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The features marked with a star (*) are based entirely on material taken straight from standard research (and other Official and Therefore Always Correct) literature. Many of the other articles are genuine, too, but we don’t know which ones.

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On the Front Cover
Two of the many commonplace sources of noise.

On the Back Cover
Sign posted at the entrance to a cemetery near Nottingham Trent University, Nottingham, UK.
Photo: Alice Shirrell Kaswell.

Some Coming Events

See IMPROBABLE.COM for details of these and other events:

June 5, 2018
Dead Duck Day, Rotterdam, The Netherlands

July 10, 2018
Ig Nobel Ceremony Tickets go on sale

September 13, 2018
Ig Nobel Prize Ceremony, Harvard U

September 15, 2018
Ig Informal Lectures, MIT

September 2018
Japan

October 3, 2018
Orlando, FL, USA

October 4, 2018
Harvard University

October 10, 2018
Hartford, CT, USA

Autumn 2018
Ig Nobel Fall EuroTour

November 23, 2018
Annual “Science Friday” radio broadcast

Where There's More
There’s always new improbable — it’s not what you expect! — stuff on the Improbable Research blog at IMPROBABLE.COM

Where There's More

Music and Noise Research
Explorations of artistic and other vibrations
by Kurt Vial, Improbable Research staff

Christmas Carol in White Noise

“Another White Christmas: Fantasy Proneness and Reports of ‘Hallucinatory Experiences’ in Undergraduate Students,” Harald Merckelbach and Vincent van de Ven, Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry, vol. 32, no. 3, September 2001, pp. 137-144. (Thanks to Kristine Danowski for bringing this to our attention.) The authors, at Maastricht University, The Netherlands, report:

44 undergraduate students were asked to listen to white noise and instructed to press a button when they believed hearing a recording of Bing Crosby’s White Christmas without this record actually being presented. Fourteen participants (32%) pressed the button at least once... hallucinatory reports obtained during the White Christmas test [might] reflect a non-specific preference for odd items rather than schizophrenia-like, internal experiences.

Booing/Music/Noise


Heckling has rarely been examined in popular music studies. The argument of this piece is that audience members heckle in an attempt to alter the balance of power in live musical performance. To understand this I introduce the idea of the “symbolic economy,” a framework of assumptions and interpretations held by audience members that gives stars their social value. My argument is that each musician’s aura is perceived when his or her performance is both recognizably popular and emotionally meaningful to each fan. Heckling can potentially damage the aura by shifting attention away from the star, condemning the content of his or her performance, and forcing him or her to make an impromptu response.

Drawing on theory from sociology and literary studies, the article supplies examples to help us understand the potentials of this process by creating a typology of different heckles.
Music and Noise Research [continued]

Results of the Removal of the Three Minutes Irritating Music


This paper studies how the incentive bass drum sound, or a simple fast rhythm affect the performance of HRV (Heart rate variability), which is a measurement of variations in the heart rate.... The music have some irritate to human cardiac, just like rock music. From the results of this experiment, we can expect to find the influence of this music type to human cardiovascular condition.

As the Voice Cracks

“Effect of Voice Change on Singing Pitch Accuracy in Young Male Singers,” Elizabeth C. Willis and Dianna T. Kenny, Journal of Interdisciplinary Music Studies, vol. 2, nos. 1 and 2, Spring/Fall 2008, pp. 111-119. (Thanks to Martin Gardiner for bringing this to our attention.) The authors, at the Australian Centre for Applied Research in Music Performance and at Sydney Conservatorium of Music, University of Sydney, report:

During the voice-change process, singing for adolescent boys may become more difficult and unpredictable.... Through analysis of 79 recordings of the perfect 4th, perfect 5th and octave sung by adolescent boys (mean age 13y5m), this study investigated singing-pitch accuracy of boys at varying stages of voice change. This study confirmed Cooksey’s finding (2000) that a SFO [descending speaking fundamental frequency] of 196 Hz [g3] is a critical point in voice-change, and that boys undergoing voice-change rely on their SFO as a reference point for pitching in singing. It was found that the perfect 4th was the most accurately sung interval, followed by the perfect 5th. Boys in all stages of voice-change found the octave difficult possibly due to varying vocal range limitations experienced during the changing voice process.

Do Test-Takers Pay Attention to Rock Lyrics?


The findings are congruent with other investigators’ reports that subjects do not pay attention to rock lyrics.

continued >
Loud Complaint: Alpheus Babcock’s Cast-Iron Piano Frames


Babcock’s claim was not undisputed however, since there had been experiment with the iron frame prior to the 1825 date of his patent. A lively dialogue between Babcock and another piano maker, Thomas Loud, dramatized the conflicting views over the use of the iron frame.

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**PLATE VI**

*Square piano by Alpheus Babcock at William Swifts Piano Forte Manufactory, Philadelphia. C.1835, FF- f', 2 pedals, plan view (Smithsonian Institution, Washington)*

Detail from the study “Alpheus Babcock’s Cast-Iron Piano Frames.”