Amusia

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Current Knowledge

“Music” involves both complex qualities such as familiar melodies, rhythm, or tempo, and more elementary aspects such as discrimination of timbre, pitch, or tone. While lesions of the temporal lobes are fairly consistently implicated, the hemispheric localization of lesions responsible for specific deficits has been more controversial. Music, like language, is composed of individual, temporally sequenced stimuli (musical notes, melodies, tunes), each capable of being analyzed with regard to particular features such as pitch and timbre,

functions that would appear to be more in keeping with the suspected operations of the left hemisphere. By contrast, melodies may also be perceived as a gestalt, which is more characteristic of right hemisphere functions. There is evidence that well-trained musicians come to rely more heavily on the left hemisphere for processing certain aspects of music when compared with non-musicians. However, the right hemisphere evidences superiority for both the perception and expression of music in studies of non-musicians. Thus, the strategies by which various musical elements are approached, as well as the leading hemisphere in appreciating those elements, are most likely determined in part by one’s prior musical experience or training. In summary, while both the right and left hemispheres are apparently involved in the expression and perception or appreciation of music, the specific contributions of each are still somewhat of a mystery.