What do you bring with you on a walk around campus? Phone, keys, maybe a laptop if you're headed to CoHo or Green. And AirPods, right? Beats? Headphones of some ilk. Something to listen to. Maybe it's Doja Cat or J. Cole in your ears. Maybe Ella Fitzgerald. Maybe it's 21 Savage or Bach's cello concertos or Taylor Swift. You could choose a podcast: the news, influencer garble, self-help. An audiobook. Something, anything, to accompany you down Escondido, past Arrillaga, through Meyer Green.

And you are not alone. Look around you on the paths that criss-cross campus. Most everyone you pass is jamming or pondering or networking to invisible people. Without the headphones they would look so strange bobbing up and down slightly. Scratching their chin every once in a while. Discussing business strategy with the empty air in front of them.

But have you ever forgotten your headphones on one of these walks? Left the dorm in a hurry to get to class, neglecting to scoop them up from your desk, deposit them snugly in your ears, and get on your way? What did you do then? Surely wondered what on Earth they did before we could literally wrap ourselves in ropes of digital music. Then, maybe, you listened to something else. The great path before you that, you realize, does not want for sound. Music, even. In fact, it's full of it.

First you notice your own footsteps. They clomp a rhythm not unsimilar to the beat of Bad Bunny's new release.

Then, wait. Humming? **No, buzzing. Bees, dozens**, stuffed into a heather bush, purple with new blossoms. You'd never heard them there before.

As you walk past a small oak tree, **a flock of tiny birds evacuates, cheeping indignantly**. So many small things making sounds three times their size, right outside your door. Huh.

The next thing you hear is noise. Deafening noise. As you walk past the construction near Hoover Tower, a drill blares, pulverizing concrete. Something beeps as it backs up. People shout warnings or jokes in raised, brusque voices. You resist the urge to plug your ears. Nothing here has ever seemed so *loud* before.
Water rushing from a fountain only adds to the overwhelm–a static, space-filling sound that reminds you of a hike leading to a waterfall. If you close your eyes, you're back on top of that mountain, listening reverently to water racing over the edge and crashing to the ground.

Maybe a crow breaks you out of your stupor. Maybe a plane flying overhead, to or from Oakland or San Jose or San Francisco. They fade into the background easily, the three flight paths that occupy the sky above Stanford. But on a walk like this one, they can make themselves re-known.

The sounds make you wonder just how many noisy things we fail to notice.

A lot of us move through the world using sight as our primary sense. But as we all know, **sight is not the only sense available to us**. Touch, smell, and sound are also guides that, often subconsciously, allow us to take in the rich environmental stimuli swirling around us and competing for our attention in every space we inhabit. Sight often wins out in this game of conscious acknowledgement, but **have you ever thought about what we miss when we forget to tap into our other sensory abilities?** I had never pondered this until I actively started to search for sounds to craft into ***The Stanford Soundscape***.

It began with **a desire to capture the natural sounds of campus**–the bird chirps, the tree rustles, the squirrel scampers–in order to call to attention the abundant nonhuman life this place contains. It's so easy to forget, what with the million things jockeying for our attention at any given time at Stanford, how packed this campus is with animal and plant life. Maybe you don't acknowledge it on the daily, but no doubt you would certainly notice if it disappeared. Think of how barren this place would feel without its towering redwoods and gnarly oaks. Without turkey vultures flying overhead and red-tailed hawks perching on the highest edges of buildings. If you have never noticed these native residents of campus, I encourage you to go seek them out.

And that's exactly what I did: **I went soundhunting**. As simple as it sounds, these expeditions entailed walking around campus and attempting to record every sound I heard along the way.

After my first soundhunt, things changed for me. I started to notice things I'd never tapped into before, like bird calls and construction noises. I began to hear mundane things, too, like the sound my bike tires make as they pass through a puddle and the whine of the CoHo espresso machine.

These revelations felt overwhelming at first. It was unbelievable to me that a small change in consciousness could make such a massive sensory difference; **everything was so *loud*, sound was coming from *everywhere***. I quickly realized that there is nowhere on this campus that is really, truly quiet. And this made me wonder: if the noise affected me, a human, this much, **what effect did it have on the rest of Stanford's ecology?** Particularly, I thought about the **acoustic ecology of campus**: the way all the sounds in this environment fit together.

