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## A Philosophical Account of Listening Musically

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## A Philosophical Account of Listening Musically

Paskalina Bourbon

### Abstract

What is the distinctive character of musical experiences? An answer: musical experience is distinctive because it is *of music*. I argue, however, that the difference between musical and nonmusical experience cannot be explained with an ontological account of music per se. Instead, we have musical experiences of sounds *whenever* we listen and attend to sounds in a particular kind of way. I call this special kind of attention “musical listening.” One can explain why musical experiences are distinctive by explaining what makes musical listening distinctive. This account of musical listening suggests an anti-realist stance towards music; there is no kind of thing “music” and no musical works that are its instances. Ultimately, I give a kind of account of music as a function of an activity of listening that more fully explains our lives with music and sound than do accounts that focus on describing the ontological status of music.

### Key Words

musical experience; musical listening; musical practice; ontology; philosophy of music; sound

### 1. Introduction

How can we explain the distinctive character of musical experiences? Attempts to answer this question drives much contemporary work in the philosophy of music. This question might not seem terribly difficult to answer. Musical experiences,

one might think, are special because they are *of music*. The general principle behind such an assumption is that the kind of auditory experience one has is determined by the kind of thing one listens to. In order to explain why musical experiences are distinctive, one must explain what music is. Indeed, this is what philosophers of music often are trying to do.

Most philosophical accounts of music are situated between two extremes.[1] On one extreme, music is equivalent to a particular subset of sounds and the features of these sounds make music independent of human attention or interaction. I call such positions 'sonic accounts,' even though no one really holds them. On the other anti-realist extreme, music is wholly mind-dependent and works of music are mental entities. On such 'mental accounts,' as I call them, sounds do not constitute music in any way and there is no music separate from our conceptualizations of it; in this case, music only exists in our minds. Mental accounts are rare.[2] What I call 'mixed' accounts of music are situated between these extremes. Music, on such accounts, has a mental and a sonic element.[3] Our minds are involved, but there are at least some mind-independent properties of music. Some philosophers, like Malcolm Budd, Roger Scruton, and Nick Zangwill, emphasize the involvement of concepts in musical experience and thus tend towards the mental extreme.[4] Others, like Peter Kivy, with his musical Platonism, and Jerrold Levinson, with his abstract sound structures, are sonically inclined.[5] All these philosophers, including those at the extremes, are realists about music because they think it exists. Such ontological accounts of music all imply related but different accounts of musical experience. The general thrust of such accounts is that if one can describe what music is, one can explain why our experiences of it are distinctive. Ontology explains phenomenology.

I argue that the difference between musical and nonmusical experience cannot be explained with an account of music *per se*: musical experience is not distinctive because it is an experience *of* a special kind of thing. Such accounts not only fail to explain the distinctive character of musical experience; a focus on the ontology of music too easily suggests a caricature of the way we live with sound. Furthermore, I argue that we have musical experiences of sounds whenever we listen and attend to sounds in a particular kind of way. I call this special kind of attention "musical listening" and argue that one can explain why musical experiences are distinctive by explaining what makes musical listening distinctive.[6] Ultimately, I suggest my account of musical listening implies that there is no kind of thing "music" and no musical works that are instances of this

general kind. That is, we should not think of music as a thing, event, activity or experience; we should think of what we might call the phenomenon of music instead as involved with a kind of activity in which we relate to sound, and perhaps silence, in a particular way.[7] Thus, I argue that, in a certain sense, music does not exist but, in another sense, music is potentially a part of our lives all of the time.

## 2. How should we account for musical experience?

Stravinsky once said that some of the first music he remembered was the sound of icebergs cracking. Such an experience was a musical one, but most accounts of musical experience, dependent as they are on a concept of music that plays a certain role in their accounts, would not be able to capture it. There is, then, either a problem with Stravinsky's experience or a problem with such accounts. It would be strange, however, to say that Stravinsky experienced the icebergs incorrectly. One would have to claim, in this case, that one *should* only have musical experiences of certain sounds.[8] Who is to say which sounds are appropriate for musical experience? What possible normative standards could there be? Either there are no such standards and everyone can decide for themselves, in which case, why bother with a definition of music, or there *are* standards. These standards are either a) imposed by certain people, but then, what gives them that authority? or b) discovered, in which case how could we ever know if our discovery was of the "real standard?" There are no good grounds for deeming Stravinsky's experience a mistake.

