Editorial

Broadening Our Horizons

If music be the food of love, play on....
William Shakespeare, Twelfth Night

In our understandable preoccupation with improving the speech communication of hearing-impaired persons, we sometimes neglect other dimensions of auditory experience. Music, for example, is important in the lives of many individuals with both normal and impaired hearing. Yet there are no formulae for computing the optimal insertion gain for a symphony, no recommended knee points for the adaptive compression of string quartets, and no mandatory MPOs for the discordant cacophonies so popular with today’s young people.

In this issue of JAAA, however, we report the result of a fruitful collaboration between audiologists, psychologists, and musicians at the University of Iowa. Kate Gfeller and her colleagues, John Knutson, George Woodworth, Shelley Witt, and Becky DeBus, sought to investigate how well the continuous interleaved sampling (CIS) speech coding strategy of the Clarion cochlear implant permitted the recognition and appraisal of the timbre of four musical instruments: the clarinet, the piano, the violin, and the trumpet. They approached the problem by designing a comprehensive test battery including rating and recognition of scales, arpeggios, and melodies; conventional measures of speech recognition; and a variety of cognitive measures thought to relate to musical perception. Not unexpectedly, normal-hearing listeners performed somewhat better than cochlear implant users, but the latter were surprisingly accurate at recognizing some of the instruments. Interestingly, performance was better predicted by cognitive measures than by speech recognition scores. The interested reader is encouraged to read the entire paper in order to appreciate the full scope of interactions among the various innovative experimental measures. In so doing, audiologists may want to consider how such an approach might broaden the scope of the contemporary evaluation of both cochlear implant and hearing aid users.

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