

NOISE LETTER

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

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Spring 2020



Illustrator Nelson Dewey reimagines the Right to Quiet Society's Globe Man for the 21st century

Change at the Speed of Sound

Looking back at 2019 is similar to looking back at the world just before September 11, 2001 – our lack of awareness of what was about to occur, and the fact that life could never return to the way it had been. Now as the world adjusts to the coronavirus pandemic, we try to find peace and calm and even joy in the midst of intense anxiety and sorrow.

In 2019, we decided that after more than thirty years, it was time to update our “Globe Man” in time for the International Year of Sound and the 25th anniversary of International Noise Awareness Day, which fell on April 29th.

We thought, who better to create the 2020 Globe Man than cartoonist Nelson Dewey, creator of the original (right)? We were delighted when Nelson agreed to take on the job, and his work turned out to be among our last vestiges of innocent happiness. While the noise sources cause disruption and disturbance in real life, we feel nothing but joy each time we look at Nelson’s imagery, which adorns the first page of this issue of *NOISE Letter*.



Nelson Dewey's original Globe Man

This *NOISE Letter* issue was ready to publish in mid-March just as the world began to recognize the seriousness of the coronavirus. Much of the newsletter’s content began to change. IYI and INAD 2020 events were being canceled and rescheduled. An article about incorporating sound within yoga programming seemed like it should be postponed until yoga and other group programs were meeting once again, but we kept some content about sound healing practices with personal digital devices. These seem more timely than before, with so many people struggling to deal with heightened anxiety.

In this issue, we also look at some of the ways that noise issues are resolved at the community level. Which approaches work, and which should we avoid? Are noise problems ever solved? So often

noise problems seem to drag on unaddressed and chronic, and solving residential noise issues can be fraught with anxiety and dread. It isn’t easy to approach a neighbor or local business about noise, there are few organizations that facilitate mediation, and those who complain are unfairly dismissed as unsympathetic complainers. The idea that “noise is subjective” is given great weight, and those in power may be slow to respond, or may not respond at all. But in this issue, people share stories of local noise problems that they were able to resolve, often to their great surprise – and relief.

We also report on some IYI 2020 programs, and an INAD virtual gathering that featured key players in the creation of International Noise Awareness Day a quarter century ago.

To see more of Nelson Dewey’s work, visit his website at <https://www.nelsondewey.com>.

COVID-19 Pandemic Impacts International Year of Sound Programming

By Linda Briskin

The year 2020 was designated as the International Year of Sound (IYS). A global initiative, its program of events takes up the role that sound plays and the need to control noise in nature, the built environment, and the workplace. Initiated by the International Commission for Acoustics (ICA), the IYS was prompted in part by an UNESCO resolution which recognizes that sound influences the equilibrium of human beings and has economic, environmental, societal, medical, industrial and cultural dimensions. IYS brings together concerns about noise and the appreciation of sound – an exciting initiative!

As a result of the COVID pandemic, some events were rescheduled to later dates in 2020, while others have been cancelled or postponed until 2021. Some events that were scheduled late in 2020 such as Acoustics Week in Canada, remain scheduled as originally planned.

A current listing appears online at <https://sound2020.org/event>, and the IYS Steering Committee’s statement about the impact of coronavirus appears at <https://sound2020.org/news/coronavirus>.

We must guarantee to the world that the Year of Sound is not cancelled by the virus and that right after this difficult period, the beautiful ‘sound of the world’ will be heard again by everyone.”

- Sergio Luzzi, University of Florence

Linda Briskin, PhD is a fine art photographer, author, scholar, and noise resister living in Toronto.

Addressing residential and community noise

An extremely large set of wind chimes

by Jeanine Botta, New York City



Photo: David Mancini / Unsplash

In the 1990s, I lived in a three-family house in the quiet neighborhood of Middle Village, Queens. My apartment faced the backyards of all of the houses on the block. Rarely were there parties, and when there were, they ended early. It was a quiet existence. One day, my direct backyard neighbors put up a set of wind chimes that were at least five feet tall.

Placed in the middle of the yard, with no buffering from a building, you could hear the continuous sound of metal striking metal day and night. Not knowing what else to do, I called the police precinct. At the time,

you could call a precinct directly about a noise issue rather than calling an intermediary agency like 311.

