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Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society

Title

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Permalink

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Journal

Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society, 44(44)

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Publication Date

2022

Peer reviewed

What is Noise Music? A Psychometric Approach

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Abstract

Can noise music fans tell us about benignly masochistic art and how sound becomes music? Noise music often includes “non-musical” sounds (electronic static/ feedback/screaming), while both exaggerating features of musicality (excessive monotony/surprise) and/or stripping them away (melody/harmony). Noise enthusiasts’ (N=395) preferences and attitudes about sound and music were recorded. We tested a five factor model using diagonally weighted least squares. Results suggest a good fit of data to the hypothesized model (CFI=0.967; RMSEA=0.043). Noise/music descriptions varied along five dimensions. Noise as: 1-Intentional (“Noise music is different from environmental noise because it requires deliberate compositional and stylistic choices”); 2-Medium (“Environmental noise can be music if used in a certain way”); 3-Art (“Environmental noise is art”); 4-Musical (“Environmental noise can have interesting timbres”); and 5-Pleasurable (“I often find environmental noise beautiful”). Experiencing noise-as-music involves a range of perceptual styles and beliefs about artistic intention.