

Isaac Albeniz, Op.47, No.5 “Asturias” analysis based on Voice Leading by David Huron.

The interpretation that musical content production can be considered as a reflection of the sensory process during the perception. In this process, we know that the scope of "melody" has a broad musical value. We have an auditory perception process that identifies acoustic sound sources as separate sound images. In this sense, the distinctiveness of sounds is meaningful and can be considered as fundamentally serving a biological purpose. However, the fact that all distinct sounds exhibit similar spectral and temporal characteristics can lead us to identify some multiple acoustic sound sources in the same auditory image. According to Huron, this is considered a deception of brain functions. In this context, we can define "melody" as a new one stream line auditory image formed by the fusion of notes perceived as pitches. Therefore, composers are inclined to design these perceptual illusions in a way that can be transformed into meaningful sound patterns. In this paper, I will analyse the first section of Isaac Albeniz's Op.47, No.5 solo guitar piece. The main reason for choosing this piece is that, during a period when my musical selectivity was relatively low, I repeatedly listened to this piece, resulting in hypothetical melodies that I perceived in the piece are *not* actually present.

In terms of toneness, cleaner the sound, the higher the sense of tone it achieves. This also implies a high sense of pitch. The perception of high pitch is important for the identification of sequential notes, thus composing in regions where the most accurate sense of pitch exists will enhance the perception of melody. According to Huron's study, the central region identified as having the best toneness and sense of pitch falls between E2 and G5. Example 1 illustrates a fundamental melodic line established between E4 and C5. However, it should be noted that the "melody" illusion created and, in my perception, defining the signature of "Asturias" is the persistent repetitions of the B4 note.

Example 1. Isaac Albeniz, Op.47, No.5 “Asturias”, mm. 1-16

Firstly, if we consider the first measure, the notes indicated by the red arrows form the main skeleton of the melody. However, the repetition of the B4 notes, not marked with red arrows, can be said to have an "interpolation" function between those distinct pitches in this sense. Here, starting from E4, it can be observed that the process of reaching its ultimate target, C4, involves the presence of this repetition. In this regard, I will examine the melodic sequence, excluding the repeated B4 notes (except those included in the melodic sequence), as E4-B4-C4-A4-B4-G#4 (first 8 measures). According to Miller and Heise, if the interval value between two notes in a sequence is close to each other (trill boundary), it tends to be perceived as a single stream line, whereas if it is the opposite (yodel boundary), it tends to be perceived as two stream lines. Here, the interval value between E4 and B4 is large (fifth). Therefore, it will be included in the yodel boundary. Based on this information, it can be said that we perceive this sequence of notes as two stream lines. This movement (E4-B4) has continued for 8 measures. Between measures 9 and 16, E4 has expanded to a 1-octave below range.

Example 2. Isaac Albeniz, Op.47, No.5 “Asturias”, mm.1-4

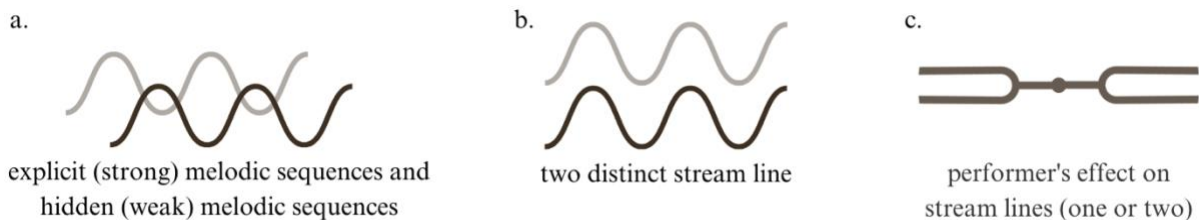
Here, I would like to draw your attention once again to the repetitions of B4 (not included in the melodic sequence indicated by red arrows in Example 1). According to the continuity principle, a melody is composed of continuous pitch sequences belonging to the same stream line. If we listen to the first 16 measures of the piece (which would mean the continuous repetition of the sequence in the first measure), the melodic framework will start to perceive E4 note from the 9th measure onwards as if they are outside of this sequence. In other words, the repeated occurrences of B4 inserted within the melodic sequence will eventually give rise to an obscured melody.

If we bring up the principle of pitch proximity, in melodic movement, if the pitches change rapidly, or in other words, if the duration of pitch change surpasses the perceptual speed of muscles, the connection between pitches that binds them into a single stream line will break. In this context, the E4 pitches within the red rectangle shown in Example 2 will be pushed out of the sequence, revealing a new melodic sequence. Here, there will be two separate stream lines. The first one is the E4-B4-C4-A4-B4-G#4 sequence mentioned above, and the second one is indicated by the blue rectangle in Example 2. It should be noted here that this “secret” melody intention of Isaac Albeniz has not been fully revealed yet.

Example 3. Isaac Albeniz, Op.47, No.5 “Asturias”, mm. 17-18

After measure 17, we can say that the intention hidden in the first 17 measures becomes even more apparent in the piece. In Example 3, the emphasis on B4, mentioned earlier, is now reinforced with an octave higher and presented as a triplet arpeggio indicated by the blue arrows. At the same time, the E4 note, which forms the skeleton of the main melody, is supported by a sustained note one octave lower (indicated by the red arrow). Here, a question arises: Does the addition of the E3 and B5 notes after measure 17 redefine these two notations as accompaniments to the melodic skeleton? Recalling the principle of harmonic fusion, octave intervals are one of the intervals that contribute significantly to harmonic fusion. In this context, the newly added B5 and E3, in a way, have merged within the stream line of B4 and E4. The conclusion drawn from this is that this compositional move has presented the original melodic skeleton of E4-B4-C4-A4-B4-G#4 as a stronger melodic perception.

Example 4. Possible melodic stream lines and performer's effect



In conclusion, it should be noted that considering all possible evaluations, it appears quite challenging to perceive a single stream line here. This is because the targeted accents, such as B4 and E3, manipulate the connections within the melodic sequence. As mentioned earlier, there is an overt and a subtle undulating hidden melodic flow present. Here, Isaac Albeniz creates an illusion of a single undulating flow through his composition characterized by rapid tempo and frequent changes of musical keys, however, the perception here can be positioned closer to the concept of pseudo-polyphony as pointed out by music theorists. Additionally, according to Huron, if a composer wants to write a melodic sequence with large intervals and avoid stream segregation at the same time, they can achieve this by reducing the tempo (i.e., "leap lengthening"). Based on this information, the situation illustrated in Example 4a depicts the presence of a main stream line and a hidden melodic line, as discussed above. It is situated in a space that can correspond to the

concept of pseudo-polyphony. In 4b, on the other hand, two separate stream lines are shown due to the fast tempo and large interval ranges on which the melodic sequences are based.

Finally, I would like to address a point related to Ana Vidovic's performance¹. Above, we mentioned that slowing down the tempo could be a solution to avoid stream segregation. In this context, I would like to draw your attention to Example 4c. The discrete perception caused by rapid pitch changes is pulled towards a single stream line in Vidovic's interpretation through tempo slowdown or playing with a lower emphasis (at a subdued level) at specific points. In a way, this can be put forth as evidence of the performer's approach to the composition and the interpretive power she possesses.

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=inBKFMB-yPg>