

Introduction to the Queen's Symposium on Musical Perception Held at Queen's University, Kingston, Ontario, July 14-16, 1981

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**INTRODUCTION TO THE QUEEN'S SYMPOSIUM
ON MUSICAL PERCEPTION HELD AT
QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY, KINGSTON, ONTARIO
JULY 14-16, 1981**

Throughout musical history there have been substantial contributions to our understanding of how the regular disturbances of the air that we perceive as sound convey the intellectual and emotional substance that we call music. The names of historical contributors are familiar to those with only a casual interest in music: Pythagoras, Boethius, Rameau, Helmholtz, Hindemith. But attempts to organize this knowledge into a useful and coherent basis for musical composition, performance, and pedagogy are often frustrated. Part of the problem, perhaps, lies in the fact that contributors are typically scattered across a variety of disciplines. Contributions from the disparate fields of physics, engineering, medicine, psychology, and music theory tend to be nestled within their particular fields; there has been little opportunity for interdisciplinary assessment and evaluation. There is increasing evidence, however, that today's investigators are anxious to pursue interdisciplinary contact, to discuss common problems and objectives, and to explore new approaches and terminology. Thus the Queen's Symposium on Musical Perception came into being.

The Symposium was held at Queen's University in July of 1981. There were six invited speakers, representing a variety of different disciplines, and each of the six papers appears in this issue. Each speaker concentrated upon a distinctive problem of musical perception and each offered experimental tests of the ideas presented. The topics included perception of structure, of timbre, of sound in space, and of the auditory objects contained in sound. The first paper, by Jonathan Kramer, a composer-theorist, examined copious examples from the standard musical literature in order to illustrate concepts of psychological expectancy and the role of experience. Annabel Cohen, a psychologist, reported the responses of listeners in a laboratory test to musical fragments that she had created, and analyzed the characteristics of melody that lead to perceptual recognition. Albert Bregman, a psychologist, discussed the capacity of the human mind to

organize a sequence of acoustic signals into meaningful units or "streams." For the next three speakers, audio-electronics and computer-controlled signal processing, while used by all speakers represented here, were particularly relevant. Floyd Toole, an electrical engineer, discussed audio reproduction systems and the correspondence between physical measurements and human judgment. Wayne Slawson, a composer-theorist, described an electronic voice for vowel sounds and presented theories about how we organize tone color in music listening. Finally, Campbell Searle, an electrical engineer, described a model of acoustic processing intended to answer the same questions posed by Slawson. Indeed, one of the remarkable aspects of the symposium was the immediate rapport achieved by Searle and Slawson upon a first encounter, despite the difference in their respective backgrounds and approaches. But also, in general, because each speaker strove to lift his work above the jargon of his own field and to make it intelligible to colleagues in other fields, a great deal of enlightening compatibility was discovered among the speakers and among the participants of the lengthy discussion periods.

Finally, because music itself generated the concerns of the symposium, there was a directed attempt to keep music in balance with talk about music. Two concerts were included with the presentations. The first, a concert of electronic music, illustrated many of the concerns about musical perception that were discussed throughout the symposium. The second concert was a performance by the Canadian pianist Ireneus Zuk. The discussion that immediately followed the performance, "Factors of Musical Perception: Three Points of View," constitutes the final paper from the symposium in this issue. Three short presentations illustrated the different approaches of a performer, a composer-theorist, and a psychologist to the study of the pieces performed and provided another example of the agreement upon essential concerns.

The symposium was assessed an unqualified success by all participants and there was much urging for a second meeting in the future. In the meantime, we hope that the articles in this issue are useful to the readers of this journal. We enthusiastically welcome response from readers regarding either tentative plans for an upcoming symposium or any of the issues raised in the following articles.

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