I attempted to represent my experience of this ecology by recording over 30 sounds with the Voice Memo app and compiling them in GarageBand. All of the sounds are human-made, machine-made, or nature-made. Some of them are sounds we actively seek out, such as musical performances (courtesy of Stanford Philharmonia, Stanford Talisman, and Stanford Chamber Chorale, respectively). Others are more passively experienced nature sounds, like bird calls and insect noises. Still others are completely superficial: typing, drilling, and car sounds, among many others. To create *The Stanford Soundscape*, I tried to arrange them into a song of sorts, one that traces a first-person journey through campus similar to the one described earlier.

The piece begins with footsteps–these represent the listener at the beginning of their journey. As it goes on, the soundscape fills with more and more sounds, entering and exiting at different intervals like instruments in a jazz arrangement. It goes on like this for about 3 minutes. Then you will hear a few seconds of silence followed by lots of noise—all the sounds overlaid. Check out the waveform for a visual representation of the soundscape.

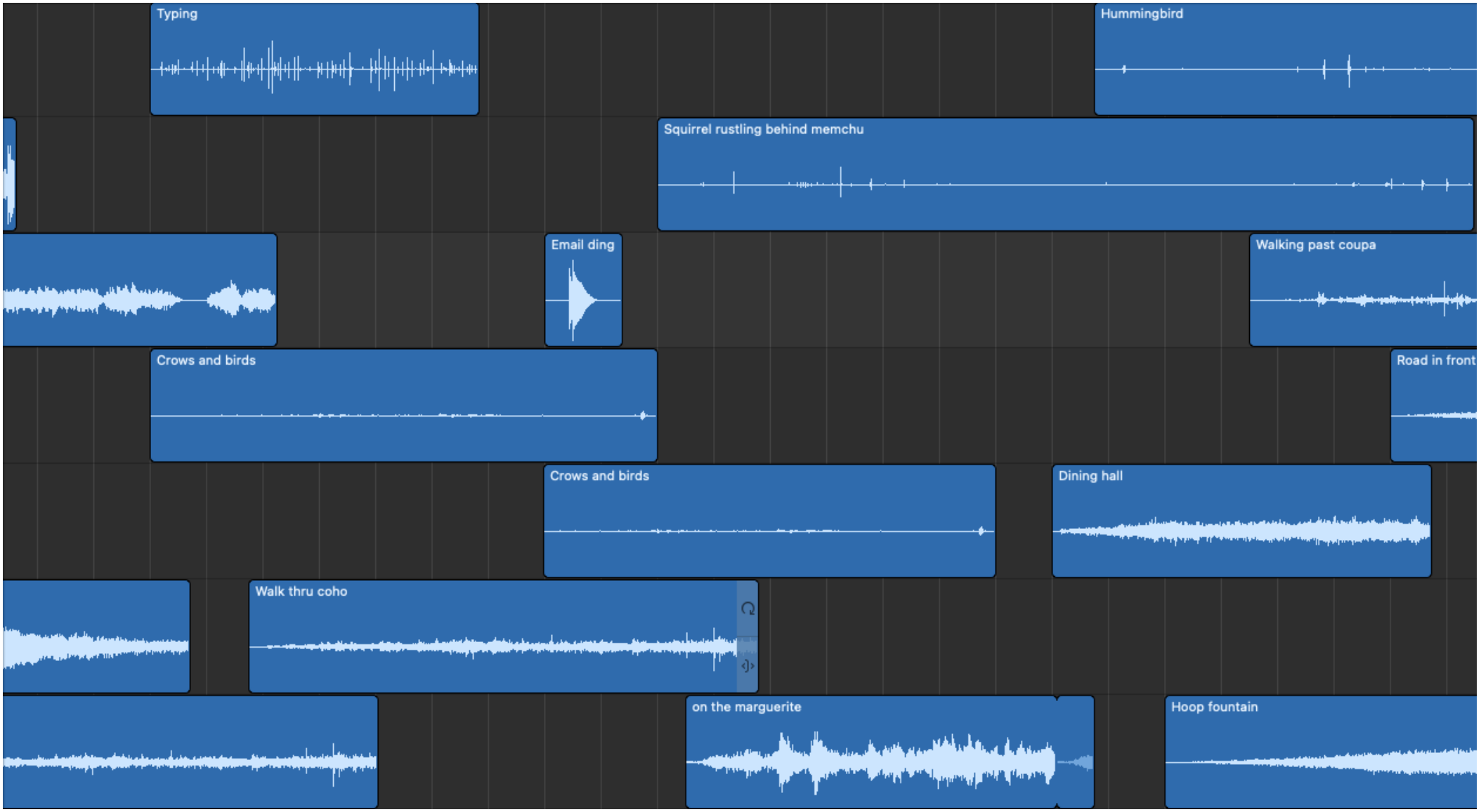
As you listen to the soundscape (in a quiet place with the volume as high as it goes), ponder these questions:

