NOISE LETTER

The Newsletter of the Right to Quiet Society for Soundscape Awareness and Protection

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Photo: U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service National Digital Library

Photo: Elizabeth Lorris Ritter, New York City, July 2020, @lizrittr

Disparate Soundscapes in the Age of COVID-19

Elvira Lount on the quiet beach of the Point Grey Foreshore in 2020.

Virtual Annual General Meeting is held on November 21

The Right to Quiet Society held a virtual AGM on Saturday, November 21 at 2:00 p.m. Pacific Time, and we were delighted to have Toronto born filmmaker, activist, and Right to Quiet Society member Elvira Lount as our speaker. Elvira presented her film *The COVID Effect on Outdoor Noise*, which explores the positive and negative effects of COVID-19 on outdoor residential and natural soundscapes, with a focus on natural areas in and around Vancouver, British Columbia. The film is posted at https://youtu.be/0xUD5xx7e0M.

Elvira has been a community activist since 2012, when she campaigned to stop the Vancouver Park Board from extending the paved seawall from Kitsilano Yacht Club to Jericho, along quiet wild Point Grey Foreshore, the last natural beach in Vancouver. She started a petition and Facebook group to Keep Kits Beach Wild and to "say no to the seawall." In 2013 she campaigned to stop construction of a 12-foot wide asphalt bike path through the centre of Kits Beach and Hadden Parks that would have rendered the little remaining green space in those parks unusable as a playground, picnic area, and space for quiet contemplation. Both campaigns were successful. In 2015 Elvira started a petition asking the City of Vancouver to help turn down the loud party boat music in Vancouver Harbour, and in 2018 she was instrumental in getting the Vancouver Park Board to turn off the music in Community Centre gyms and indoor pools. She continues to be active in politics and social media with a passionate belief in liberty and the right to quiet as well as preserving the natural environment.

Action Alert

Protect Our Quiet Natural Wild Spaces

Elvira Lount is still campaigning for quiet beaches and parks. Her latest petition asks the Vancouver Park Board to protect natural wild spaces at Vanier Park and Kits Beach from BYOB gardens, which would designate some of the quietest natural spaces and areas where local wildlife roam as legal "drinking zones." Sign the petition!

Action Alert

Tell Saanich Council to Ban Gas-Powered Leaf Blowers

Right to Quiet Society member Teale Phelps Bondaroff has organized a campaign to ban gas-powered leaf blowers in Saanich. A researcher, community organizer, environmentalist, and conservationist, Dr. Phelps Bondaroff is Chair and co-founder of the AccessBC Campaign, Director of Research of OceansAsia, and Research Coordinator for the BC Humanist Association. He lives in Saanich with partner Stephanie, with whom he created a program to map and support little free libraries. Learn more about Dr. Phelps Bondaroff at his website, and sign the petition!

Changes within the Board of Directors

In September 2019, President Hans Schmid was honored by the Board of Directors as he retired from service, and Hans paid tribute to Ilse Schnirch for her many years of service. Board members John Martyn and Karl Raab were reelected, and Nicole Pan and Jeanine Botta were elected to the Board to serve as Treasurer and Secretary. Board members Alice Fedorenko and Heidi Juergens retired from the Board. In March 2020, John Martyn was elected President, and Karl Raab was elected Vice-President. The Board members enjoyed meeting virtually with Society members, neighbors, and friends at the Annual General Meeting.

Fireworks from Vienna to Berlin

By Karl Raab, PhD

Berlin, January 3, 2014

After surviving the event and the days before it, I should tell you that if you ever consider visiting Berlin, remember to avoid it around New Year's Eve. This year the event attracted 3/4 million visitors. We were very far from them and the 6,000 official rockets at the Brandenburg Gate, but from early evening our neighbourhood was like a war zone. Last year a rocket landed on our little balcony. The clouds of smoke at midnight are so thick that stepping outside is not a viable option. This year there were 450 fires overnight.

Illegal fireworks were already detonating on the previous day. Easily recognized by their far greater noise level than the permitted products (120 dB at different distances for different categories), they are also very dangerous. Despite warnings in the media there were over 100 serious accidents in Berlin (lost fingers, a severed hand, burns). Although German fireworks sales remain steady at 115 million euros per year (yes), hospitals report the number of accidents increasing yearly.

Now we're in the clean-up phase; it takes the waste management service several weeks to remove the many tons of garbage (wood, plastic, cardboard) across the city. Yesterday, an eleven-year-old found an unexploded device near his home and was severely burned when it exploded in his hand. Elsewhere in Germany it's much the same, but there were also several fatal accidents.

Sadly, the media reports rarely mention the noise, except for its traumatic effect on domestic animals and wildlife. Nonetheless, Berlin is a fantastic city, and for good reasons it's now the top tourist destination in Germany.

So, go if you ever get the chance.

