

Inaccurate Interpretations

My incredibly biased, and most likely wrong, view of the world

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Wednesday, 26 January 2011

"Sometimes behaves so strangely"

If you read my first blog post, you would have seen that I want to become a radio producer, so I figured it was about time I made a post about some audio-related stories. This first story is one I first heard on WNYC's Radiolab. Radiolab is a radio program broadcast on NPR in America and is available as a free podcast for the rest of the world. Chances are, if you continue to read this blog, that you will see a lot more posts based on Radiolab stories. The reason for this is because they are no small part of my inspiration for radio production. You know how bassists may look up to Victor Wooten as the apex of bass technique, or some guitarists fantasize about standing on stage next to Joe Satriani and his beautifully bald head? Well, that's how I feel about this show. If I had the opportunity to work for them, I'd sell my family home for plane tickets.



Pictured: Beauty incarnate. The bald kind.



Not Pictured: Happy fingertips

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- Just started playing [@SupergiantGames](#) Bastion, it really is fantastic, and super charming. Wish I'd got the soundtrack now. [1 day ago](#)

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But anyway, this somehow leads me to this first story. I'm sure Radiolab would do a better job at explaining it than I ever could. If you listen to the first five minutes of the audio clip below, you'll get the point. I'd recommend you listen to the whole show sometime, but this first five minutes is all we need.

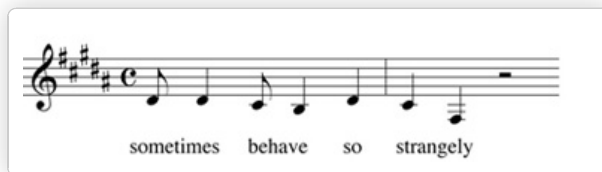


If you don't feel a particular desire to listen to said audio file, I'll do my best to explain what it is about.

Diana Deutsch is a Professor of Psychology at the University of California, San Diego. She is a perceptual and cognitive Psychologist who is a lead researcher in the Psychology of music. She has done a lot of research on the nature of absolute pitch, discovering that amongst people whose first language was a tonal language (languages where words can have more than one meaning based on the tone of the word), 75% of them had absolute pitch, whereas amongst people who had languages such as English as their first language, only 25% of them had perfect pitch. (If you want to know more about this research, you could look [here](#)). Another very interesting point raised in this episode is that no matter what language they speak, all mothers, all around the world, talk to their children in the exact same way.

Deutsch has also made two CDs based on audio illusions, which leads us smoothly to the main point of this article. Listen to this: http://www.acoustics.org/press/156th/Sound_Demo_1.mp3

Did you hear it? The story goes, that one day, while editing the first track, an introduction, to Deutsch's second CD, she had this particular part of the track on loop while she went to make some tea. She completely forgot that she had left this looping and, while drinking her tea, she began hearing something really odd. What was she hearing?



This.

She realised it started to sound like music. If you go back and listen to that track, you will see what I mean. It seems like a completely normal sentence until it comes to this phrase and it sounds like she suddenly bursts into song. If you didn't hear it the first time, go back and listen to it now, you'll wonder how you missed it the first time, it seems so obvious when you know it's there. It was this discovery, of how speech can "sometimes behave so strangely", that led Deutsch to discover the link between language and absolute pitch.

Oh, I probably should have warned you at the start of this post: once you hear the musical quality of the speech, it's impossible to unhear it. I first heard it a few weeks ago and ever since it has been stuck in my head, it is a seriously catchy tune!

For more info on Diana Deutsch, her research, and her illusions, click [here](#)

For more info on Radiolab, click [here](#)

Can you hear the music? Could you hear it before it was pointed out to you? Let me know! Leave a comment below the blog, you don't even need to sign up or anything!

Posted by Crimsai at 22:37

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