



Aural Diversity

March 1st 2026
Issue #4

Because everybody hears differently!

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Welcome

– By Andrew Hugill

Welcome to Issue #4 of the Aural Diversity Newsletter!

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?*

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

Editorial

– By Andrew Hugill

We now have just under 300 members in the network, with a steady stream of new arrivals alongside the occasional departure. I find that fact both quietly remarkable and encouraging. The membership is international and spans a wide range of fields: from the sciences and medicine to the arts and design; from professional bodies and policy makers to clinicians, researchers and practitioners. It continues to feel like an unusually broad and generous community.

As I wrote recently on the About page of the website:

Today, the concept of Aural Diversity circulates across policy, industry, academia, and creative practice, often independently of the original project structures. It now functions as a broader conceptual lens within discussions of hearing, listening, and inclusion.

Talking of circulation, I have recently given <https://auraldiversity.org> a complete overhaul. It is now responsive across devices, with clearer navigation, updated material, and a refreshed design. Redesigning it made me realise how much has happened over the past few years. I would very much welcome feedback. And if you come across research publications, events, or examples of impact that explicitly reference Aural Diversity, please do send them to info@auraldiversity.org. I try to keep the site as comprehensive as possible, but inevitably I rely on network members to help fill the gaps.

This issue is full of interesting material. I have been genuinely encouraged and, I admit, pleasantly surprised, by the range and quality of what has been submitted. Thank you to everyone who has contributed. Please do keep sending things. The newsletter works best when it reflects the breadth of thinking and experience across the network.

Recent News

Aural Diversity Toolkit

Jemma Jones (Arup) gave a guest lecture on the Aural Diversity Toolkit for the MSc students at UCL as part of the Designing Inclusive Places module run by Toar Sadia in January 2026. Jemma also presented on the Aural Diversity Toolkit at an international workshop on Architecture and Autism - Shared Spaces and Sensory Escapes at the University of Trieste in November 2025.

Amplifying Awareness (Tinnitus UK)

[Amplifying Awareness](#) is a new report by Tinnitus UK, centred on Live Music and Tinnitus. Tinnitus UK has gathered many insights from across the music world, from industry professionals and gigging artists to dedicated fans and festival-goers, to shape a major industry-wide campaign on hearing health and safer listening. (Thanks to Samuel Couth)

Noise Network Plus



Aural Diversity perspectives are well represented within Noise Network Plus, a UKRI-funded network addressing environmental noise and regulatory standards. John Levack Drever, Carmen Rosas Pérez, Jemma Jones, Roger Kirkham, and others, are part of the Inclusive Engineering Group, the Policy, Law and Standards Working Group, and more.

This engagement places Aural Diversity within ongoing debates about acoustic metrics, public health thresholds, and environmental regulation – areas where assumptions about “average” hearing are often embedded but rarely examined.

Silent House



Onurcan Çakır has recently published "An Architectural Design Guideline for Pain Hyperacusis Patients: Silent House Typology" in the journal *Civil Engineering and Architecture*. <https://www.hrpub.org/download/20251130/CEA30-14843036.pdf>

The project subsequently received wider media attention in the *New York Post*, in which an article about pain hyperacusis was published, entitled "Inside the quietest home in the world – which a Turkish architect built for himself out of medical need". <https://nypost.com/2026/01/09/real-estate/inside-the-quietest-home-in-the-world/>

Noise Action Week

– Laura McLeod (Arup) writes:



I'm on the organising committee for the relaunch of [Noise Action Week](#) with the Institute of Environmental Sciences which is 11th-15th May 2026 this year. For Noise Action Week, we're mainly focusing on health effects from noise related to pub/club noise and dog barking (finding that complaints to local authorities have increased post-Covid). As part of this, we're developing materials for schools and using the Aural Diversity Toolkit as a basis for creating KS3 lesson plans: study the personas in the Toolkit, discuss how these personas might respond to dog barking/restaurant noise, how it might be different/similar to your own experience and how we can better design public spaces to be better suited for everyone.

Media

The *Daily Mail* ran a [piece about diplacusis](#) on November 19th 2025, featuring an interview with Andrew Hugill. It was well-written by Pat Hagan (who was not responsible for the somewhat misleading headline).

Bill Bailey's 2007 documentary [The Hunt for the Hum](#), was recently aired again on BBC Radio 4 Extra. He asks various experts why low-frequency noise can cause problems for both humans and whales.

