

Newsletter | Issue 2
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auraldiversity
because everybody hears differently

Editor: Andrew Hugill

auraldiversity.org

Welcome to Issue #2 of the Aural Diversity Network Newsletter!

The Aural Diversity Network emerged in 2021 from an ongoing project that began in 2018. By the time its AHRC funding had 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).

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](#).



Delegates at the 5th Aural Diversity Workshop, University of Leicester

News & Updates



Noise Network Plus

Leads: Mark Plumbley and Abigail Bristow, University of Surrey; Charlotte Clark, City St George's, University of London; Simone Graetzer and Antonio J. Torija Martinez, University of Salford; and Alan Hunter, University of Bath.

The Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council Noise Network Plus is a new network bringing together people from all disciplines who want to address the harms caused by noise to people, other animals and wildlife (including marine life) and the planet as a whole.

Despite its pervasive effects, noise is a neglected pollutant. There is an urgent need for more research and better interdisciplinary coordination. The recently published Environmental Noise in Europe report of the European Environment Agency stated that noise pollution from transport sources alone results in the loss of 1.3 million healthy life years annually in Europe, equivalent to an annual economic cost of at least EUR 95.6 billion. Noise pollution affects biological processes by triggering physiological and psychological stress responses; and the human body can be negatively affected even during sleep.

In response to this urgent need to reduce anthropogenic (human-made) noise, the Noise Network Plus sets out to re-engineer the discipline of engineering, making noise a consideration at all stages of the design process. We are creating a mission-oriented inter-organisational research and innovation network, as a catalyst to bring together diverse, dynamic teams from across disciplines. The network will bring communities together to deliver a healthier, quieter society and environment. Everyone is welcome to join us, especially those who care about aural diversity and how this might shape individual responses to noise.

We will launch a call for explorative cross-disciplinary pilot projects in late October 2025. To receive more information about this call and the other activities of the network, you can join our mailing list. Go to jiscmail.ac.uk/NOISE to subscribe. We are also on LinkedIn; search for 'noise-network-plus'. (Simone Graetzer, University of Salford).



Centre for Doctoral Training (CDT) in Sustainable Sound Futures

Director: Prof. Trevor Cox

The EPSRC Centre for Doctoral Training (CDT) in Sustainable Sound Futures is training 70 doctoral students who have the skills and knowledge to reduce the harms caused by noise and poor acoustics and forge a more positive sounding future. We have created an unprecedented collaboration for PhD training in Acoustics across Salford, Southampton, Sheffield and Bristol Universities and over 50 project partners.

A sustainable aural future is more than just reducing noise; it includes the engineering of positive sounds. From using sound to improve the accessibility of products, through to enhancing cultural events that boost well-being, there are many ways of creating a better sounding future. It's important that we understand and can predict the response to sound of an aurally diverse population.

We have a unique opportunity over the coming years to make rapid advances in aural diversity-relevant research thanks to the CDT and the Leverhulme Trust Aural Diversity Doctoral Research Hub, both led by the University of Salford. You can find more information here: <https://soundfutures.salford.ac.uk/>



Sownd Affects

Sownd Affects is a hearing wellness initiative that has just completed a project with Oscar Acoustics, funded by Arts Council England, to make three of Hackney's grassroots music venues "audio inclusive". The venues - Vortex, SJQ, and Paper Dress Vintage - have undergone pioneering upgrades, creating safer, more welcoming spaces for the 1 in 3 people sensitive to noise. This includes those with hearing challenges, neurodiversity groups, and people living with conditions such as misophonia and tinnitus. Full details on [the website](#). (Emma Moffat, Sownd Affects).

