

Newsletter | Issue 1
May 1st 2025



auraldiversity
because everybody hears differently

Editor: Andrew Hugill

auraldiversity.org

Welcome to Issue #1 of the Aural Diversity Network Newsletter!

The Aural Diversity Network began in 2021 as a two year project funded by the AHRC. By the time the funding expired, engagement with the network was so substantial that it has continued ever since. There are currently around 300 members worldwide. This Newsletter is designed to keep people up to date with network activities. Please send any contributions to info@auraldiversity.org (email the same address to join).

About Aural Diversity

Aural Diversity arises from the simple observation that everybody hears differently. It challenges the common assumption that we all possess the same ears, asking: *whose* ears are standard? *whose* ears have primacy? To see the scope of the field, view the [Infographic](#).



Vibrotactile Music Session
Attenborough Arts Centre, 2023. Led by Russ Palmer.

The Aural Diversity Project began in 2018. Its activities are documented thoroughly on its [website](#). The book [Aural Diversity](#), published in 2022, is a rich introduction to the topic.



**aural
diversity**

News & Updates

Noise Network Plus

On 18 March 2025 Noise Network Plus was launched, an EPSRC-funded multi-disciplinary initiative to tackle noise pollution over the next 10-15 years. 100+ experts gathered to discuss solutions on topics like noise in the built environment, education, new sources, and impacts on health, wildlife and aural diversity. Please follow [Noise Network Plus](#). (Lisa Lavia, Noise Abatement Society).

Assistive Listening Research

The new Assistive Listening Technology Research, Training and Innovation Lab serves as an independent, interdisciplinary platform advancing collaborative research and knowledge exchange across audiology, education, engineering, and allied health. It is dedicated to the open dissemination of peer-reviewed evidence, consolidated resources, and innovative development frameworks, with the overarching goal of informing national standards for the provision, training, and evaluation of Assistive Listening Devices for young people. Central to this mission is the commitment to assess, supply, and verify equipment to ensure that assistive technologies are effective, accessible, and aligned with best practice across diverse educational and clinical settings. (Paul Harris, Ewing Foundation).

The Cadenza Project

[The Cadenza Project](#) is attempting to improve music listening for those with a hearing impairment. This is achieved through the running of open signal processing challenges, in which competitors are asked to personalise and enhance music for listeners with a hearing impairment. The [2nd Cadenza Challenge](#) has recently concluded, with challenge entrants submitting signal processing systems to address two different tasks:

- Task 1 - Improve lyric intelligibility for pop/rock music, whilst maintaining the audio quality of the music
- Task 2 - Rebalance the level of instruments in small classical music ensembles

For both tasks, systems are trained and objectively evaluated using existing metrics and models (e.g., to measure audio quality or lyric intelligibility). The analysis of these data is ongoing. Importantly, for CAD2 Task 1, signal processing systems are also subjectively evaluated by a Listener Panel, comprised of 50 hearing aid users. Each Listener Panel participant is presented with 200 short music excerpts that have been processed by the systems specifically for their individual hearing impairment profile. For each excerpt, participants rate the music on two key dimensions:

- Lyric intelligibility - “Lyric intelligibility refers to how clearly and effortlessly the words in the music can be heard”
- Basic audio quality - “Results from judgments of the sound of the music, in relation to a person’s expectations of how the music should ideally sound to them.”

Participants also provide ratings on “clarity”, “distortion”, and “liking” of the music. These dimensions were developed by a smaller Sensory Panel of hearing aid users, across several focus group sessions. For more information, a report on the first Sensory Panel process is openly accessible [here](#). This Listener Panel evaluation stage is currently ongoing. The Cadenza team sincerely thanks all participants in the project for their continued commitment and engagement with the research. (Scott Bannister, University of Leeds).

New Publication

Ed Garland has an essay about closed captions in this new book: [Beyond/Tu Hwnt, An Anthology of Welsh Deaf and Disabled Writers](#). There's also much else of aural diversity interest in there! (Ed Garland)

Forthcoming Events

🎵 Noa's Final Recital "Can you see the Sound?"