This point could be put another way: Any criteria we might offer by which to evaluate whether a particular experience is musical or not would have to be stipulated. For to experience something incorrectly, as we might want to say Stravinsky did of the icebergs, requires that one also be able, at least in principle, to experience that thing correctly. What criteria, however, could we offer to distinguish between the two kinds of cases without stipulation? One could stipulate either that the experience itself must have certain qualities or characteristics or, as described above, that the content of that experience—what it is an experience *of*—must have certain qualities or characteristics. The basic argument in this section and throughout this paper is that we cannot justify any principled distinction between that which should be experienced musically and that which should not be experienced musically, except by appealing to some such stipulated criteria.

Perhaps the problem with such accounts can be fixed by expanding one's definition to include the kinds of sounds

produced by icebergs. If one expands a definition of music, however, one can no longer explain why musical experience is distinctive by describing music. If a description of music is not sufficient to distinguish musical experiences from other auditory experiences, then it seems that one could theoretically have a musical experience of any sound. Expanding one's definition of music to include all that we could and do have musical experiences of leads to a definition that captures all possible and actual audible sounds. Such a definition could not explain what is distinctive about music and thus could not explain what is distinctive about musical experiences.

I have described the Stravinsky example relative to a sonic account of music, but mixed accounts of music similarly fail to explain the distinctiveness of musical experience.[9] Mixed accounts of music involve sounds and our mental interaction with such sounds. Stripped of irrelevant details, the blunt schema for such views is: mental activity + sounds = music. In order to explain why such views cannot explain the distinctiveness of musical experience, it is useful to look at another example. Imagine a washing machine that finishes its cycle with a triple beep, which is the exact same sounds, with identical pitch, duration, timbre and volume, as the first three notes of a recording of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony. If you were to listen to the first three notes of the Beethoven, you would presumably have a musical experience. But when listening to the washing machine, you would not. However, the sounds in each case are the same. You hear the same sounds as music and as unmusical, but not because those sounds actually are (or are not) music. The object of one's listening underdetermines the kind of experience one has.

Mixed accounts cannot explain why the washing machine and the Beethoven experiences are different in kind. The sounds that are the object of each experience are identical. All mind-dependent features derived from such sounds must also be identical. Given the music = sounds + mental activity schema and given that the fact that one has a musical experience cannot be explained by virtue of the sounds listened to, the mental activity element of music must do the explanatory work.[10] Mixed accounts of music can only explain musical experience by accounting for how one thinks about music's mind-independent features. Because such thinking is partly constitutive of music, an account of one's mental activity towards sound cannot be fully separated from an account of music. If this mental activity is also partly constitutive of musical experience, then musical experience cannot be separated from what it is an experience of

(from music). This is a rather convoluted state of affairs that leads to all kinds of complicated distinctions.

I will pursue a simpler explanation: One can explain the specialness of musical experience by giving an account of how we listen to sound. In doing so, I will not assume that music exists in addition to sounds; thus my account shall begin with as few ontological assumptions as possible. Instead of focusing on trying to describe the phenomenology of musical experience or the kind of thinking that it involves, I will focus on giving an account of an activity that allows for us to have an auditory experience at all.[11] We can only have auditory experiences if we can hear sound. We can only have musical experiences if we *listen* to sound. In order to have a musical experience, one must be listening to sounds, either actual sounds or imagined sounds, in a particular way.[12] I shall call this particular way of listening “musical listening.”

