

THE COCKTAIL PARTY EFFECT

for Ingrid Lee

The cocktail party effect is a well-known psychoacoustic phenomenon characterized by focusing auditory attention onto a single stimulus and refers to one's ability to comprehend a single conversation at a loud, noisy party by effectively tuning out all other sounds. Old Fashioned: two ounces bourbon whiskey, two dashes bitters, one splash water, one teaspoon sugar, one maraschino cherry, one orange wedge. Mix sugar, water and bitters in an old fashioned glass. Drop in a cherry and an orange wedge. Muddle into a paste. Pour in bourbon, fill with ice cubes, and stir. Energetic masking: perceptual interference present in the sensory epithelium. Informational masking: perceptual interference that cannot be explained by energetic masking. Object: an estimate of the content of a discrete physical source. Saliency: the perceptual strength of an input based purely on stimulus attributes. Similarity: an explanation for auditory informational masking when a target and competing sources have similar perceptual features. Source: a discrete physical entity in the external world. Uncertainty: an explanation for auditory informational masking when properties of either the target or the masker change unpredictably from trial to trial. Dry Martini: one and two-thirds ounces gin, one-third ounce dry vermouth, one olive. Stir gin and vermouth with ice in a mixing glass. Strain into a cocktail glass, and add the olive. A sequence of sounds that is heard distinctly from other simultaneously occurring sounds is known as an auditory stream. The auditory system separates such streams based on timbre, frequency, rhythm, volume, pattern and spatial cues. A related phenomenon, a sort of psychoacoustic trick used by many composers, is that of identifying a single sequence of tones from one instrument as two or more melodic lines. This is often referred to as a compound melody, yet it is understood within the discourse of psychoacoustics as stream segregation. Bloody Mary: one ounce vodka, three ounces tomato juice, two dashes red hot sauce, two dashes green hot sauce, one dash Worcestershire sauce, one-half ounce lemon juice, one pinch salt, one pinch pepper, one stalk celery. Add vodka, tomato juice, red hot sauce, green hot sauce, Worcester sauce, lemon juice, salt and pepper. Pour back and forth between two mixing glasses. Strain into an ice-filled highball glass. Garnish with celery stalk.