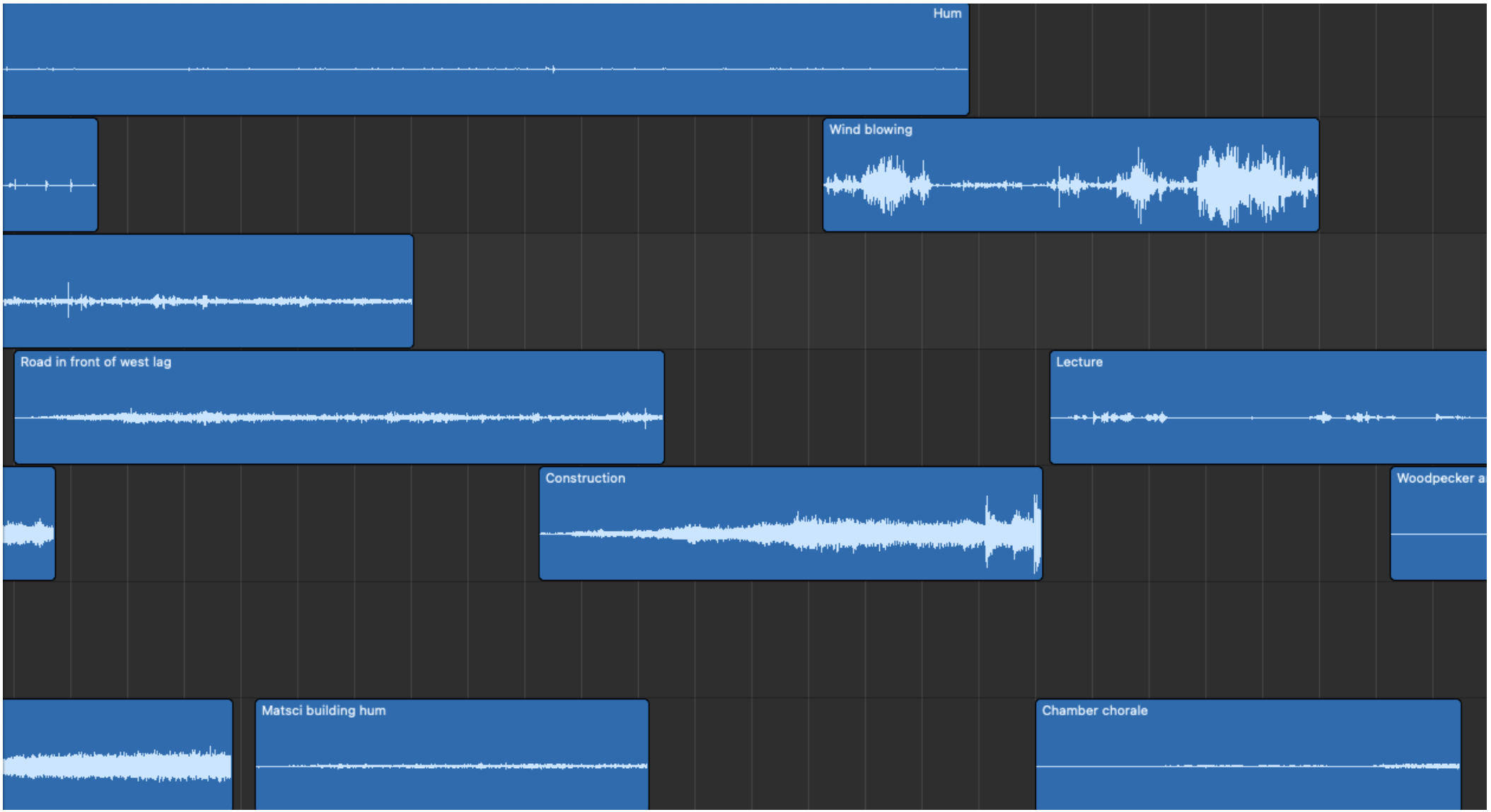
Can you tell all the sounds apart by using just your ears? Are some sounds covered up by others? How many sounds in the soundscape come from human voices? From human-made objects (anthropogenic noise)? From nonhuman living things? How many of these sounds do you hear every day? How many of these sounds have you never heard before? Does listening to this soundscape make you think differently about how you move through campus?