Forthcoming Events



Aural Diversity Conference

There will be a conference at the Leverhulme Aural Diversity Doctoral Research Hub (LAURA), University of Salford and online, on September 5th 2025. Full details are available [on their website](#), which explains that it is intended to be a friendly, single-track conference for people working in aural diversity from any disciplinary background. We seek contributions from areas including acoustics, architecture, art, audiology, design, education, hearing science, music, psychology, sociology, soundscape, and more. There will no fee to participate or attend. Lunch and refreshments will be provided for those coming in person. Register for the event [here](#). The deadline for paper proposals has passed, but they are still accepting abstracts for poster presentations or short (5 minute) talks until August 22nd.



Sound and Environment Performance, Newcastle

The piece Duncan Chapman made with a group of students with cochlear implants (and two other artists) for the second Aural Diversity concert in Leicester has been selected to be played at the [Sound and Environment Symposium](#) at Newcastle University in September:

Like fresh snow, bells and leaves : Duncan Chapman c20'

Created in collaboration with Students at the Hearing Support Centre, Beauchamp College, Leicester; Simon Le Boggit and Tim Baker. This piece explores the sounds and voices of a number of people with different experiences of hearing. The sounds of voices are mixed with environmental recordings and transcriptions of vocal phrases.

New Publications

David Bächinger et al. (2025) "Awareness and attitudes towards ear health in classical music students—advancing education and care for professional ear users", *Front. Psychol.* 16, 26 May 2025. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1497674>

Ed Garland (2025) [Earwitness: A Search for Sonic Understanding in Stories](#) (Cardigan: Parthian). Ed Garland's book of essays about hearing loss, reading and literary sounds has just been republished with a new afterword.

Carmen Rosas-Pérez, Laurent Galbrun, Sarah R. Payne, Adele Dickson, Mary E. Stewart, [More than noise: Lived experiences of autistic people in real-life acoustic environments](#), *Applied Acoustics*, Volume 233, 2025, 110581, ISSN 0003-682X.

Carmen Rosas-Pérez, Laurent Galbrun, Mary E. Stewart, Sarah R. Payne; [How can anyone learn or teach? Experiences of autistic people with sound in schools and universities](#). *Proc. Mtgs. Acoust.* 8 May 2023; 51 (1): 015001.

Calls for Papers



Cultivating Inclusion in Sound, Music and Computing

Special Session on Cultivating Inclusion in Sound, Music and Computing for the Computer Music Multidisciplinary Research conference in November at UCL organised by Anna Bramwell-Dicks, Jude Brereton and John Levack Drever.

We invite contributions and critical reflections on inclusion within sound and music. Moving beyond foundational discussions of diversity, equity, and inclusion (EDI), we aim to curate a collection of actionable strategies, evidence-based methodologies, and tangible tools derived from both academic inquiry and professional practice.

The session will include a curated panel discussion, followed by smaller focused group conversations on particular themes.

We're asking for 500 - 1000 word Position Statements that explore the equity, diversity and inclusion challenges and solutions within sound, music and computing. Please share your insights on specific problems you've identified and the innovative approaches you're employing to overcome them. We especially welcome perspectives from, and research centered on, marginalised voices and communities within the music and audio landscape, recognising their invaluable insights for systemic change.

See the full Call for Participation and join us in November at UCL (or online) :-)
<https://lnkd.in/eNhnGaBJ> (John Levack Drever).

Politics

The Welsh Government is currently discussing [a BSL bill](#). The Bill includes provision for the Welsh Government to:

- promote and facilitate the use of BSL.
- publish a National BSL Strategy describing how they intend to promote and facilitate the use of BSL and report on progress.
- produce guidance for public bodies listed in the Bill about promoting and facilitating the use of BSL.
- appoint a BSL adviser and a panel to assist the adviser. (Ed Garland).

Media

Podcast from the Acoustical Society of America: [How Classroom Acoustics Fail Autistic Students and Teachers](#). Interview with Carmen Rosas Pérez.

