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Preliminary response to the MTO 0.2 article

Justin London

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[1] Whilst there were (as of yet) no "formal" responses to my article on "Loud Rests and Other Strange Metric Phenomena" I was most gratified to see the number and variety of responses, comments, and discussion that appeared on the SMT-list. I was especially pleased that a number of music-psychologists joined in the debate, as well as mainstream theorists (what ever that means, these days).

[2] For volume 0.4 I will prepare a formal reply to several of the discussion threads which arose in response to "Loud Rests", but for the moment I would like to offer a few comments on some issues raised by Joel Lester, Rich Parncutt, and others about my "weird" third example.

[3] Example 3 is metrically ambigious in a deadpan performance, and was so chosen precisely for that reason (though I will admit to moving rather quickly from the physicist's first hearing to the metrically-indexed version in paragraph [6]). I was/am assuming that in this example did not have a deadpan performance, but rather a performance which contains subtle, yet highly conventionalized variations in timing and dynamics (what Sloboda, op. cit. below, has termed "expressive variations") of each note within the anacrusis; these varitaions act as cues for the meter.(1) On the basis of those cues we can hear the first three durations, leaving any tonal interpretation(s) aside for the moment, as inidicative of a "and-four-and-ONE" metric pattern. Lester is completely correct in reminding us that the score is a set of directions for the performer, which is not the same thing as a knowledge-representation of the listener's metric cognition and understanding.

[4] And as result of following the directions given by the score, musicians will produce a sound structure that encodes the metric information—the bar lines are thus "recoverable" to the listener. Lester also is quite right in pointing out that when we first hear the melody we have no idea that the opening pitches are "sol-la-ti-do." The first note can be anything; the first two are a whole step, which could be placed in various diatonic conetxts. But when we have the first three tones (assuming a diatonic context, which of course, may be an incorrect assumption), which span two whole steps, we now a fairly circumscribed number of tonal possibilities: do-re-mi, fa-sol-la, or sol-la-ti. Of these three only the first and third are viable candiates for a diatonic beginning—as starting on fa is rather unlikely (examples, anyone?). But at this point (3 notes into the "piece"), we will also have some timing and dynamic information about the three notes; as indicated above, a performer faithful to the notation will give varying emphasis to these pitches, something like "tone-Tone-tone-(TONE)". If we perceive that the second note is longer/louder (just a bit) that the first or third, we have a good reason to hear the tones as "sol-La-ti-DO" (OK, I've included

the fourth note now), since the rhytmic emphasis is on the 2nd and (esp.) fourth notes of the scale. I posit that this interpretation is more likely than one which places these tones in a "do-Re-mi-FA" context, for that would be a highly atypical metric placement for tonic. Indeed, what I believe Lester did in grouping the 8ths in pairst, starting on the strong 8th, was to mentally perform the opening motive as "DO-re-Mi-fa-SOL-la (rest)", with appropriate expressive variations for that metric context.

[5] Along with expressive variations, and the scale-step limits that accrue as the melodic line unfolds, there is another factor which facilitates metric recognition, and that is that listeners know a lot about musical beginnings. It seems reasonable to imagine that we have a rich store of opening templates or schemata (of varying levels of specificity) which appertain to different musical styles. We have a "so-La-ti-DO" pattern already in our heads, in other words, and so it isn't so much a task of building the scale-step representations and metric placement from first principles, as it were, as it is a task of matching the given sound structure to our repertoire of opening gestures.

[6] As a final remark re the "problems of example 3", in "Loud Rests" I point out that metric cognition involves two phases, one of recognition, as well as one of continuation. What should be noted here is the metric recognition phase, which is what all the fuss is about, *must* be retrospective—how could it be otherwise, unless we have metrically clairvoyant listeners—but nonetheless we are able to achieve metric recognition *very* fast. This rapidity is due to the rich number of cues the music provices via expressive varations as well as our practiced experience in responding to those cues.

[7] Well, this is perhaps a bit more than just an informal reply, so I will conclude with a promissory note. In volume 0.4 I hope to comment on Smoliar's discusion of Desain's work on Expectancy Space, and its relevance to a dynamic model of meter, as well as the discussion thread spun by Judd, Demske, and others re musical and cognitive universals.

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Justin London
Carleton College
jlondon@carleton.edu

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Footnotes

1. The study of timing and dynamics (and their metric implications) is currently a hot topic in music-cognition circles. Aside from the work by Eric Clarke on "Categorical Rhythmic Perception" cited in "Loud Rests," other relevant studies include: Alf Gabrielsson, "Timing in Music Performance and its Relations to Music Experience." in *Generative Processes in Music*, ed. John Sloboda, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988; John A. Sloboda, "The Communication of Musical Metre in Piano Performance," *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology* 35A:377–96, 1983; and Neil P. Todd, "A Model of Expressive Timing in Music," *Music Perception* 3:33–58, 1985.
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Prepared by Natalie Boisvert, Cynthia Gonzales, and Rebecca Flore, Editorial Assistants