### 3. Musical listening

Musical listening is an activity of attention. When listening musically, one attends to differences or similarities in the pitch, timbre, volume, and duration of sounds and how sounds are arranged in patterns.[13] The focus in musical listening is not on what sounds tell us. It is instead a focus on the particularities of the sounds themselves, both as individual sounds and as such sounds fit together into patterns. [14] One can learn to listen musically by paying attention to sounds closely enough to recognize the kinds of patterns they form. One can learn how to attend to ways in which sounds are similar or different as long as one can recognize whenever sounds have the same or different features, distinguish between different types of features, and compare these features. As one becomes better at musical listening, one is able to make more distinctions.

Recognizing similarities and differences between sounds often involves remembering other sounds but it need not. The more one listens musically, the more automatically one can recognize such patterns. The notion of activity here is important; one’s ability to listen musically is the ability to *do* something, not a propensity to assume a certain attitude, which might suggest musical listening is closer to a mood than I think it is. In learning to listen musically, as in learning to become proficient at any perceptual activity, one forms habits of attention.

It is useful to contrast musical listening with several other kinds of listening. We can listen to sound merely as a source of information about a state of affairs. I can conclude, from listening to a cat meow, for example, that I am in close proximity to a cat or at least to a recording of a cat meowing. One can also

listen to sounds as signals. I can listen to an alarm clock and recognize that its sound is a sign that I should wake up, without carefully attending to such sounds. Listening to sounds in this way is analogous to seeing a red light and concluding that one should stop at the stoplight. Listening to speech is also a different kind of listening that I shall not discuss here.

In each case, one does not pay attention to the particularities of the timbre, pitch, volume, and duration of these sounds in the way one does when listening musically. If one hears a cat meow and concludes from that meow that there is a cat nearby, one is using the meow of the cat in order to make an inference from the existence and situation of a sound to the situation of a particular kind of creature. The particular sounds involved in the cat's meow are irrelevant; instead, one must only recognize the meow-sounds as sounds produced by a cat. Similar reasoning applies to the alarm clock case. In each case, sound is attended to as a means to another end and the particularities of the sounds only matter relative to this further end. In musical listening, there is no further end towards which one aspires.

One can listen musically and in other ways simultaneously, just like we can read words while also attending to the shape and color of the letters. For example, one can listen to a tea kettle in two ways: one can hear the tea kettle whistling and hear it merely as a sound that signifies that water is boiling or one can hear the tea kettle whistling and pay attention to the variations of its pitch. One can listen to sounds and learn from those sounds (i.e. the kettle is ready) while listening to it musically. Musically listening to speech, which we sometimes do when we pay attention to pitch variations in a speaker's voice, provides a good illustration of listening two ways simultaneously. If one could not listen in multiple ways simultaneously, it would be impossible to understand sung words.

Surely, one might say, listening to background music should be called musical listening, but we sometimes seem to be unconscious of background music to such an extent that listening musically to it would be impossible. If this is true, then musical experiences are possible without musical listening. However, we often do not experience supposed background music as music at all; we only experience such sounds musically when we attend to them. If snippets of such background music remain with us, it is because we either *did* attend to such snippets musically or because in remembering what sounds we heard, we are attending to such imagined or remembered sounds musically.

Some accounts of musical experience, and of music, involve descriptions of concepts that, it is claimed, are necessarily involved in musical experience. Musical listening, however, does not require that the listener possess or “deploy” any particular concepts in such listening. I shall briefly sketch an argument to this effect here, but a full account of the place of concepts in musical listening is beyond the scope of this paper. Firstly, one might argue that it is necessary to have the concept “music” or “musical” in order to listen to any sounds musically. But this cannot be the case; just as one need not have the concept of running in order to run, one need not have the concept of musical listening in order to listen musically. To call such listening “musical,” as I have been doing, is to describe an activity that we primarily do in the context of certain practices, with the language that is proper to that practice or culture. Furthermore, several African peoples, like the Hausa and Tiv people of Nigeria, do not have one term for music; the Basongye of Zaire seem not to have a general conception of music as a whole.[15] Yet these peoples do have musical practices and produce and respond to complicated patterns of sound. The concept of music is not necessarily involved in musical listening.