Aural Diversity and Sonic Deprivation in Secure Psychiatric Care

(Matt Smith, Forensic Service, Technical Instructor (Music), Langdon Hospital)

Over the past decade, my work as an Occupational Therapy Technical Instructor in a secure forensic hospital has centred on facilitating experimental music-making with people detained under the Mental Health Act. Most recently, this practice has culminated in the release of a patient-led ambient album on cassette via Spirit Duplicator. Created through structured group and one-to-one sessions, the project uses modular synthesis, cassette loops, and field recordings captured during section 17 leave to explore the relationship between listening, identity, and environment.

The album was developed through deep listening techniques inspired by Pauline Oliveros and informed by the clinical realities of long-term psychiatric detention, where access to natural sound is severely limited. Field recordings—such as bees at Buckfast Abbey or footsteps at Fernworthy Reservoir were captured by patients and myself as part of a therapeutic intervention intended to restore contact with the wider ecological soundscape. These sonic materials, smuggled back into the hospital like contraband, gained a kind of talismanic status among those without leave. In this way, natural sound became a shared cultural artefact within the institution—both a provocation and a site of care.

This work was featured in *The Wire* magazine (March 2025), marking the second time patient-created compositions from our service have received national coverage. For me, this suggests a growing public receptiveness to alternative narratives of creativity, disability, and institutional life—what might be framed as “aural justice” within sonic arts and mental health.

My current focus is developing this work into a full-time, practice-based PhD that investigates the impact of sonic deprivation and environmental sound access in locked settings such as psychiatric hospitals and prisons. Drawing on my dual perspective as a long-term NHS employee and neurodivergent researcher, I am framing the project around themes of aural agency, memory, and autonomy. The aim is to interrogate how sonic environments—or their absence—shape a person’s capacity to reconstruct identity and to feel connected to the world beyond confinement.

I’m particularly interested in how marginalised listening practices (field recording, drone, ambient composition) might offer new methodologies for therapeutic engagement that bypass the cognitive and linguistic demands of traditional interventions. This aligns closely with the aims of the Aural Diversity network, especially in its insistence on listening as a plural, embodied, and politically situated activity.

If you’d like to listen to the album or explore the accompanying research further, links are available below. I would welcome conversations or collaborations with others working at the intersection of sound, health, environment, and care—particularly those exploring aural diversity in clinical or carceral contexts.

Listen: <https://labyrinthedesesprits.bandcamp.com/album/the-cosmic-hunt>

Contact: msmith48@nhs.net

Audiograms, programming hearing devices, and using both ears

Some things related to Hearing are distinctly missing. In an era of expensive cellphones and headphones, there need to be approved methods for measuring an audiogram and word counts at home. Hearingtest.online has a free audiogram that is useful and educational, and the Apple airpods pro2 audiogram is available in many places (but it has an unusual statistical method), but neither include masking, and there are no tests for words. They are also screening tools, but interested users need to be able to change the frequencies, particularly for tinnitus and for aging, and to be able to choose just certain portions of the tests.

The lack of a home audiogram is then extended to a user having virtually no controls to adjust a Cochlear Implant (CI), despite there being no “professional” measure for “sound quality”. This is probably also the case for many hearing aids, even though the user is doing the listening, and the programmer hears nothing, and no standard sound situations are played for evaluation. That may often be necessary, with children for example, but for a person with a good general CI result, it should be possible to adjust the settings to see if they can be optimized.

A CI is also presumed to be a device for just a single ear, yet for someone with a CI and single sided deafness (SSD) the most important thing is for the two ears to complement each other as well as possible. Trying to explore a measure for this, setting headphone balance to only the

good ear, adding just 10% or so of the CI ear adds most of the benefit, and starting with the CI ear, adding just 10% of the good ear does something similar. It is as though for things to feel fairly normal you just need a small amount of input from the 2nd ear (yet you also need to hear as well as possible with both ears.)

So how does progress get made on these topics? It is surprisingly hard to find methods to adjust audio, but perhaps there could be a website that provides tools for measurement and adjustment, and reliable information? That could provide a measure for aural diversity, while also leading to improved results with hearing devices.

(Michael Simpson mjs1@outlook.com)

The Aural Diversity Newsletter is published quarterly.

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