Happy New Year!
Karl

Growing up in 1950s Vermont I must have experienced fireworks, but I don't remember them. After years in Massachusetts, Mississippi and Montreal, my first memory of fireworks was a July 4th 1973 visit to a friend's cottage in Vermont. We had watched the pyrotechnics on Lake Champlain with neighbours. Although I was Canadian, the warmth of that experience gave me a patriotic feeling I still remember. Fireworks were prohibited on the "island" due to its distance from the fire station, dense tree cover, and dry tinder.

Six months later, I had a New Year's Eve encounter in Vienna, my birthplace. I was standing on the famous *Stock im Eisen* corner (now a pedestrian zone), when a reveler in a car lobbed an ignited device at my feet. The shock of the detonation and fear of having been injured was unforgettable.

During two decades in Europe we often spent holidays at my family home in Germany. One New Year's Eve they'd purchased a few modest devices, but neighbours had much larger arsenals. Going outdoors to participate, I was overcome with clouds of smoke engulfing the neighbourhood; it felt like a war movie, except that the smoke was real. I retreated, enjoying the spectacle through the window. In later years I stayed indoors. Years of research and action protecting non-smokers from second-hand smoke magnified my horror. During twelve years in France, Bastille Day fireworks were a much happier experience.

Germany consumes the most fireworks of any European country. Annual *Silvester* sales have hit 137 million euros. (See letter from Berlin.) However, years of calls for restraint have brought a slight reduction, and civic officials have even reported lower volumes of waste on the streets.

Here in Vancouver, consumer fireworks were (finally) made illegal on November 1st, thanks to a motion by City Councillor Pete Fry.

Noise ranks behind arguments such as fires, personal injuries, air pollution, street cleaning and staggering fortunes burned up. In the early struggles for smoke free public places, our first victories were based on existing fire by-laws, not public health regulations. Let's hope that hotter and drier summers at least lead to more regulation of fireworks around our national holidays next July.

Karl H. Raab is an environmental health advocate, retired chemist and technical translator. In the 1970s he fought against SST landing rights; he now combats audible remote vehicle lock signalling, and advocates for garden equipment noise standards and regulation of amplified music in natural settings. Karl serves as Vice-President of Right to Quiet Society.

Disparate soundscapes in New York City

By Jeanine Botta

Sleep is a human right. Residents of Washington Heights and Inwood protested street noise. Two groups formed to address noise: WaHi and Inwood for Respectful Decibel Levels, and WaHi and Inwood Noise Task Force. Photos: Phil Dejean, @checkerphil

Just as the pandemic reached North America in March, a friend spoke with excitement about COVID-related quiet at Lake Tahoe. He was anxious to record the peaceful soundscape before lockdown orders eased, when human activity would resume and the quiet would vanish.

Around the world, reductions in road and air transport significantly reduced sound levels, creating shifts in marine and terrestrial ecosystems. Previously noisy areas in New York City were marked by an unprecedented quiet described as welcome, surreal, and worrisome all at once. People would joke that they missed hearing horns honk.

In other areas, horn honking never stopped, and people were plagued by higher noise levels as lockdown set in. Drag racing, all-night outdoor parties, and sudden detonations of commercial grade fireworks kept people awake and terrorized pets into the early morning hours in working class and ethnic enclaves. Other sounds increased in affluent neighborhoods, driving noise complaints about helicopter flights and alcohol-fueled mass gatherings.

But one aspect of the pandemic soundscape was shared by rich and poor alike: disdain for those who report noise violations. According to popular opinion, people should not complain about noise – or other quality of life violations. When a council member introduced a policy that would reward citizens for reporting parking violations, the outcry was quick: "Snitch!" "Rat!"

The affluent fared no better. When outdoor dining in their neighborhoods resulted in sidewalks packed with tables, chairs, platforms, trash, crowds, speaker systems, and music, residents who objected were accused of "NIMBYISM" (not in my backyard) by the elite press.

Addressing noise pollution is difficult the world over, but in New York City it is especially fraught with politicization. Those who report noise violations are assumed to be privileged cranks. Links between health, well-being, and quality of life are lost on those in power, including journalists. Noise violations are reported to authorities as "complaints." As if noise weren't already misunderstood and miscategorized as a nuisance, this process frames noise as merely subjective. Journalists and scholars speculate that noise complaints in gentrifying areas are only placed by gentrifiers: "Most members of minority communities… don't necessarily know their rights and wouldn't even know to call." But this may not be accurate, since noise complaint data in New York City does not include any demographic information.

Reduction of noise pollution in New York City would improve if two changes occurred. One, those in power need to understand what everyday people have long understood: that chronic noise affects health; and two, the City needs to invest at least minimally in technology that other cities have been pilot testing in recent years. New York City invested $28 million in SpotShotter technology, and technology that automatically tickets speeding drivers already exists. Requests from citizens to implement pilot studies of noise capturing technology are met with fleeting interest at best. If some of this technology had been in place before the pandemic began, at least some of our street noise might have been addressed using automated ticketing. But not yet. As other cities reports strides in digital enforcement, sleep deprived New Yorkers submit noise complaints.