I spoke with a friendly young officer who said that he'd speak with the wind chime owners and let me know how it went. Though he sounded sympathetic, I worried that he might not be able to do anything to change the situation.

A few days later, the wind chimes were gone.

When the officer called me, he told me that it had been easy to do. "I told the owners that there was a young couple who couldn't sleep." I thanked him.

It went unsaid, but the officer knew to play to biases of the community in which I lived, in which he worked, and probably society as a whole. A single woman living on her own elicits limited sympathy if she complains about your noise, while a young couple unable to sleep is somehow more sympathetic.

It wasn't politically correct...

But - whatever it took. The wind chimes were gone!

A wobbly manhole cover

by an East Village resident, New York City

Click...Clank, constantly. Five seconds apart. I'd hear this loud unpredictable sound constantly throughout the day. *Click...Clank*. Can't sleep. Again, *click... clank*. Even though I have hearing loss, the sound was so loud it kept me up every night for months. I asked neighbors if they'd heard the noise.

They had. But they didn't want to do anything. Why not? I called 311.

Two weeks later. The noise continued. And again for another two months. After twelve calls to 311, nothing was done, despite the city assuring me via email that they were looking into the issue. I figured out the cause. The pending "L" train shutdown caused the city to create bike lanes on some streets. To do this, they moved the car parking lanes towards the middle of the street, about four feet off the sidewalk where the bike paths were now.

Thus, cars driving on the street were forced to ride through a narrower strip of the street and more towards the other side, which caused their wheels to drive over a wobbly manhole cover.

Click, Clank.

Maybe I should move apartments? Should I get soundproofed windows?

I perused online.

A friend suggested I call the local congressional district representative.

Four months had passed.

Click, Clank.

The representative responded and assured me they would contact the appropriate team. The next day I saw workers on the street next to the manhole. I asked them if they were investigating the sound.

"Absolutely."

They were astonished. How could this constant *Click Clank* not get noticed by the neighborhood?

They were amazed people put up with this.

They secured the manhole.

Life returned to normal.

I could sleep again.



Photo: Matthew LeJune / Unsplash

Help spread the word about peace and quiet!

We welcome feedback, article contributions, news about events, scientific news, and other information that we can include in our newsletter or on our website. Contact us at editor@quiet.org or visit www.quiet.org.

Leaf blowers disturbing the peace in paradise

by Lucy Weinstein, MD, MPH, Florida and New York

Each January, we stay for three weeks at our timeshare on Captiva, Florida. It's idyllic: gorgeous sunsets over the Gulf of Mexico, miles of empty beach, shore birds galore, dolphins and manatees cavorting in the warm waters... Idyllic, that is, until the landscapers arrive with their gasoline leaf blowers, making deafening noise, as well as spewing forth pollutants and destroying bird and other small animal habitats.

For many years, a few times a week I would feel that my tranquil vacation there was being ruined. What could I do? I could hear the noise from inside our apartment, from our balcony, and even while swimming in the otherwise lovely swimming pool. But I had researched the issue with a colleague from my home town on Long Island, and gathered some information on the harms of gas leaf blowers.

I sent some of these facts by e-mail to the office that oversees our part of the resort, and talked about

the issue with our neighbors there. There was no response from those in charge, and I resigned myself to intermittent misery.

But then in January when we returned to Florida, lo and behold! I could hear the much softer and less grating sound of electric lawn equipment!

When I went over to the timeshare office to thank them and introduced myself, the manager said, "So you're the one who got us to convince the landscape company to switch to electric!"

I was successful! Amazing.

Now I have to get the rest of the resort (managed by a different company) to do the same...



Photo: Huntington CALM

Loud compressors affect neighbors' sleep and reduce bird population

by Ted Rueter, Director, Noise Free America, Chapel Hill, North Carolina

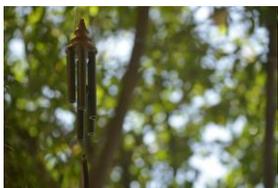
In September 2018, Noise Free America: A Coalition to Promote Quiet received a request for assistance from Julia, a resident of Presidio, Texas. She lives directly behind a Dollar General store, whose air conditioning units were extremely loud. The noise emanating from the compressors was affecting her quality of life and that of her neighbors. Julia and her husband could not enjoy morning coffee together on the patio, and had difficulty sleeping. One elderly neighbor could no longer hear any birds; she also experienced sleep disturbances. Another neighbor built a wall around his yard to try to block the noise.

