

DON'T LOSE THE MUSIC!

Hearing loss and tinnitus

If you think you have a hearing problem, the first thing you need to do is visit your NHS GP. You may need further medical investigation and treatment so it is a good idea to see your GP first, even if you are thinking of contacting BAPAM or using an independent audiology service. Detailed information from the NHS can be found here: www.nhs.uk/conditions/hearing-impairment

Action on Hearing Loss provide excellent information about available services, both NHS and private, on their website here:

www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk/your-hearing/look-after-your-hearing.aspx

If you have tinnitus, the British Tinnitus Association provide a helpline and detailed information about the condition and its management: www.tinnitus.org.uk

Musicians Hearing Services is a private audiology service with experience of the specific hearing needs of musicians and entertainment industry personnel. They can give advice about hearing issues and provide hearing tests, bespoke hearing protection, in-ear monitors and hearing aids. www.musicianshearingservices.co.uk

Help Musicians UK publish useful advice on their website. Their Musicians' Hearing Health Scheme provides affordable hearing assessment and custom-fit ear plugs in partnership with Musicians Hearing Services: www.helpmusicians.org.uk/working-retired-musicians/musicians-hearing

Here are a few tips and home truths, courtesy of the Action on Hearing Loss campaign, *Loud Music*:

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.

All our Health Resources for performing arts professionals and students can be found online at:

www.bapam.org.uk

Musicians 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 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, they will be worth it in the long run. Both Action on Hearing Loss and Musicians Hearing Services can provide further advice about hearing protection.
- Watch out with mobile devices. 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 (for example, on the train). It will end up being dangerous for your ears. Try noise cancelling headphones to 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. The British Tinnitus Association are a great source of information.
- Take breaks of up to 10-15mins away from the noise to help reduce the effect of the sound (chill-out zones, etc). This also goes for using mobile devices, as well as trying out hearing 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.

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Musicians'
Union

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Equity

By Sanchita Farruque and Dan Hayhurst,
BAPAM

Acknowledgments:

Action on Hearing Loss:

www.actiononhearingloss.org.uk