Resources

Lockdown was the longest period of quiet in recorded human history	[Link]
Desperate Dog Owners Empty Pet Store Shelves of CBD Treats as Illegal Fireworks Flare	[Link]
9 Ways Outdoor Dining Will Change New York	[Link]
They Played Dominoes Outside Their Apartment for Decades	[Link]
City eyes network of noise sensors to curb Calgary clamour	[Link]
Paris is testing "noise radar" to automatically ticket loud cars	[Link]
"With this tool, it is not possible to dispute who made the noise"	[Link]
Chelsea's 'noise cameras' snared 130 drivers with loud engines in the first 11 days since being turned on	[Link]
'ShotSpotter' Tested as Shootings and Fireworks Soar, While Civil Rights Questions Linger	[Link]
Decibel Duty	[Link]

Jeanine Botta serves as Secretary on the Right to Quiet Society Board of Directors, and lives in New York City.

Hospital-Based Music Therapy Interventions

By Kate Beever, MA, MT-BC

Board-certified music therapists work in hospital settings using a number of musical interventions to address pain management, gross and fine motor skills, identity crises due to hospitalization, family and staff communication, breath support, and procedural support. Much of the work of medical music therapists takes place bedside, as individual or family therapy. This involves breathing exercises and movement to music, adaptive songwriting, instrumental improvisation, and verbal discussion around preferred music and lyrics. Because the human brain interacts with music across all neural networks, neuroplasticity is possible through musical exploration. Linking musical ideas with motor skills or speech patterns using patient-preferred music motivates the brain to repeat these exercises, strengthening connections between various parts of the brain.

Engaging in music is not just a right brain vs. left brain activity. The brain releases dopamine, stimulating appropriate emotional responses to different aspects of music harmonic progressions, rhythmic repetition, dissonance resolving to consonance. Muscles react reflexively to produce organized movement facilitated by rhythm. Music enhances speech abilities using melody and meter, assisting with verbal organization and articulation.

The hippocampus is engaged in executive functions like initiation, problem solving, attention, and memory. Music can be a format for learning new concepts, increasing attention and memory, and developing skills for planning and abstract thinking. At the same time, all of the senses are engaged, while also processing proprioceptive and vestibular stimuli, helping with self regulation. Music is processed in all areas of the brain, stimulating areas of the brain that may not be accessible through other types of therapy. Unlike traditional music education or music performance, music therapy is used to parallel non-musical tasks and functioning with musical play.

In the NICU, music is used to train sucking habits of infants, and to assist in the socioemotional connection between parents and newborns. For patients in rehabilitation after a stroke or brain injury, rhythm is used to prompt movement or speech- filling in gaps in repetitive rhythm or harmony motivates an otherwise 'stuck' step. In palliative care, music is used to process grief, loss, and changes in identity, as well as decrease pain perception. Patients with dementia can recall and sing songs long after they have lost other cognitive function, so musical memories can help restore positive interactions for even a few days.

Most of this work is considered 'active music therapy' in which the patient or caregiver is engaged. 'Passive music therapy' involves listening to music previously recorded or improvised by the therapist in the moment. One could argue that the implication of receptive music therapy as 'passive' is false. Listening to music still engages the brain, having many of the same positive effects. Active listening involves breathing in time to music or to imagery inspired by music. Receptive music therapy is used even with comatose or otherwise unresponsive patients. Blood pressure lowers, heart rate alters to match the music, and eyes may open. Music therapists use entrainment to create physical changes in patients who may not be able to verbalize their emotional responses to the music.

Another use of 'passive' music therapy is Environmental Music Therapy, a term coined by Steve Schneider (Stewart and Schneider, 2000). Music therapists use their main instrument to incorporate ambient sounds from a fragile environment (like the ICU) into improvised music, turning noxious stimuli into less threatening soundscapes. Paying attention to visual and aural cues of the staff, while creating sounds that are not actively noticed but are felt by individuals present, can help modulate perception of a floor into a calmer setting.

Feedback from studies of this kind have implications for use of soundscapes in other settings. Where we cannot remove sounds that may cause harm, we can incorporate them into more pleasant soundscapes. We can't simply replace one form of noise with another, which would cause further distraction, but we may be able to change the din of loudness by turning it into a more familiar rhythm, which the human brain would then lock into and find flow, or even relaxation.