Musical listening is presumably a conceptual activity, at least insofar as all perceptual experience is conceptual. But, one might think, for musical listening to be a special kind of activity, it must also involve a special set of concepts; otherwise, how would musical listening be distinguished from other kinds of activities of attention? One might think that recognizing that pitches, for example, are different requires more than the ability to recognize that those pitches are not identical. Roger Scruton describes a complicated metaphorical conceptual apparatus that he claims is involved in our ability to listen musically. He observes that we have a propensity to think of pitches—that is, pitches that succeed each other in time—as moving. From this he concludes that musical listening involves the concept of motion, that is, spatial concepts.[16] Scruton’s account is idiosyncratic in involving the notion of a metaphorical concept, but the basic structure of any account according to which concepts are necessarily involved in musical experience has a similar Kantian structure. Experience necessarily involves a conceptual structure, and in order for an experience to be musical (of music), it must have a particular musical conceptual structure.

Scruton, like many others, has his particular account of the concepts necessarily involved in listening to music, and, it may seem, so do I. Musical listening, on my account, seems to require concepts like “pattern” and “identical” or even “sound.”

However, these concepts are not uniquely involved in musical listening; if they are involved in listening at all, they are also involved in the kinds of nonmusical listening described above. Indeed, Scruton's account of the involvement of metaphorical concepts in any particular case requires that one already be listening musically to sound; one must already be engaged in attending to the differences and similarities of sounds for spatial concepts to be operative at all. Scruton might say that attending to sound pattern *requires* the operation of metaphorical spatial concepts, but, I would argue, if this were the case, Scruton's description of the concepts involved in musical experience (operative in musical listening) would be a more elaborate way of describing the same kind of activity that I have described, without using the notion of metaphorical concept. If Scruton's description is *more* than an elaborate way of describing musical listening as an activity of attention to patterns of similarities or differences of sound, as I think it is, then the problem of stipulated criteria discussed in the last section is replicated. An account of musical listening cannot be reduced to an account of concepts that are necessarily, or sufficiently, involved in such listening.

If one is to have a musical experience, one must be listening musically. If one accepts this claim, and musical listening is the distinctive element of musical experience, several things are implied. Firstly, nothing need follow about which sounds one *should* listen to musically. Although it may be more aesthetically pleasing to musically listen to some sounds, in principle all sounds can be listened to musically. Secondly, it is not necessary for one to like sounds that one listens to musically; it is possible to listen musically to a sound one finds utterly abhorrent, such as sounds that do not fit one's musical taste. One might try to describe the activity of musical listening as an activity of finding certain sounds meaningful, whatever that would mean. If finding some sounds abhorrent involves not hearing such sounds as meaningful, that is, perhaps not hearing them as emotionally significant, then listening to sound musically does not require that such sounds are listened to meaningfully. Furthermore, one can become better at musical listening by doing it more. Musical listening, as an activity of attention, can be practiced and improved, and we can acquire habits of such listening. Musical listening also is culturally independent, as sounds produced in the context of any tradition can be listened to musically. Mixed accounts of music, by contrast, have a hard time capturing music from different cultures. However, one can develop one's ability to listen musically to sounds from any musical tradition.

#### 4. The consequences of musical listening for the ontology of music

The goal of this paper is not to offer an account of musical experience per se; the purpose is instead to describe the activity through which we have such experiences. My purpose is not to give a definition of music—that is, it is not to describe the kind of thing music *is*. However, because there are several possible accounts of music, as sets of entities of whatever kind, that could be offered based on my account of musical listening, I shall discuss several of these accounts here.

