

The Sounds of Poetry Viewed as Music

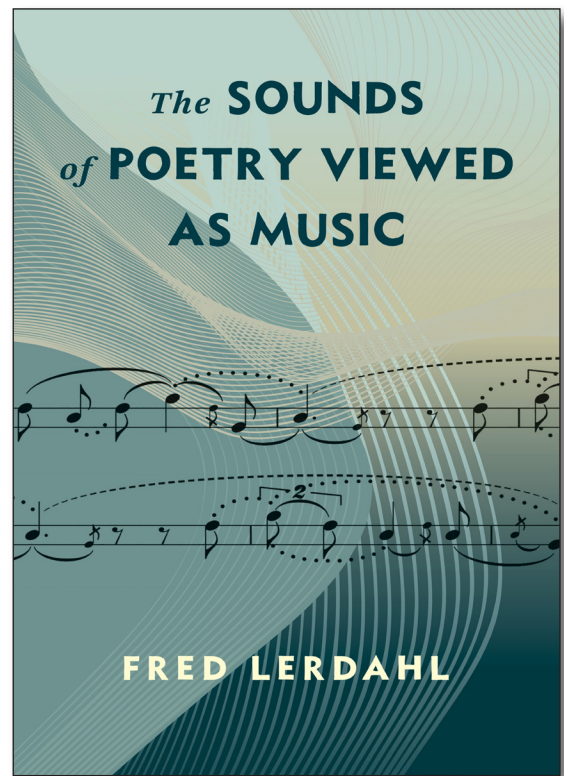
Fred Lerdahl

Poets, literary critics, and lovers of poetry often speak of the “music of poetry.” *The Sounds of Poetry Viewed as Music* gives substance to the metaphor by building on recent research in linguistics and music theory to propose a theory of the sounds of poetry conceived in musical terms. It develops a rule-based methodology for assigning normative readings to the rhythms and contours of poetic lines. Each component of the theory is compared to earlier treatments both in traditional prosody and in generative metrics and intonational phonology. The theory’s predictions correspond well to recorded readings by poets and actors. The book also advances an original hierarchical treatment of syllabic rhyme, alliteration, and assonance.

The Sounds of Poetry Viewed as Music is an interdisciplinary project. In reconceiving prosody in musical terms, it offers a detailed treatment of the cognitive organization of poetic sounds, and by implication it supports the claim that music and language have a common ancestry in expressive vocalization. This book will engage readers of poetry, literary scholars, musicians, philosophers, and cognitive scientists interested in the intersection of the musical and linguistic capacities.

FRED LERDAHL is Fritz Reiner Professor Emeritus of Musical Composition at Columbia University. An acclaimed composer and music theorist, he has written numerous orchestral and chamber pieces, three of which have been finalists for the Pulitzer Prize in music. His books include *A Generative Theory of Tonal Music*, with linguist Ray Jackendoff (1983); *Tonal Pitch Space* (2001); and *Composition and Cognition: Reflections on Contemporary Music and the Musical Mind* (2020).

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“Drawing on decades of musical theory, *The Sounds of Poetry Viewed as Music* offers a fresh alternative to traditional literary and generative metrics approaches, redefining our understanding of poetry’s structure. Concise yet profound, it bridges poetry, music, and linguistic theory in bold new ways.”

—Nigel Fabb, University of Strathclyde

“*The Sounds of Poetry Viewed as Music* presents a novel method for capturing perceptually and affectively relevant aspects of poetic structure. Lerdahl rigorously tests his approach against expert performances of poetic classics, offering a broader framework for analyzing verse.”

—Mara Breen, Mount Holyoke College



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