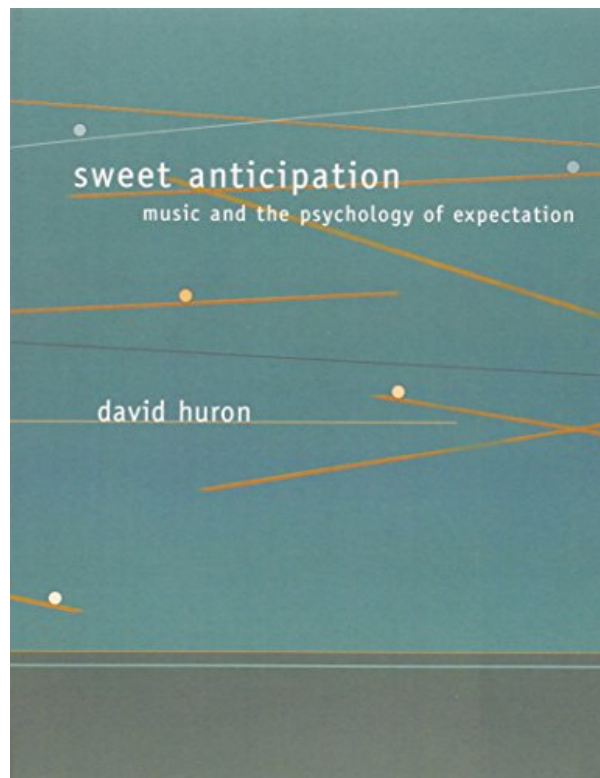
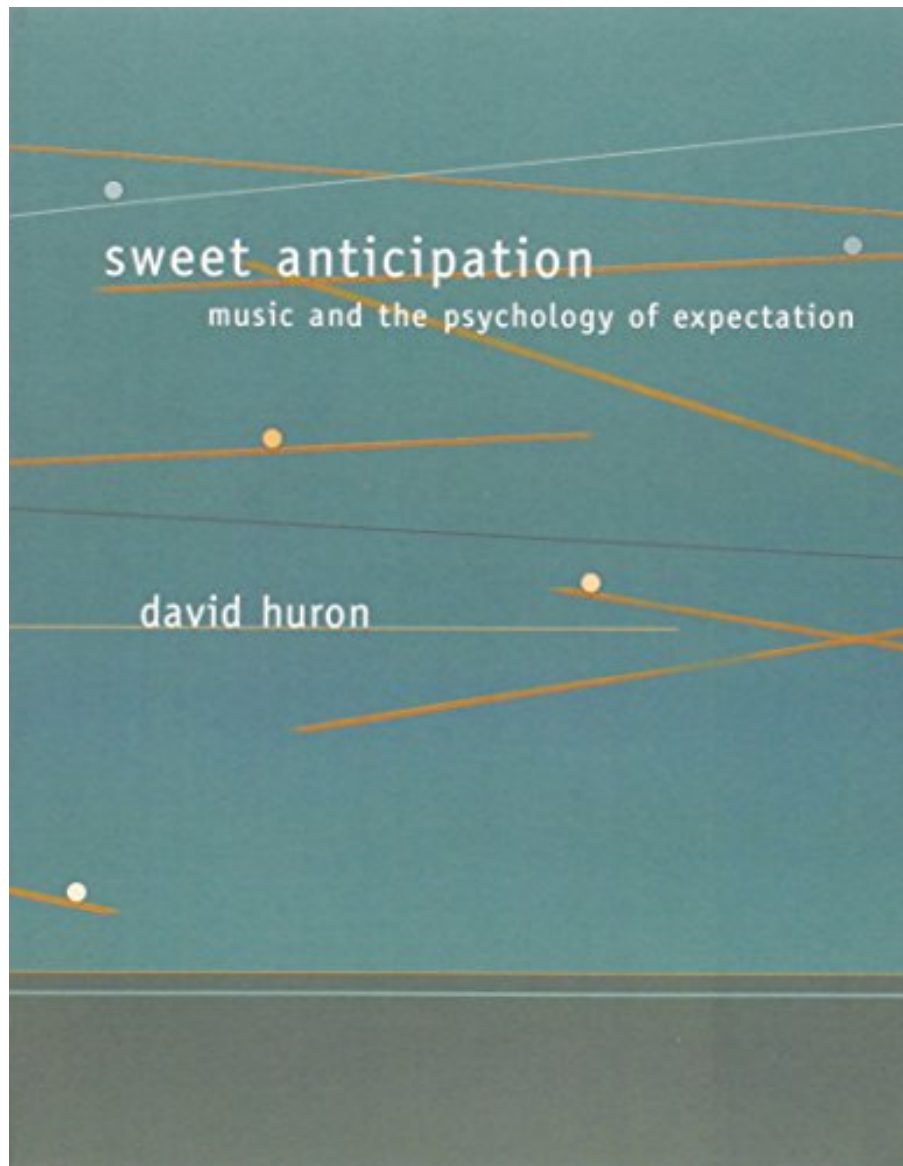


