

# DON'T LOSE THE MUSIC!

## Hearing loss and tinnitus

If you're a performer, you not only have to be able to play your instrument, but it is vital to be able to hear yourself play too! It seems obvious, but why is it that so many performers forget to look after their ears?

This factsheet is aimed primarily at those working in 'amplified' music, but of course we all need to think about protecting our hearing when we're out and about as well as when we're performing – whether just enjoying a night out clubbing or catching a mate's gig at the local pub. It's wise to get your hearing checked every six months, or more often if you are already experiencing problems with your hearing.

What follows are a few home truths, courtesy of the RNID's campaign 'Don't Lose the Music', about noise levels in clubs. If you want to learn more, or if you need specific advice on hearing problems and anything else to do with ears, you can get directly onto our websites, shown at the end of the factsheet.

At some gigs and clubs, the music can be louder than 100 decibels (dB) – that's louder than a pneumatic drill 10 feet away. At that level your hearing is at risk. Ringing ears or dull hearing are signs of permanent damage.

So, if you go to a club and you have to SHOUT to the person two feet away, the noise level is FAR TOO LOUD and you are damaging your ears.

You should:

- Stand away from the loud speakers
- Wear special re-usable earplugs designed for clubs and gigs
- Use chill-out areas to give your ears a rest.

As musicians, you need to make sure of the following:

- If you are using amplification equipment, especially monitor speakers, make sure they are at a safe listening level. You need to be able to hear what you and your fellow musicians are playing, without damaging your ears.
- If you aim for lower listening levels on stage, then you'll do better. Don't be tempted to increase the volume level – ask that all your fellow musicians play quieter, and so try to keep the levels lower.
- Make it a policy to rehearse with other musicians at lower volume levels. Try wearing ear-plugs regularly, both at rehearsals and gigs, so you get used to

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Acknowledgments:  
RNID – [www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk)  
and Don't Lose the Music  
[www.dontlosethemusic.com](http://www.dontlosethemusic.com)

them. If you're drowning out the quietest instrument (or the singers), chances are you're making it uncomfortable for everyone, including your audience.

- You should also consider a combination of acoustic shields (say, to isolate the drummer from the rest of the band) and ear-plugs, specially designed for musicians. These can be custom-made to suit your own ears and although these are not cheap – at around £70-£170 on average – they will be worth it in the long run. RNID and Don't Lose the Music can provide advice about ear plugs.
- Watch out with MP3 players or personal stereos. You're probably listening to music far too loudly, so **TURN IT DOWN!** Give your ears a rest and don't be tempted to increase the volume as the background noise gets too high (like on the train). It will end up being dangerous for your ears. Ear-plug add-ons can help cut out background noise so you don't have to play your music so loudly.
- After exposing their ears to very loud noises or music, some people experience a ringing or whistling or other sound long after that noise has gone! This is called tinnitus and can also be permanent and incurable in some people.
- Take breaks of up to 10-15mins away from the noise to help reduce the effect of the sound (chill-out zones, etc) and this also goes for using MP3 players and personal stereos, as well as trying out ear protection as explained above.
- For orchestral musicians, whether freelancers or employees, the management has an obligation to provide you with a safe working environment. Some orchestra managements now provide hearing tests to their players.

### **Remember ...**

Once hearing damage occurs, there is usually **NO CURE...**

If you start getting hearing problems, you need to get professional help and probably also a hearing test. Contact BAPAM to find out about what assessments and/or treatment you are entitled to. Don't just take our word for it, read the following from famous artists and you can judge for yourself:

- "Look after your hearing – it's all you've got!" (Sir Paul McCartney)
- "When I first started playing in bands I never wore hearing protection and we played as loud as we could. One night I came home from a show and my ears were ringing, as they often did. And they were still ringing the next day. And the next. Ever since then I've worn hearing protection when exposed to very loud music. I know that once my hearing is gone it will never return." (Moby)

### **SEE ALSO ...**

#### **RNID**

**[www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk)**

#### **British Tinnitus Association**

**[www.tinnitus.org.uk](http://www.tinnitus.org.uk)**

#### **British Association for Performing Arts Medicine**

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