

BEATEN TO THE PUNCH BY YAMAGUCHI—9/1/07

In the most recent Jamie Aebersold catalog there was advertised a publication titled “The Complete Thesaurus of Musical Scales” by Masaya Yamaguchi. I always buy these things to see if they duplicate the content of my book “The Chromatic Universe” (copyright: 1984). Usually the answer is no, but in this case his material showed a fundamental similarity at the level of the mathematical basis. Whereas my approach has been to catalog tonal combinations as vertical entities, his was to catalog them as scales that he derived with the aid of set theory proceeding from the methods of atonal theorists. There are no notated examples in his treatise whatsoever, only tables of coded interval sequences that take up all but a few of its 65 pages. Therefore, a musician who wishes to make musical use of the information must do a fairly daunting decoding and transcribing task. Although the same mathematical database underlies both his project and mine, there can be no non-frivolous plagiarism issues between the two works as far as I’m concerned.

My work was deemed a bad publishing risk in 1984 for reasons that made a great deal of sense to me at the time. How things have changed! Then only a few had personal computers, and the Internet was an arcane scientific tool. My work with pianist, musicologist, and computer programmer George Khouri for the last six or seven years has produced a new version of the material that has all the musical examples on a CD and a complete rewrite of the text that is now under copyright as “The Complete Catalog of Chromatic Combinations.” (c.2007)

I would say that a major difference between Yamaguchi’s work and mine is that mine puts the material into a musical context (albeit an overwhelmingly vertical one) whereas his mentions only the relation to the intervals and some of the scales in conventional use with no consideration of chords or harmony at all.

Anyway, I checked out this guy’s website and found it quite interesting. He calls himself a musician but reveals himself to be kind of a perpetual-student nerd with immense intellectual pride lacking a credible music resume.

My feelings about the matter are ambiguous. On the one hand I’m a little pissed that he’s beat me to the punch, but on the other, delighted that someone beside myself has come to view the nature of the whole system as a useful avenue of investigation.