Can you See the Sound?
Noa Nishizawa's Final Recital

15th May 3:55pm-4:40pm
RNCM Concert Hall

Programme

Desolate landscape / Matt Brown (world premiere)
Turbulence, Tide and Torque / Peter Graham
Apres un Reve / Gabriel Faure Arr. Noa Nishizawa
(world premiere of this version)
Arpeggione Sonata 1st movement / Franz Schubert
Arr. Sakura Drops Duo (world premiere of this version)
Euphory Concerto 1st and 2nd movements
/ Adam Wesolowski
See the Sound / Emilio Yáñez Ruíz (world premiere)

Baritone horn / Euphonium / Hand Sign : Noa Nishizawa
Percussion : Sharon Fung, Trio Trilogy (Sharon Fung, Jason Wong, Hayes Liu)
Piano : Jonathan Fisher
Painting : Sophie Illaifar
Vocal : Sophie Illaifar, Yu Chinen
Euphonium / Narration : Louis Dawes
Featuring Composers : Matt Brown, Emilio Yáñez Ruíz

Hope to see some of you there!

Hi everyone, I'm Noa Nishizawa, currently completing my Master of Music in Artistic Research and Performance at the Royal Northern College of Music. As a brass player (baritone horn and euphonium) with bilateral hearing loss - which limits my hearing to 20% of what most people can hear, my research focuses on how **visual communication in brass ensembles** can enhance musical experiences—especially for those of us who don't always hear everything clearly.

To celebrate the conclusion of my degree, I'm holding a recital on **Thursday, 15 May from 15:55 to 16:40 at the RNCM**. The programme is based on my research and each piece in the programme explores a different visual element—hand sign, gesture, eye contact and lighting—all aimed at making music more accessible and expressive without relying solely on sound. In keeping with the theme, I'll be performing the entire programme **without using my hearing aids**, relying fully on visual and physical connection. I'd love to share this journey with you—hope to see you there!

Conference Presentations

Performers and doctoral researchers Niamh Gallagher and Nina Danon will be presenting the preliminary findings of our collaboration, an embodied exploration of disability, neurodiversity, and auraldiversity through music, at two conferences in June:

- [Creativity, Creative Arts, and Neurodivergence Conference](#), which runs over two weeks, with two online sessions (Tuesday 10 and Thursday 19 June) and two hybrid days at the Foundling Museum in London (Friday 20 and Saturday 21 June).
- [Critical Neurodiversity Studies: Directions/Intersections/Contradictions](#), a fully hybrid conference on the 24–26 June, at Durham University. The access and inclusion commitments for this conference are particularly impressive! (Nina Danon, Goldsmiths' College).

Preemptive Listening



‘I am very happy to share information about some upcoming screenings of my feature film ‘Preemptive Listening’, [about] a year after we first premiered it at Tate. A [screening](#) is taking place on 27th of April 2025 at Curzon Bloomsbury. There will be further screenings throughout April in Nantes, the Hague, Mexico City, Chicago, Minneapolis, and across the UK from June onwards. Please check [here](#) for updates. Lastly, I am very happy to share a [special guest-edited issue of the online journal Disclaimer](#) which features conversations, essays and performance documentation extending from the three days [about the project] at Tate, including many of the film collaborators.’ (Dr Aura Satz, Royal College of Art, UK).



Midlands4Cities
Doctoral Training Partnership
Birmingham Coventry Leicester Nottingham

Soundways: Tracing Sound Across Practices, Spaces and Cultures

This Dialogue Day will take place at the University of Nottingham on Wednesday 4th September under the auspices of the [Midlands4Cities](#) Doctoral Training Partnership. “Aural Diversity” is one of the themes of the day, alongside “Sound between the Local and the Global”, “Sound Collections, Data, and Heritage” and “Sound walking and Embodied Methods”. The intended audience is mainly doctoral students, primarily those wishing to speak in the doctoral session, though we will also be able to accommodate a few non-speaking attendees. (Stefania Lacedelli, University of Leicester; James Mansell, University of Nottingham).

