

Commentary on Justin London's MTO 0.2 article

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REFERENCE: mto.93.0.2.london.php

[1] I was interested in Richard Parncutt's comments, although I came up with a different perception.

Regarding durational accent, the last of the six notes (A) will tend to sound accented due to its relatively long effective duration.

This seems crucially important to me.

If, as the notation of Justin's example implies, the first 3 notes represent C major harmony and the last three F major, then the harmonic accent will fall on the fourth note, F.

Is there an implied problem here? if we think CDE FGA, we'll imply groups of three (A weak).

Perhaps the strongest effect of all in the example is the primacy effect, according to which the first note is the downbeat, simply because it is the first.

OK, but I didn't sense this. I.e. We start with no expectations, we hear a note, we ask "is it a downbeat or an upbeat?" We listen to confirm one or the other alternative. BUT for the last note A, we have heard quite a few pitches in a series, we come to expect the same, but hear silence instead, which thus accents the last note strongly. I seem to hear the A as stronger than the C, thus I arrange duples and triples to come up with A as downbeat. I end up getting either c alone as upbeat in duple meter (C DE FG A) or c and d as upbeats in triple meter (CD EFG A) (a possibility not mentioned by RP).

[2] Both of these of course imply the melody as part of a context. My preferred interpretation, C DE FG A, is found in "doh, a deer"!

[3] Re Stephen Smoliar's comments, drawing Beethoven's first into the picture: yes, I agree, there is a tradition of the musical phrase that goes way back, making the conveyance of downbeat "natural" and easy. One might also invoke the intro to Beethoven's seventh (i) or the Stravinsky Symphony in C (i) (which probably relied on just that literate ear to pick up the Beeth. refs.). The chicken-egg question that the perception-oriented person is wondering about is: do we hear it that way because we're so used to hearing it that way (i.e. is it learned), or do we hear it that way because of an a priori, physically based, perceptual inclination, one that has little reliance on previous experience?

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