘made sense’ but advanced an understanding of the tonal tradition as both natural and German. Riemann’s musical thought – from his considerations of acoustical properties to his aesthetic and music-historical views – thus regains the coherence and cultural urgency that it once possessed.

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New perspectives in music history and criticism

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This series explores the conceptual frameworks that shape or have shaped the ways in which we understand music and its history, and aims to elaborate structures of explanation, interpretation, commentary, and criticism which make music intelligible and which provide a basis for argument about judgements of value. The intellectual scope of the series is broad. Some investigations will treat, for example, historiographical topics, others will apply cross-disciplinary methods to the criticism of music, and there will also be studies which consider music in its relation to society, culture, and politics. Overall, the series hopes to create a greater presence for music in the ongoing discourse among the human sciences.

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