



YOU MAY ALREADY HAVE HEARING LOSS

BY CHERIE YURCO

■ Following a recent live music event, I interviewed a longtime musician who joked that his years of gigging have made it more difficult to carry on a normal conversation. I patiently repeated my questions, trying to speak in an abnormally loud voice. When I asked if he'd ever considered using musicians' earplugs, the man laughed at the absurdity of such an idea. Unfortunately, hearing loss really is no laughing matter, especially for musicians.

The auditory system is one of the body's most delicate sensory systems, and when you are frequently exposed to excessive sound levels the system can be easily damaged. Though many people associate musician hearing loss with rockers (20% of whom have some hearing loss, according to one Norwegian Institutt for Klinisk Medisin study), any type of musician is at risk. Often, only when noticeable hearing loss has already occurred, do musicians take the problem seriously.

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) sets guidelines for the maximum time you can safely be exposed to various sound pressures measured in decibels (dB).

As you can see from the chart on the following page, the dangers are real and occur with a wide range of instruments and genres of music.

Here are some tips to reduce the danger of hearing loss:

- ✓ Purchase and wear musicians' earplugs. They are superior to traditional earplugs because they offer "flat" attenuation, while traditional earplugs tend to filter more sound from higher frequencies, resulting in a muffled sound.
- ✓ As you can see from the table, each instrument has a wide volume range. When possible, practice more softly, or practice with your electrified instrument "unplugged."
- ✓ To reduce your overall exposure to sound, take precautions in your daily life. Avoid any environment where you need to raise your voice to be heard. Wear earplugs or earmuffs when mowing the lawn or operating other loud machinery, and turn down the volume on your television and iPod.
- ✓ During rehearsals take frequent, 15-minute silence breaks.
- ✓ When you have a break during your gig, take a moment to step outside and give your ears a rest.
- ✓ Spread out so you are not being blasted when you perform with others. Also, move away from on-stage monitors and amplifiers.

For more information on musician hearing loss and additional tips visit House Research Institute at www.hei.org or Hearing Education and Awareness for Rockers (HEAR) at www.hear.net.

Here is a table with approximate NIOSH ranges of safe exposure for various instruments:

Musical Example	Typical Loudness Range (in Decibels)	Recommended Exposure Time Range
Piano	60 dB to 95 dB	+25 hours to 47 minutes
Chamber music in small auditorium	75 dB to 85 dB	+25 hours to 8 hours
Violin	84 dB to 103 dB	10 hours 5 minutes to 7 minutes
Cello	82 dB to 92 dB	16 hours to 1 hour 35 minutes
Oboe	90 dB to 94 dB	2 hours 31 minutes to 1 hour
Flute	85 dB to 111 dB	8 hours to 1 minute
Piccolo	95 dB to 112 dB	47 minutes to less than 1 minute
Clarinet	92 dB to 103 dB	1 hour 35 minutes to 7 minutes
French Horn	90 dB to 106 dB	2 hours 31 minutes to 3 minutes
Trombone	85 dB to 114 dB	8 hours to less than 1 minute
Timpani & bass drum rolls	106 dB	3 minutes
Symphonic music peak	up to 137 dB	less than 1 minute
Amplified rock music, 4 to 6 feet away	120 dB to 150 dB	less than 1 minute



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