

Please PIPEDOWN

The source for news about the campaign for freedom from piped music.



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Ruth Schiedermayer, editor

Hello Pipedown Supporters

An article in the April 2009 issue of Acoustics Today, described 5 of the world's most highly rated concert halls. "What is So Special About Shoebox Halls? Envelopment, Envelopment, Envelopment" by Marshall Long. The author discusses the shape of the spaces designed for listening to music. He writes about how the shape of the concert halls modifies the sound to enhance the music. He discusses the gently sloping floors where the audience is seated. He talks about the elevated orchestra platforms and the height of this platform in relationship to how the music travels.

This article applies to the less than perfect acoustic environments where program audio is currently sent. Retail, restaurant, and service environments are not concert halls. The music often sounds awful simply due to the fact it is being forced into a space that was not designed for music. Some of the worst environments for program audio are airport concourses and restrooms. The echoes and distorted sounds that result from program audio coming out of lots of speakers in the ceiling only gives these places excessive din.

In times past, sometimes the speakers contributed to the distortion and dissonance from program audio. Today with superior acoustic speakers capable of quality amplification at higher volumes, the shapes of most public spaces do not lend themselves to listening to music. Since the volume of the music is usually higher than the ambient noise, the music just doesn't sound very good in these acoustic spaces.

Comments on Society: You didn't ask nicely

This is a comment heard over and over, from court cases on the People's Court to episodes of the Sopranos to a recent episode of King of the Hill where Hank cranks up the volume instead of turning it down when asked. Not asking nicely is a surefire way to get someone to not do what you ask. People use this as an excuse to continue behaving badly and to rationalize that the requester does not deserve the request.

Civility and courtesy go a long way in the art of persuasion. I am convinced you can't persuade people to change without a sincere effort at being nice and asking nicely. When supporting this campaign to get the music turned down, please remember to do whatever is needed to begin civilly (like counting to 10 first if necessary) and to please ask nicely. If asking nicely does not help, then asking someone else in the business or switching to writing a courteous letter may be effective.

Comment Cards

In addition to comment cards available for a SASE, it is possible to use the enterprise's own comment cards which can sometimes be found near the cashier. The business reply cards where the business pays the postage are handy. If it costs the enterprise money to receive the card, then it is possible they may spend more time reading it. I encourage all readers to use this option whenever they have a chance.

News from readers

Judy Ellis writes about the use of on-line business reviews, which is another place readers could place comments about noisy restaurants and retail businesses. Trip advisor (<http://www.tripadvisor.com/>) provides on-line reviews where comments about the restaurant's noise level could be included.

Other on-line reviews are possible such as Google Maps (<http://maps.google.com/>), Urban Spoon (<http://www.urbanspoon.com>), and Yelp (<http://www.yelp.com>) but these require an account, as do some other options such as ZAGAT and Fodors

Advice: Count to Ten (10) before acting

As angry as many of my readers sound about too-loud music in businesses, it may seem that it is too easy to yell at people about the noise from the program audio. My advice is to find a way to control your anger before complaining as it may turn out better for you as well as for others who may or may not have control over the volume..

A good friend of mine recently encountered a very loud environment at a fitness center. The music plus the instructor yelling to be heard above the music became too much for my friend. The class was held in such a loud setting that she simply left during the middle because the noise made her angry.

Fortunately for her, she did not simply leave or yell at the staff at the front desk on her way out. Instead, she went and used some exercise equipment for the rest of the class time, so that her trip to the fitness center was at least worthwhile. She did a bit more than count to ten, but it had the same impact. When she left, she was able to talk calmly to the staff and find out they had become aware that this particular instructor was louder than the rest. She was reassured the staff would attempt to solve this problem. Since she was calm by this time, her complaint was added to the others and increases the likelihood of real change.

Bibliography

"When the Brain Can't Hear: Unraveling the Mystery of Auditory Processing Disorder", by Teri James Bellis, PhD, 2002, Atria Books, Paperback, ISBN-10: 0-7434-2864-1, ISBN-13: 978-0-7434-2864-4

Very interesting book about how the brain processes auditory information. What is interesting is that adults with APD often have difficulty understanding speech in noisy environments. This shows that piped-in music is a distraction and a barrier to communication to more people than only the hard-of-hearing folks.

In the works

I have personally asked many Pipedown-USA supporters to help with a letter campaign to Goodwill Industries International, where program audio is often too loud in their retail outlets. Goodwill is a very good socially conscious organization, I am hoping if enough people write to them at their corporate headquarters then perhaps we could influence that organization to change their culture regarding the use of program audio. If Goodwill stores could turn off or turn down the music then they would be allowing all people, from all backgrounds to shop in peace.

For more information or details on where to write, please contact me by email.

Picture

No quote this issue, instead I refer readers to an image found on the web of The "Enraged Musician", which is a 1741 etching and engraving by English artist William Hogarth.. Searching for this image should produce several results. One copy can be found at:

<http://www.blesser.net/spacesSpeak.html>