Resources

Burunat I, Brattico E, Puoliväli T, Ristaniemi T, Sams M, Toiviainen P (2015) Action in Perception: Prominent Visuo-Motor Functional Symmetry in Musicians during Music Listening. *PLOS ONE* 10(9): e0138238

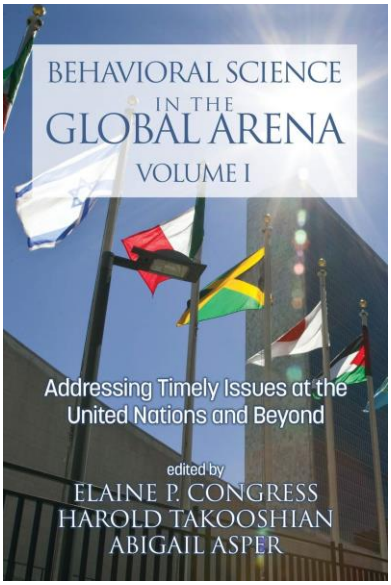
Kirkland, K. (2013). *International Dictionary of Music Therapy*. London, NY: Routledge Taylor & Francis Group.

Rodrigues, AC, Loureiro, MA, & Caramelli, P. (2010). Musical training, neuroplasticity and cognition. *Dementia & Neuropsychologia*, 4(4), 277-286.

Kate Beever, MA, MT-BC is the founder of Maine Music & Health, LLC, in Portland, where she has developed music and wellness programs for thousands of clients. Her website is https://www.mainemusicandhealth.com.

A Chapter on "Reducing Urban Noise"

By Arline Bronzaft, PhD



My interest in noise pollution started over forty years ago when my research found that children in classrooms in a school in Upper Manhattan exposed to elevated train noise were nearly a year behind in reading by the sixth grade compared to children on the quiet side of the building. This research resulted in noise abatement on the elevated train tracks and acoustical ceilings being placed in the classrooms near the tracks. Once both treatments were in place, a later study I conducted found children on both sides of the building were now reading at the same level.

Yes, noise impedes learning but, more importantly, things can be done to reduce noise impacts. These studies resulted in my becoming an advocate for lessening the din in our communities, especially in urban areas. Over the years, I have also written extensively about the huge numbers of studies that have found noise to be hazardous to hearing and our overall mental and physical health as well as ways to lessen the noise.

Thus, I was delighted to be asked to contribute a chapter to a book that would look at how behavioral scientists have addressed global problems such as Aging, Child Welfare and Well-being, Gender Equity and Reproductive Justice, Poverty and Inequality and Environmental Health. The United Nations celebrated its 75th anniversary this past June and it was deemed an appropriate time to release a book that examined the role of behavioral sciences in the workings of this organization. The book is titled "Behavioral Science in the Global Arena, Volume 1" and its editors are Elaine Congress, Harold Takooshian and Abigail Asher.

In our chapter entitled "Reducing Urban Noise," Melissa Search and I examine the impacts of loud sounds and noise on health. We present the strong research findings that do indeed support the fact that urban dwellers around the globe are being negatively affected by loud sounds and noise. By negatively, we mean that their mental and physical health are being impaired. Our chapter also addresses the actions that governments in the United States, Europe and Asia have taken to reduce the noises in urban centers but we conclude that these have fallen short of what needs to be done to fully deal with this harmful pollutant. We also remind our readers that there are good sounds in our environment, e.g. bird songs, splashing waves, raindrops. Yet, we will not be able to enjoy the positive effects of these pleasant sounds, as well as the quiet provided by our urban parks and green areas, if we don't work toward lessening the din and protecting and enhancing the parks and green areas.

This book was published at the time when our world is coping with the COVID-19 Pandemic and, surprisingly, the urban soundscape changed for many residents. There was less noise from traffic and car honking, overhead jets, construction tools, and from nearby bars and restaurants. Residents were heard talking about being exposed to bird songs, leaves blowing in the wind and cricket sounds. While some people expressed missing the disturbing sounds of their lives before the Pandemic, I believe what they are actually saying is: "We miss our earlier, normal lives." I am hoping that as we move into a "new normal," people will be reminded of the "Pandemic's" quieter times favorably and be motivated to engage in efforts to reduce noise pollution and provide greater spaces for the enjoyment of quiet. The information provided by our chapter should assist with these efforts.

Environmental psychologist Arline Bronzaft has served as an advisor to five New York City mayors, and serves as chairperson of the GrowNYC Noise Committee. Bronzaft co-authored a pioneering study on the impact of noise on children's reading scores, worked on the New York City noise code, serves as an expert witness, and is a champion of programs that teach children about good sound and harmful noise. Bronzaft discusses noise and health in scholarly and popular media, has participated in countless community meetings, and has appeared as a guest on the Soundproofist and Freakanomics podcasts. Bronzaft has family roots in Brooklyn, New York and Toronto, and she has been a friend of the Right to Quiet Society for many years. Learn more about the book at https://www.infoagepub.com/products/Behavioral-Science-in-the-Global-Arena.