To start off the essay, the author shows how philosophical accounts of both music and sound fail to distinguish the two from each other. Disproving the idea that sounds are purely mental, the author proceeds to show that music and sound have no metaphysical difference. Using three different realist accounts of sound and music, (Properties, waves and events) the author effectively shows that these views fail to distinguish one from the other. The author claims that the difference in music and sound is not the constitutive properties of the sound waves, but rather how it is interpreted by the listener. Elaborating on the nature of how one listens to music, the author states that listening to music cannot be a passive experience. Rather in order to listen to music, one must be actively understanding the patterns of the music. The author then tackles the argument that listening to music requires concepts in order to truly understand it. Concluding the essay, the author states that any sound can be listened to as music. However, the author distinguishes listening to sound as music, to what is defined as a musical work.

I want to start with the idea of concepts and how they are not/are related to music. In the section concerning concepts, the author is insistent that concepts are not a part of how we listen to music. However, in the same section, the author claims that “Recognition, then, does not have to involve concepts.” This statement seems to be false. If I am to recognize something for what it is, I must already have a concept of what that thing is. Simply put, I cannot recognize something that I know nothing about. The majority of page 16 does not convince me in the slightest. “Having the concept ‘fugue’ or even ‘fugal subject’ does not help me hear a particular fugal subject” (16). The above quote from page 16 seems to be contradictory to statements made
about what distinguishes music from sound. “I shall try to show that listening, as an active
conception of all human interaction with music, including that of the musician and the
composer, provides the ontological backbone for accounts of music across all cultures and
circumstances”. The author appears to state that listening to music is not based on concepts but
also states that listening is an active conception of all human interaction with music. This is a
blatant contradiction that takes away from the strength of the argument. However, I do believe
that the authors ultimate view of music can be reconciled with the idea that concepts are
necessary to listen and understand music. The conclusion of the essay states that “Music is
distinguished from sound because of the way we listen to it” (23). This statement seems to be
compatible with a conceptual account of understanding music. The author states that their idea
of listening to music “avoid(s) the standard problems with accounts of music which rely on
metaphysical assumptions and conceptual apparatuses” (23). The standard problems with
accounts of music based on conceptual apparatuses is not clear to the reader and therefore the
omission of conceptual apparatuses does not follow.

Aside from the conceptual omission, the majority of this essay is very well thought out
and written in a way that the reader can follow the steps. Although a slight knowledge of basic
western musical theory is very useful, it is not necessary. As for the presentation of this
argument to an audience at the conference, it may be helpful to clearly distinguish the sections
(ie, Music vs. Sound, Listening to Sound vs. Listening to Music, and what defines Musical
Listening.) Clearly distinguishing these sections may help the audience not get lost in the
distinction (or lack thereof) between Music and Sound. It may also be helpful to briefly not what
the “standard problems with accounts of music which rely on metaphysical assumptions and
conceptual apparatuses” refers to.