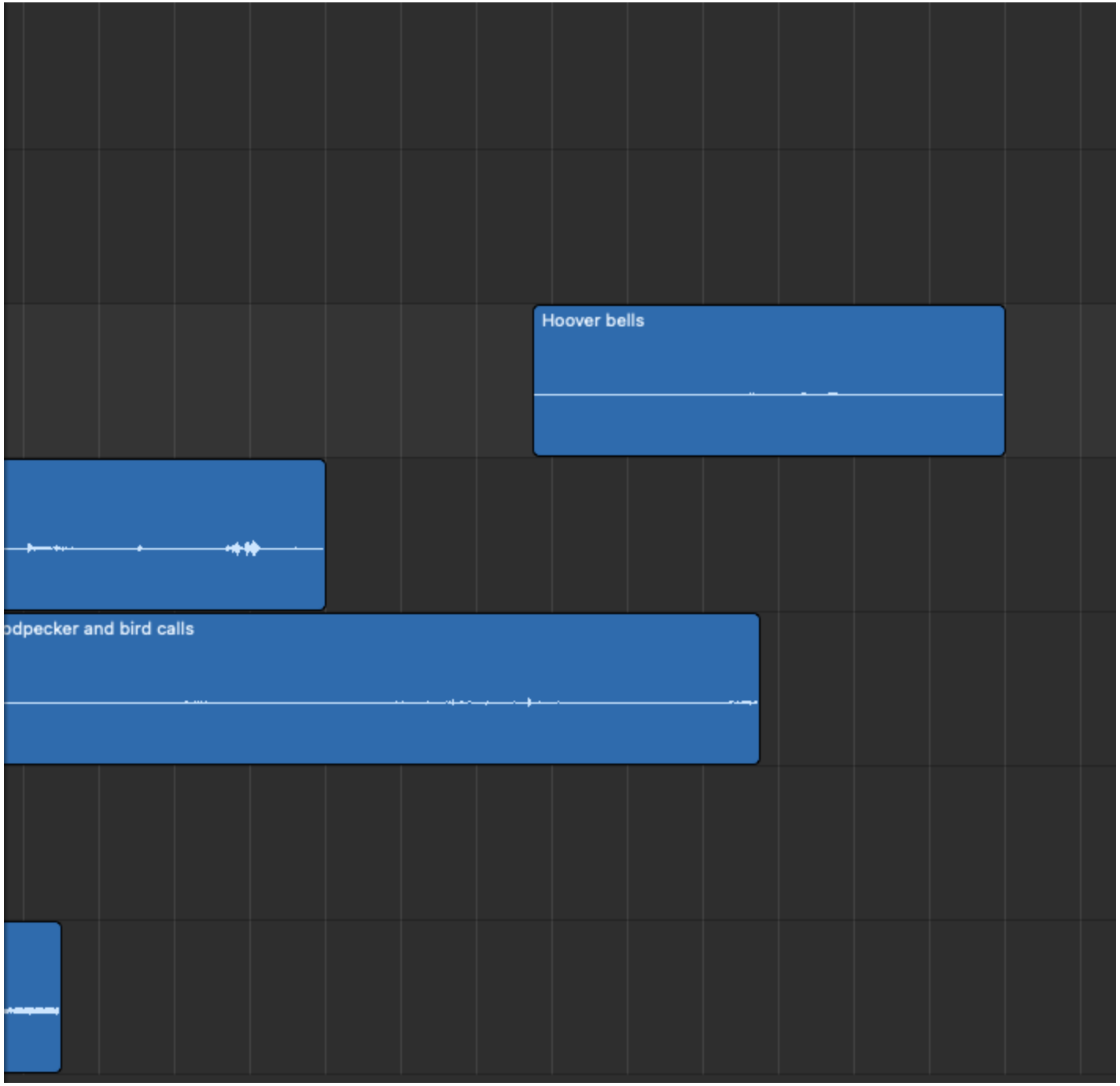
Note: For those who have difficulty hearing, I encourage you to observe the waveform (a visual representation of the soundscape) below and take note of any of the similarities or differences between the soundwaves produced by each of the sounds. It gives a good idea of how the sounds interfere with each other, particularly which ones tend to dominate the landscape.