Before examining the possible ontological accounts of music that might follow from my account of musical listening, I shall address a definition of music that seems to resemble my account in emphasizing the role of attention in listening to sound. As Andrew Kania defines music, it "...is (1) any event intentionally produced or organized (2) to be heard, and (3) either (a) to have some basic musical feature, such as pitch or rhythm, or (b) to be listened to for such features." [17] Even an event of silence is music, if it is "...intended to be listened to (or heard) in such-and-such a way." [18] Kania's emphasis, like mine, is on the importance, for any description of music, of our listening to what he calls "musical features" and what I call "characteristics of sound." The account of listening involved in Kania's definition, however, is ultimately very different from mine. First of all, I do not think music should be primarily understood as an event, as I argue in the next section. Setting this difference aside, however, the key notion in Kania's account is that sounds can only count as music if they are intended to be listened to in a certain way. This notion of intention is what, for him, makes silent music, like Cage's 4'33" or his own Composition #3, 2009, music at all. Here, silence is not the absence of all sounds of any kind, but instead refers to those sounds that a musician or performer frames as sounds that should be attended to, that is, whichever sounds occur in a particular, often explicitly designated, length of time, but that they do not produce themselves. [19] Whether we produce the sounds in question or merely draw attention to them in an organized or formal way, musical listening can only occur, we might say on Kania's behalf, if those sounds are intended to be listened to. According to an account like Kania's, musical listening, if it occurs at all, should be restricted to only those sounds that are intended to be listened to for its musical features. The point of the earlier examples of Stravinsky's icebergs and the Beethoven's Fifth washing machine, however, was that restricting the range of sounds that should be listened to musically is a mistake; we can only do so by defining a class of

musical sounds by stipulation. Kania suggests that we can be mistaken in thinking certain sounds are music. I am explicitly denying this claim; to be able to make a mistake requires that there be criteria according to which such a mistake can be identified, and there are, I argue, no such objective criteria.

Given my account of musical listening, what should be said about the kind of thing music is? The first option equates music with those sounds that are the object of any occurrence of musical listening. That is, if any sound can be listened to musically, perhaps all sounds are potentially instances of music. Music, in this understanding, would be created as the result of every action of musical listening; every time one listened to sounds musically, one would create another piece of music. An instance of music, then, could be called an action or an event that we could pick out by means of recognizing if sounds had been listened to musically in any particular case. The second option has a similar structure. My account of musical listening might imply that musical experiences, constituted by our activity of listening to sound musically, are instances of music. Musical experiences are those in which one is musically listening to sound.

Both of these positions lead to a proliferation of instances. For example, the problem of individuating musical works, whether we understand such instances or works to be experiences or events, is a recurring problem for such positions. If every musical experience or event of musical listening is an instance of music, the number of musical instances would be gargantuan. Everyone would be a composer of sorts. It would be impossible to talk about music because it would be impossible to share the same experience. One would have access to one's private music and no one else's. Similarly, if every instance of music were individuated by virtue of it being an event of sound listened to musically, then there would be no public objective conditions that would allow any two people to have access to the same instance of music. Even the identical and simultaneous acts of musical listening performed by different people are different acts. Thus, both positions easily lead to different versions of the same set of problems concerning the ontological status of individual musical works and the proliferation of musical tokens, and types: How can we objectively individuate musical works or instances of music on either the music as event or music as experience model? I want to set these two options aside, not merely because of the potential for individuation problems, but because, in offering an account of musical listening, I want to pursue a way of thinking about music that does not lead us to

try to characterize the kind of *thing* it is but instead encourages us to characterize the way we actually relate to sounds.

The picture we have thus far is this: We have musical experiences of sounds whenever we listen to sound musically. My account of musical listening is supposed to explain how we could have musical experiences of sound, when an account of such an experience was ruled out by fiat because of a commitment to any particular definition of music. Instead of going from a definition of music to an account of our experience of music, the question now is whether we can go from an explanation of our ability to experience sound musically to some kind of general way of characterizing music as a kind of thing. Thus, we come to the final answer to the question, "what is music," that I shall consider here: that there does not exist a class of entities, or particular kind of entity "music." In fact, it is misleading to try to describe music as an entity of any kind.