At Julia's request, I wrote a snail-mail letter to the national CEO of Dollar General. I noted that Julia had made several attempts to speak with the manager, but her calls were not returned. In December 2017, Julia and her neighbors drafted a petition to their city

council, asking the city to intervene on our behalf, including several inexpensive sound barrier suggestions for the Dollar General store to adopt.

I concluded in my letter, "I am asking that Dollar General be a good neighbor and install a soundproofing barrier around the air conditioner compressors. I feel confident that this problem has a quick, inexpensive, easy solution. Please let me know if I can be of further assistance."

Remarkably, I soon received an e-mail from Dollar General's legal counsel, stating that she would investigate the situation. I offered the assistance of Bob Andres, Noise Free America's technical advisor. Together Bob and the Dollar General team devised a technical solution to the noise issue, much to the satisfaction of Julia and her neighbors.



Have an experience addressing a noise issue? Tell us about it!

Have you taken steps to address a noise issue and succeeded? Or succeeded only to return to the previous situation? Send your story in 250 to 300 words, using Word or Notepad, to editor@quiet.org. Photos welcome if privacy is observed. You can send by mail to Editor, Right to Quiet Society, 612 Kent Road, Victoria, V8Z 1Z1, Canada.



drive up

Action Alert

Tell retailers: Virtue signaling isn't good enough.
ALL shoppers benefit from reduced noise.
Repeated beeping sounds are stressful to workers.

In 2016 and 2017, retailers around the world showed concern for people with neurological conditions like autism that benefit from reduction in light and sound. All at once, sensory awareness was in the news, and Target was not to be left behind. Corporate leadership signaled its investment in sound planning in its public relations material, and individual Target stores publicized efforts to program quiet shopping hours for customers on the autism spectrum. But since then, Target has introduced an app with a sound that it's fair to describe as the epitome of unnecessary noise.

The "Drive Up" option is initiated by customers who plan to pick up items at Target, where staff are alerted through the MyDevice phone app, which shows customers' pending orders and estimated arrival time. Staff prepare orders and notify customers, who in turn notify staff when they are on their way. This results in a double horn honk on staff members' phones. Once is bad enough, but if a staff member is unable to respond immediately, the phone continues to emit horn honks.

The team of engineers who designed the MyDevice system tried different forms of notification, and settled on the horn sound because staff were not responding to other alerts. Concern for shoppers – or workers – who are anywhere along the spectrum of sound sensitivity seems not to have been considered.

Use of acoustic reminders is recognized as a source of stress and anxiety among workers in warehouses and other industrial settings. Over the course of decades, reminder technology has improved to such a degree that employee health is a consideration in system selection. The idea of choosing a double horn honk as a form of "voice picking" twenty years into the 21st century is difficult to understand.

When quiet shopping hours were introduced in 2016, many in public health and hearing health considered the rise in sensory awareness to be a reason to celebrate – although we hoped such programs were "only the beginning." A blogger with an autistic child voiced concern about a single hour of reduced noise not being enough.

The world isn't made up of sound sensitive people and "everyone else." Most of us fall everywhere along a continuum between sound sensitive and impervious to noise. What's good for sound sensitive people in retail spaces benefits other shoppers, and workers.

Maybe "quiet hours" alone really aren't enough. Instead, we should reduce unnecessary noise in retail spaces as much as possible. Retail soundscapes don't have to be silent to be comfortable. And eliminating obvious stressors like horn honking phone apps would be a reasonable start.

To voice concerns about this issue, send a letter by regular mail, with one signed original to each addressee:

Brian Cornell
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer
Caroline Wanga
Vice President and Chief Culture, Diversity and Inclusion Officer
Target Corporation
1000 Nicollet Mall
Minneapolis, MN 55403

Or send an email to Brian Cornell and Caroline Wanga at the address CorporateResponsibility@target.com.

