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Why does nails scratched across a chalkboard bother us so much?



German and Austrian scientists examine the physiological effects of nails on a blackboard to try to figure out what it is that gives us the creeps.

Our first story today is actually physically difficult for me to talk about...because it revolves around the one sound that just drives me batty:

Long fingernails raking their way across a blackboard.

But did you know there is a whole area of science—it's called psychoacoustics—that investigates why certain sounds are so lovely, and others so horrible to the human ear? Its applications include designing better hearing aids or concert halls. There are some psychoacoustic inquiries that arise from simple curiosity. Such as this one: why does the sound of nails on a blackboard make people almost universally uncomfortable, across cultures and across race?

In a study publicly presented just last month, scientists at the University of Vienna and the Macromedia University for Media and Communication, Cologne, have tried to answer this question by recruiting more than a hundred test subjects and studying their reactions to this much-maligned sound - by playing it to them again and again. This, alongside digitally-manipulated variations—nails on chalkboard at higher pitch, nails on chalkboard at lower pitch, and so on—to isolate the exact qualities that make it so grating.

Report: *Sruthi Pinnamaneni, Vienna*

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German Climate Computing Center does a lot of the heavy-lifting for climate scientists.

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UK researchers have shown that cab drivers who learn the layout of the capital city - 'the Knowledge' - exhibit growth in the brain, challenging the notion that children are the only ones with 'plastic' minds.

EU vows to help online dissidents speak out

The European Union has unveiled a strategy called 'No-Disconnect' to help online activists living under oppressive regimes get their message out without fear of state surveillance.

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