Chapter 13

**MUSIC PERCEPTION**

1. How might one apply the Gestalt principles of melody to auditory scene analysis?

*Hints and discussion: If students have difficulty making this leap, suggest to students that different instruments in a band might be playing different parts. Thus in blues and some rock music, the bass plays what is known as a “walking bass line” which follows its own pattern (which might conform to one Gestalt form) while a vocal or lead guitar line will play the melody (which might conform to a different Gestalt form). In this way, as each instrument is creating a different pattern, or Gestalt form, this makes it easier to separate the instruments perceptually. Separating the melody from the rhythm section might be a bit like separating a subject from the background in visual images (an area where Gestalt principles are well known to apply).*

1. In the previous chapter, we considered whether speech is special. Is music special?

*Hints and discussion: Parallels can be drawn between music and speech, in that both seem to have unique brain areas (or least unique patterns of brain activity) associated with them. Also, just like there are aphasias, the chapter also discusses amusia. Normal auditory processing is intact but the ability to process music is impaired.*

1. Charles Darwin suggested that music evolved as a form of sexual selection, and notes that its ability to evoke passion in humans is part and parcel of this trait. Can you think of examples to support or refute this idea?

*Hints and discussion: The discussion can here turn to fun topics such as the idea that rock stars are often treated as sexually desirable, and that popular music often has sexual themes. Counterarguments may be more serious, though students may have some difficulty here. An example is Stephen Pinker’s claim that music is an evolutionary “spandrel”, meaning a decorative byproduct that has no functional value (a spandrel is part of a domed ceiling that was not planned but a byproduct of the arches used in its construction, and often decorated with murals and other designs).*

1. The text notes important similarities and differences between music and language, and further discusses cultural differences in music. Do you think that such cultural differences might be explained in terms of linguistic differences? Do cultures/nations with similar languages produce similar musical styles?

*Hints and discussion: While there may be no single way to respond to this discussion prompt, students can ponder the linguistic, cultural and musical differences between East and West.*