SWEET ANTICIPATION: MUSIC AND THE PSYCHOLOGY OF EXPECTATION (MIT PRESS) BY DAVID HURON



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Review

A richly detailed theory of how and why the audience has particular expectations and emotions.... A fascinating journey into the inner workings of music and how it tickles the human mind.

(Petr Janata Nature)

Sweet Anticipation... in its range, rigour and insights constitutes an astonishing achievement. Although it announces itself as a book about expectation in music, it goes well beyond what that might imply and is more like a broad and encompassing theory of music perception and cognition, with expectation as the central concept.

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Having worked on the question of musical expectancy for a number of years myself reading David Huron's recent book has been, for me, a real treat. My interest in this topic does, however, make me a harsh critic of work on this topic. It is within such a context, then, that I praise this book. Quite simply, Sweet Anticipation is excellent.

(Prof. Mark Schmuckler Philosophical Psychology)

David Huron's superb book Sweet Anticipation: Music and the Psychology of Expectation ... is an exceptional contribution to the field of music cognition and represents a clear advance in our understanding of the role of expectancy in musical experience. As a cognitive psychologist, I find Huron's proposals for expectancy mechanisms and their possible evolutionary origin convincing and novel. Indeed, throughout the book musical issues are connected with human psychology in a way that reflects a deep and nuanced

understanding of both disciplines.... On the whole, Huron provides an extraordinarily rich analysis of the phenomenon of musical expectation and provides a persuasive account of its psychological sources. Sweet Anticipation is without question one of the most exciting pieces of scholarship to emerge in the past decade, and should be read by anyone with a serious interest in the psychology of music.

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The psychological theory of expectation that David Huron proposes in *Sweet Anticipation* grew out of the author's experimental efforts to understand how music evokes emotions. These efforts evolved into a general theory of expectation that will prove informative to readers interested in cognitive science and evolutionary psychology as well as those interested in music. The book describes a set of psychological mechanisms and illustrates how these mechanisms work in the case of music. All examples of notated music can be heard on the Web.

Huron proposes that emotions evoked by expectation involve five functionally distinct response systems: reaction responses (which engage defensive reflexes); tension responses (where uncertainty leads to stress); prediction responses (which reward accurate prediction); imagination responses (which facilitate deferred gratification); and appraisal responses (which occur after conscious thought is engaged). For real-world events, these five response systems typically produce a complex mixture of feelings. The book identifies some of the aesthetic possibilities afforded by expectation, and shows how common musical devices (such as syncopation, cadence, meter, tonality, and climax) exploit the psychological opportunities. The theory also provides new insights into the physiological psychology of awe, laughter, and spine-tingling chills. Huron traces the psychology of expectations from the patterns of the physical/cultural world through imperfectly learned heuristics used to predict that world to the phenomenal qualia we experienced as we apprehend the world.

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Most helpful customer reviews

55 of 58 people found the following review helpful.