To describe music as an event, experience, action, or other kind of entity is to suggest a picture according to which music is (a) something over and above the sounds that we attend to in a certain way or (b) defined as equivalent to those sounds that are the proper candidates for musical listening. Our definitions and descriptions of music as a kind of thing are motivated by particular philosophical problems, one of which I have described here. I want to suggest here that, at the very least, describing music as a music + mind conglomerate, as suggested in (a), does not do any extra explanatory work. Music as a phenomenon can be fully explained by describing our activity of musical listening and the sounds (any sounds) to which we listen; there need be no third thing "music." Relative to option (b), I have argued that there are no objective criteria with which to distinguish sounds that should be listened to musically from sounds that cannot. We cannot mistakenly listen to some sounds musically, though, like with any activity that we can fail to perform, we can fail to listen musically to sounds. There is, however, no such thing as counterfeit or fake music; there are no sounds that trick us into listening to them musically when we should not do so. The argument is not 1) any sounds can be listened to musically; 2) any sounds can be considered to be music; 3) all sounds are music; and, therefore, 4) no sounds are music.[20]

The argument is instead 1) any sounds can be listened to musically; 2) there are no unstipulated criteria for distinguishing between sounds that should be listened to musically and sounds that should not be listened to musically; 3) without such criteria, it makes no sense to demarcate a class of sounds that should be listened to musically; and 4) there is no class of

sounds that is properly considered musical as opposed to a class of sounds that are nonmusical. Any sound can be music, which is to say the category "music," as in "musical sound," is not a useful one relative to our attempt to characterize the phenomenon we are interested in. There is no such thing as discovering which sounds are music such that we can be wrong in our discoveries. Furthermore, in saying that "in listening to sound musically we are creating music," we are only saying something akin to saying "in sitting on a tree stump we are creating a chair." In such a case, we are perhaps using the stump as a chair, just as in listening to sound musically, we are experiencing such sound musically, but that need not entail that we are creating a work of music or a chair by virtue of our listening or sitting. Not every activity has as its outcome a creation, and not every activity has, for it to be successful, only a particular kind of object. It is in this sense that music does not exist. There are no instances of music and no ontological category to which such instances belong. Instead, there are only sounds listened to musically.[21] If musical listening really is, as I have argued, necessary for musical experience to be possible, then, in a certain sense, music does not exist.

Maybe music, as such, doesn't exist, but we talk about music all the time, so why bother claiming it does not exist? All our statements about music, then, would appear false. But they are not. What are we really talking about when we make such statements? 'Music' and 'musical' are just terms of convenience. When talking about music, we are really talking about sounds that we relate to in a particular way. Musical scores, for example, are a composer's instructions for the production of various sounds that they intend for people to listen to musically. When musicians play music, they are producing sounds that they, and others, listen to musically. Other musical activities, like improvising and conducting, could be similarly explained.

If all that is accomplished by claiming that music doesn't exist is a new elaborate translation manual, there again seems to be little point in making this claim. As long as we think that music exists as something separate from sound, however, we fall into philosophical traps. If music exists, then it seems like we should be able to characterize it. But it is impossible to do so in a way that includes music from all cultures, not to mention in a way that captures all sounds we experience in a musical way, like Stravinsky's icebergs. If, however, we do not attempt to describe music as another kind of entity, objectively demarcated from other kinds, then one need not bother with definitions.

Furthermore, if one focuses entirely on sounds and musical listening when giving an account of what we generally consider music, certain elements of musical culture become clearer. Music theory, for example, is a set of formalized schemas for the description of sounds, with particular qualities relative to each other. A culture of music is one in which there are various practices of producing sounds and within which certain qualities of those sounds and ways of producing them are valued. An account of musical listening, as opposed to a description of the objects of such experiences, allows for musical practices throughout the world to be better captured and understood. By focusing on the activities involved in any listening practices, the musical practices of different cultures are more easily described as contiguous with and not different in kind from the musical practices of the Western world with which most philosophers are acquainted. One can gain proficiency in the music of a certain tradition by developing habits of attending to certain kinds of sounds and their relationships with other sounds, and by learning to produce such sounds. By focusing on music as the object of musical experience, however, these practices of habit forming and attention are easily ignored, in favor of descriptions of *what* is produced as the result of such practices. Part of the goal in describing the activity of musical *listening* at the center of an account of music, therefore, is to produce a philosophical account of music that makes sense of the place of sound, and those sounds we listen to musically, in our lives.