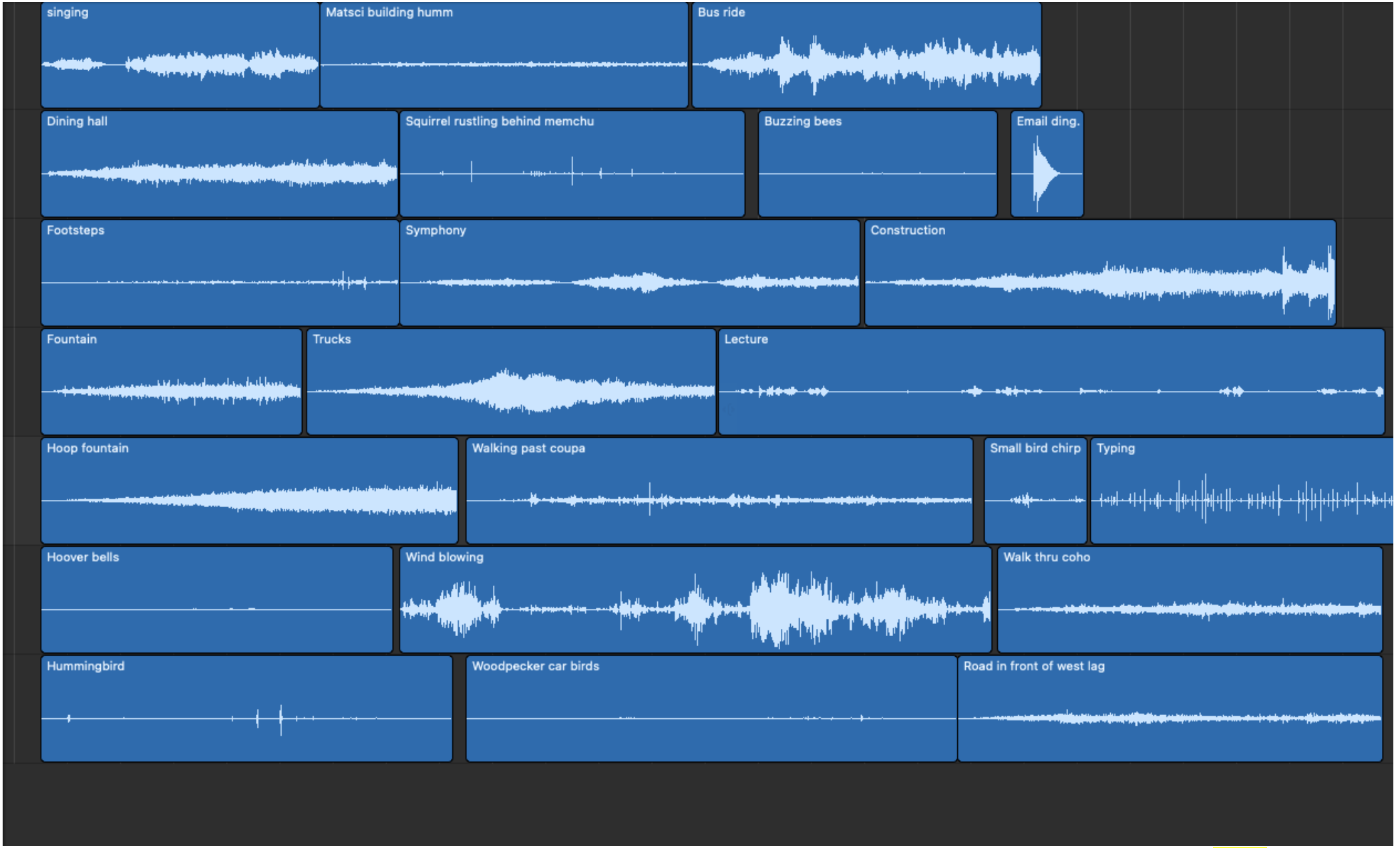
START


Footsteps
Leaf footsteps
Buzzing bees
Small bird chirp
Construction
Fountain
Singing
Evening crow and bikes
Symphony
Trucks
Small bird tweet
Walk thru coho


Typing
Hummingbird
Squirrel rustling behind memchu
Email ding
Walking past coupa
Crows and birds
Road in front
Crows and birds
Dining hall
Walk thru coho
on the marguerite
Hoop fountain


Hum
Wind blowing
Road in front of west lag
Lecture
Construction
Woodpecker a
Matsci building hum
Chamber chorale


Hoover bells
odpecker and bird calls


singing
Matsci building humm
Bus ride
Dining hall
Squirrel rustling behind memchu
Buzzing bees
Email ding.
Footsteps
Symphony
Construction
Fountain
Trucks
Lecture
Hoop fountain
Walking past coupa
Small bird chirp
Typing
Hoover bells
Wind blowing
Walk thru coho
Hummingbird
Woodpecker car birds
Road in front of west lag

END