Music and Surprise

By E. N. Anderson

Finally, a real five-star book about music. For some reason, there are thousands of books about language, but almost no serious ones analyzing the biology and psychology of humanity's other communication systems. Every society has a highly developed musical tradition, every society uses music in countless ways including the most sacred religious ceremonies, and yet hardly anyone has stepped forward to analyze it as a basic communication channel for humans.

David Huron's book is on surprise in music. He shows how music creates expectations of pattern, from simple rhythm up to very complex patterns (the concerto, the symphony...) that only sophisticated listeners know. Musicians notoriously love to play with these patterns, to surprise the listeners and thus create new pieces and prevent boredom. Huron distinguishes several types of surprise, on the basis of a highly sophisticated evolutionary and cognitive psychology as well as an astounding knowledge of music. He knows everything from the complexities of Beethoven and Schoenberg to the joik songs of the Saami of arctic Europe, and even knows what happens when you play the latter to rural folk in southern Africa. By contrast, such earlier works as Robert Jourdain's *MUSIC, THE BRAIN AND ECSTASY* were greatly limited by confining their attention to western classical and classical-derived pop forms, thus missing everything from cross-rhythms to alternative scales.

Surprise presupposes a whole file of knowledge of patterns and schemas, and a deep cognitive and emotional investment in same. Huron takes these mostly for granted. Obviously, the next step is to figure out why people love complicated musical patterns in the first place. Especially, humans love the theme-and-variation type of play with patterns that dominates music from Elizabethan lute solos to jazz to ragas. These are not exactly surprising, especially when you know the pieces, but they are always delightful. Why? Huron mentions body rhythms, speech rhythms, and the like. There is obviously more. I think there is much more about pattern--in music and in general--that we need to study.

30 of 33 people found the following review helpful.

Music theory that includes the whole world!

By Amazon Customer

Sweet Anticipation should be required reading for all composers and musicologists. The book plausibly explains how and why music affects human emotions, and it also contains numerous practical factoids that can be used to gauge one's own works against the spectrum of human musical perception. Huron uses statistical analysis and a deep knowledge of recent experimental progress in the psychology of musical perception to paint a picture that goes far beyond often banal music theory. His theories apply to all existing musical traditions, which to me is one of the most interesting aspects of the book, since most music theorists are pathetically myopic when it comes to assessing music as a universal human phenomenon.

This is certainly the best music theory book that I've read in many, many, years. It takes many things that performing musicians intuitively know to be true, and puts them into a more rigorous experimental context than musicians normally use. This being said, the book is probably not that accessible to anyone who does not yet have an undergrad level grasp of classical music theory - if you don't know what a ii-V-I progression is, or you can't see the shape of a melody by looking at an printed musical example, you probably won't get much out of it.

Highly recommended!

10 of 11 people found the following review helpful.

A great book on the Physiology of the human capacity for Music

By Razvan Bunescu

Why do some of us experience frissons when listening to music? Why is a deceptive cadence still "deceptive" after countless listenings? Why do bad feelings amplify subsequent positive emotions? Why understanding pleasure is important for understanding music?

This and many other interesting questions are addressed in David Huron's book. Central to his theory on how expectations determine emotions in music are our propensity for (imperfect) inductive statistical learning, the unconscious reactions of the fast-track brain and the following slower, contrastive appraisal responses. All integrated convincingly in an evolutionary perspective.

I like the statistical approach used throughout this book to explain important concepts such as expectation, surprise, anticipation, tonality, contra-tonality, syncopation. I liked the parallels drawn between when-related and what-related expectations - music contains "tendency notes" as well as "tendency moments", drumming fills as "embellished tendency tones". Statistical learning can go a long way towards explaining musical expectations (I am however less convinced that a statistical learning theory can ignore Gestalt-based features in its attempt to explain musical phenomena).

Really understanding music is a very hard task, and I agree that music analysis will be far from solving the task as long as the easy "naive realism" approach is preferred to "sophisticated realism". This book offers a good example of empirically founded sophisticated realism.

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