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The phenomenology of musical hallucinations

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Over the years, I have received reports of musical hallucinations from hundreds of people, and their phenomenological descriptions fall broadly into two categories. Most typically, people describe their hallucinated music in terms of 'playlists' that are composed of music in many different genres, and from which fragments are pulled out seemingly at random, as though from an iPod, or a Jukebox, or from a radio that unpredictably switches channels. Frequently this hallucinated music becomes locked into a continuous loop for minutes, hours, or even days. Those who experience these hallucinations are often elderly, with some hearing loss, and (with few exceptions) find the hallucinations intrusive and disruptive. In contrast, some people, who are not elderly and report no hearing loss, experience hallucinations that are intermittent, complex and often very beautiful. The hallucinations experienced by this second group are also sometimes original, or have original elements. This paper contrasts the phenomenology of these two types of musical hallucination. The relationship of the second type to the music of certain composers is also discussed.