Further Reading

Target expands its 'Drive Up' service to 270 stores across Florida, Texas and the Southeast. By Sarah Perez, 2018.
<https://techcrunch.com/2018/04/17/target-expands-its-drive-up-service-to-270-stores-across-florida-texas-and-the-southeast>

Supermarket quiet hour: It's great for those with autism but more must be done. By Emily Leary, 2017.
<https://metro.co.uk/2017/02/23/supermarket-quiet-hour-its-great-for-those-with-autism-but-more-must-be-done-6467448>

Tracking and tracing: Geographies of logistical governance and labouring bodies. By Anja Kanngieser, 2013.
<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1068/d24611>

Sample work management system that considers worker stress
<https://www.lucasware.com/jennifer-voice-picking>

News briefs

The 2020 Global Program of Hush City Soundwalks

To observe IYS, Dr. Antonella Radicchi of Hush City Mobile Lab has organized the 2020 Global Program of Hush City Soundwalks, involving guided walks



during which participants use the Hush City app. Originally scheduled to begin on International Noise Awareness Day on April 29th and to continue during 2020, individual programs have been rescheduled because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

As of this writing, soundwalk programs in Brazil, Spain, and Ireland are scheduled for the Fall of 2020, and the program in Italy is scheduled for Spring 2021.

Learn more about the 2020 Global Program at antonellaradicchi.it/portfolio/hush-city-4-iys2020 and access the app at opensourceoundscapes.org/hush-city.

Photo © Tempo Reale 2015

Virtual gathering for INAD 2020

April 29, 2020 was the twenty-fifth anniversary of the International Noise Awareness Day (INAD), and the Center for Hearing and Communication (CHC) hosted a virtual gathering to commemorate the day. INAD was established in 1996 by the League for the Hard of Hearing, which eventually became CHC.

Present at the online meeting were pioneers from the early days of noise activism Nancy Nadler, Director of the CHC Noise Center, Arline Bronzaf, groundbreaking researcher on noise and learning, journalist Val Weedon, and author John Stewart.

One topic of great interest was the challenges for the deaf and hard of hearing when communicating with people who are wearing face coverings, which prevent any ability to read lips.

Read *10 Tips for Managing Face Masks and Hearing Loss* and watch



Face Masks and Hearing Loss at <https://chcheating.org/blog/face-masks-hearing-loss-communication-tips>.

You can watch the INAD 2020 virtual gathering at <https://youtu.be/2zyBXS4v0c>.

Image © Center for Hearing and Communication 2020

Call for papers: COVID-19 pandemic acoustic effects

"The International Year of Sound has...turned into an International Year of Quiet, at least as far as anthropogenic sound is concerned. We, as a scientific and technical community specializing in acoustics, should take note of this sudden and drastic change and do our part to chronicle it as precisely as possible."

So states the Journal of the Acoustical Society of America (JASA) in its call for papers for a special issue that focuses on effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on sound environments in different settings and contexts. https://asa.scitation.org/jas/info/specialissues/cfp_042220

In a relatively short period of time, reductions in vehicle and industrial activity have led to significant decreases in air and noise pollution. Although the JASA submission deadline is currently open-ended, the call for papers is time sensitive, and for good reason. As one of our supporters from a village along Lake Tahoe reports, in the time it took for lockdown regulations to lift, recreational activity resumed, and the quiet vanished.

Meditative uses of sound

As we were putting the Winter issue of *NOISE Letter* to bed, news of the COVID-19 pandemic broke and suddenly everything changed. One article we'd written for the newsletter seemed out of step with the changing times – a profile of yoga programs that incorporate sound in practice, and wellness studios that feature sound baths and other sound healing modalities.

We will feature that article in a future *NOISE Letter* when group classes and workshops are in session again – something that can't happen soon enough.

To that end, we'd love to hear from our readers.



Have you attended sound healing or sound bath events or workshops? Do any of your yoga classes incorporate the use of sound – and if so, does it enhance the experience for you? Do you teach or lead sound bath or sound healing classes, or yoga classes that use sound?

Of equal interest, do you listen to audio recordings to relax? If so, what sounds are most effective for you? Do pandemic-specific audio talks or guided meditations interest you? Write to us at editor@quiet.org or send mail to Editor, Right to Quiet Society, 612 Kent Road, Victoria, V8Z 1Z1, Canada.

Photo: Robson Melo / Pixabay