One of the best features of understanding music as sound listened to musically, instead of as a special kind of thing, is that we can be alive to the beauty of all kinds of sounds. Perhaps patterns of sounds designated by composers are more likely to be beautiful than 'found sounds,' as John Cage calls them. But if all sounds can be listened to musically, we can and probably do have experiences of music more than we might think. Musical listening is an activity we can always perform, in the tumultuous dusk of the city or the tranquil quiet of the early morning, one that makes our lives aesthetically rich and ourselves alive to the beauty of the world.

## 5. Conclusion

In this paper, I have explained how musical experiences are different in kind from nonmusical auditory experiences. It is not the object of one's listening that explains why musical experiences are distinctive. Instead, it is the way one listens to sounds that produces the special kind of experience we call musical. This kind of listening, musical listening, involves attending to patterns of sounds. Furthermore, I argue that

music is not a special kind of thing; instead, there are only sounds and our attention to, and production of, them. It is in this sense that music does not exist. In another sense, however, we are always surrounded by the possibility of music because we are capable of listening musically—because it is an activity we can engage in. Thus, an account of musical listening, without a positive ontological account of music, more fully explains musical experience, musical practices, and the role of music, and sound, in our lives.

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## Endnotes

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[1] Exceptions include David Davies' account of musical works as the actions of composers and Guy Rohrbaugh's account of musical works as historical individuals, especially to pages listed in the reference. See: David Davies, *Art as Performance* (Malden: Blackwell, 2004); Guy Rohrbaugh, "Artworks as Historical Individuals," *European Journal of Philosophy*, 11, 2 (2003), 177-205; ref. on 188-84, 193-94, 199.

[2] Renee Cox, for example, has such a position, which she calls a form of musical idealism. Although she only attempts to describe a limited subset of all music, this subset, at least, is not constituted by sounds at all. Musical works are instead composed of tones, or imagined tones, and "aesthetic silences," and although tones are sounds "conceived as musical tones," sounds are not part of musical works. Renée Cox, "A Defense of

Musical Idealism," *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 26, 2 (1986), 133-142; ref. on 133-134.

[3] Andrew Kania's definition of music as "...(1) any event intentionally produced or organized (2) to be heard, and (3) either (a) to have some basic musical feature, such as pitch or rhythm, or (b) to be listened to for such features" ostensibly presents music in this 'mixed' way, since music requires, according to him, an event, that does not merely occur 'in our minds' (i.e. is not merely subjective) yet that requires someone's intentional involvement (2011, 10). Kania's account of music involves a notion of musical listening that superficially resembles mine, however, and thus I shall thus address his position in a later section of the paper. Thank you to an anonymous reviewer for pointing me to Kania's work. Andrew Kania, "Definition," in *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy and Music*, ed. Andrew Kania and Theodore Gracyk (New York: Routledge, 2011), pp. 3-13.

[4] Malcolm Budd, *Aesthetic Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetics of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); Nick Zangwill, "Music, Metaphor, and Aesthetic Concepts," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 72, 1 (2014), pp. 1-11.

[5] See: Peter Kivy, "Platonism in Music: Another Kind of Defense," *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 24, 3 (1987), pp. 245-52; Jerrold Levinson, "What a Musical Work Is," *Journal of Philosophy*, 77, 1 (1980), pp. 5-28; Jerrold Levinson, "What a Musical Work Is Again," in *Music, Art and Metaphysics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp. 215-263.

[6] Some aspects of an account of musical listening have been developed in this article: Paskalina Bourbon, "Beyond Musical Metaphysics: A Philosophical Account of Listening to Music," *Revista Portuguesa De Filosofia* 74, 4 (2018), pp.1377-1398.

[7] Thank you to an anonymous reviewer for this phrase.