Calls for Papers



Music & Science journal – special issue on music and hearing loss*

Topics may include (but not be limited to):

- Hearing conservation and hearing protection devices
- Hearing aids for music: user experiences, technological innovation, application design
- Cochlear implants for music: user experiences, technological innovation, sound coding strategies
- Deep learning and signal processing for hearing devices for music
- Music augmentation strategies (e.g. vibrotactile, personalised listening)
- Audiological/hearing therapy practice
- Music-based aural rehabilitation strategies
- Music perception and hearing loss
- Creative practice for those with hearing loss

The Special Collection welcomes the full range of paper types (including empirical research articles, theoretical papers, position papers, discussions, and reviews). More information [here](#).

**Please note: We are using 'hearing loss' as the term most commonly used in scientific research papers which address the impact of different levels of hearing on music experience. We appreciate the complexity and diversity of terminology and philosophical perspectives on this matter, and that different terms are preferred and commonly used. Given variations in terminology use (e.g. 'hearing impairment', 'deaf', 'hard of hearing', 'hearing difference'), we ask that authors use their preferred terms, along with any relevant critique of terminology. (Alinka Greasley, University of Leeds)*

Aural Diversity in Museums



The upcoming conference *Sound in Museums* (17-19 October, Mafra, Portugal) welcomes contributions investigating the diverse dimensions of sound in museum settings. We encourage members of the Aural Diversity Network to submit proposals to examine how museums can integrate a wider range of auditory experiences. Topics can range from auditory perception and internal listening, to design strategies and the role of digital technologies to support sonic accessibility.

Join the conversation and contribute to expand aural diversity in museums! The deadline for submission is 30th April. Submit your proposal [here](#). (Stefania Zardini Lacedelli, University of Leicester).

In the Media

Midnight Mastermind

Andrew Hugill appeared on BBC Radio 2 on February 16th, posing questions on 'The History of the Orchestra' to Phil Williams (who was "philling in" for OJ Borg) in the *Midnight Mastermind* slot. The format is that he has the duration of one song (on this occasion, a Duran Duran track) to mug up, then is asked three questions. We had good fun with the questions, but then had a very interesting discussion about Aural Diversity, which continued after the broadcast segment had finished. (Andrew Hugill, University of Leeds).

And finally...

Thinking afresh

On approaching one's fourth decade of working in fields related to audio and broadcast production, some semblance of acuity and insight in the listening department is assumed even if fragments have fallen away over the years. But the other day I was challenged to think afresh again.

I had a long conversation with a friend who is an established and experienced sound designer for film, television and games. We trod over familiar ground related to our field - dialogue editing, sound effects mixing, immersive and spatial audio workflow, and how binaural rendering is getting very convincing these days. My friend then mentioned that he had recently lost the use of one ear, and had to make do with one.

It often seems, in sound production circles (make that 'film sound production circles') that it's all about the surround experience: audio that immerses, or envelopes, the listener in a lush mix of sonic landscape that seems to simultaneously come from all around, yet appear so natural that you're not peering around looking for the loudspeakers. Or it might be good old stereo (hasn't failed me yet!). These might be obvious observations, even trivial. But they do sort of assume the audience has two ears that more or less work in concert to afford a sense of sound localisation. Or maybe the assumption is false?

A sense of curiosity should be always be lurking behind the nearest corner, and so the question arises - as we as programme makers and (the dreaded term) content producers create audio/visual experiences for audiences; who is our audience, and are we assuming that what sounds great to our ears will translate equally well for them? A story told in a space ought not require any particularly exceptional 'golden ears' to be enjoyed as a piece of 'spatial art'.

An inevitable follow on: should someone who creates sound experiences, with hearing that might be deemed 'impaired', be any less proficient in their ability for the task? I would suggest absolutely not. Anecdotal reports suggest some stigma.

Of course, a story that pulls us in will have multiple elements, be it narrative engagement, personal appeal, familiarity with the writer, or a plethora of other captivating qualities. The sound design component might play a large role, or it might not. The intersections between programme enjoyment, engagement, immersion and accessibility will need careful navigation, with wise and open conversation. But I don't think we need to be fearful of something beautifully sonic created by just one ear.

I guess J.S.Bach will always have the last laugh, anyway. (Alex Wegman, Bournemouth University).

The Aural Diversity Newsletter is published quarterly.

Please send any contributions to info@auraldiversity.org