[8] An account of musical works as historical individuals might seem to withstand this response better than other musical accounts, but it is subject to the "who decides" problem.

[9] I will not deal in this paper with mental accounts or with other anti-realist accounts.

[10] That is, unless one has a historical account of music. I shall not deal with historical accounts here; such accounts would not be able to capture the iceberg case.

[11] One could also describe the following account as one of what is necessarily involved if we are to understand sound as music at all. Discussion of this topic, and the difference between understanding music as such and understanding aspects of "music," can be found in Georg Mohr, "On the Very Idea of Understanding Music," in *Aesthetics Today. Contemporary Approaches to the Aesthetics of Nature and of Arts*, ed. Stefan Majetschak, Anja Weiberg. (Germany: de Gruyter, 2017), pp. 127-137. For a discussion of musical understanding, also see Stephen Davies, "Musical Understandings," in *Musical Understandings: And Other Essays on the Philosophy of Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

[12] This becomes complicated, and I shall not go into further detail here.

[13] As long as one thinks sounds exist, the particular account of sound does not matter.

[14] My account of listening as the recognition of formal patterns of sound is superficially similar to Levinson's formalist, nonconceptual account of musical listening (1997, 69). Levinson's concatenationism, as it involves only that one recognize linear structural patterns, also closely ties together pattern recognition and musical listening (13-14). Levinson, however, lists necessary and sufficient conditions for something to be music (2011, 268). For Levinson "music" does exist and must be humanly produced (270). My view involves no such requirement. Jerrold Levinson, *Music in the Moment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 13-14, 69.

[15] Bruno Nettl, "Music," in *The Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*. ed. Bruno Nettl, Ruth M. Stone, James Porter and Timothy Rice (Alexandria: Alexander Street Press, 2001) pp. 425-437. ref. on page 430.

[16] Scruton, 80-96.

[17] Kania, "Definition," 10.

[18] Andrew Kania, "Silent Music," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 68, 4 (2010), 343-353, ref. on 344.

[19] Kania, "Silent Music," 350-351.

[20] Thank you to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out this way of possibly construing the argument of the present paper.

[21] This claim is analogous, *but only analogous*, and only in certain limited respects, to the claims mereological nihilists make about complex objects. Mereological nihilists think nothing exists besides mereological simples, which lack spatial

and temporal parts. There are no part-whole relations, so no objects have parts. We mistakenly think and talk, they argue, as if there are objects with parts, but really we think and talk about simples arranged object-wise. In the musical case, there are only sounds, analogous to mereological simples, that we listen to musically. Sounds are temporal and thus only analogous to simples. Instances of music, analogous to complex objects, do not exist in addition to sound. When we make claims about instances of music, we are only making claims about sounds. We think and talk about music not because sounds are *arranged* music-wise but because we listen to sounds musically or music-wise. The analogy only works illustratively, however; my argument does not depend on this analogy. Ross Cameron describes a literal account of musical works according to which they do not exist because, according to his mereological nihilism, nothing with parts exists. The claim I make in this paper is very different in kind. In Cameron's view, nothing but mereological simples exist. Cameron's mereological simples are abstract sound structures that exist eternally/atemporally. Sound structures must be indicated by composers. Cameron thinks that abstract sound structures exist atemporally and are the truth-makers for claims about musical works. In my account, truthmakers for claims about musical works vary depending on the kind of claim made. Furthermore, he claims to aspire to ontological parsimony, but the inclusion of atemporal "abstract sound structures" in his account seems misaligned with that goal. I argue that sounds listened to musically *seem* to have a special status because of the way we listen to them, not because they correspond to an abstract sound structure. Cameron also cannot explain how composers have epistemic access to abstract sound structures, as such structures cannot causally interact, being atemporal. Composers, on my view, have no epistemic access problem; composers only need to have the ability to imagine sounds. Ross P. Cameron, "There Are No Things That Are Musical Works," *The British Journal of Aesthetics*, 48, 3 (2008), pp. 295-314; ref. on 302.

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