Research

ELIGIBILITY:

- 18+ YEARS OLD
- ONE OR ANY COMBINATION OF THE FOLLOWING:
 - AUTISM SPECTRUM (ASC)
 - ATTENTION DEFICIT (HYPERACTIVITY) DISORDER (AD(H)D)
 - DYSPRAXIA (DCD)
 - DYSLLEXIA
 - TOURETTE'S SYNDROME (TS)
- IDENTIFY AS A MUSICIAN OR AUDIENCE MEMBER IN LIVE MUSIC SETTINGS

PLEASE CONTACT THE RESEARCHER IF YOU WOULD PREFER VOICE RECORDINGS OF QUESTIONS/ANSWERS OR YOUR CONTRIBUTION TO BE HELD IN AN INTERVIEW.

MUSICIANS

AUDIENCES

THIS STUDY IS IN ASSOCIATION WITH DRAKE MUSIC SCOTLAND AND IS FUNDED THROUGH THE ARTS AND HUMANITIES RESEARCH COUNCIL. IT HAS BEEN ETHICALLY APPROVED VIA THE ROYAL NORTHERN COLLEGE OF MUSIC RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE. IF YOU IDENTIFY AS BOTH A MUSICIAN AND AUDIENCE MEMBER, PLEASE COMPLETE THE SURVEY OF WHICH YOU MOST STRONGLY IDENTIFY. IT SHOULD TAKE AROUND 20-30 MINUTES TO COMPLETE. PLEASE DIRECT ANY QUESTIONS OR PREFERENCES OF COMPLETION FORMAT TO ALEX.CHAPMAN@STUDENT.RNCM.AC.UK

Neurodivergent musicians and audiences

– By Alex Chapman

I'm an AHRC researcher based between the RNCM and Drake Music Scotland. This project explores the experiences of neurodivergent musicians and audiences in live music settings and encompasses sensory processing, motivations and engagement, and reasonable adjustments. Eligibility is identification as a musician or audience member in live music settings in addition to one or a combination of the following ND identities: Autism; ADHD; Dyspraxia; Dyslexia; Tourette's.

A pilot was previously conducted to ensure question clarity, effectiveness of responses, and accessibility were approved by the community. Contributions take about 20 minutes to complete and other formats of completion are available (e.g. voice recordings, interviews, etc.) if you feel more comfortable engaging with me/spoken forms. My email address is Alex.Chapman@student.rncm.ac.uk if you would like more information. Links are also available here for direct access: [Musician Survey](#) [Audience Survey](#)

Human Centred Acoustics - More than just a number.

The London Branch of the Institute of Acoustics has issued a call for speakers for a one-day conference on Wednesday 20th May 2026 under the title of [Human Centred Acoustics-More than just a number](#). This event will explore how acoustic environments can better support comfort, wellbeing, and inclusivity, bringing together professionals and researchers working across subjective acoustics, design, and emerging technologies.

Topics of interest include: Designing for inclusivity and diversity; Human-centric acoustic design; Psychoacoustics and soundscapes; Non-acoustic factors influencing perception and comfort; Emerging technologies.

Hospital Noises

Xsara Helmi, PhD Researcher with LAURA (The Leverhulme Trust Aural Diversity Research Doctoral Hub) funded by the Leverhulme Trust, announces her forthcoming article, "HOSPITAL NOISES: Sonic Autobiography and the Embodied Experience of Autistic Auditory Perception – A Transdisciplinary Arts-Practice Inquiry." The paper will appear in *Journal of Creative Research Methods* (Vol. 2, Issue 1), published by Bristol University Press / Policy Press (May 2026; early view from 25 March 2026). Using a phenomenological arts-based approach, it explores autistic auditory experience in hospital environments and introduces new concepts advancing sensory-led research in aural diversity and autism studies.



Creative Work

Frog Fizzles: attention, constraint, and aural diversity

– By Andrew Hugill



[Frog Fizzles](#) is a participatory composition project that treats frogs as “living scores.” Each frog’s observable characteristics, such as call, colour, size, habitat, and activity, are translated into a small set of performance constraints. The resulting fizzles are brief (usually under 30 seconds) and can be realised through sound, voice, musical instruments, everyday objects, or vibrotactile means.

The project is shaped by autistic ways of thinking, with an emphasis on clear systems, brevity, and low pressure. It does not assume listening is only auditory: a fizzle may be sounded, spoken, scraped, tapped, or realised through vibration. No musical training is required, and nothing need be shared. Frog Fizzles is an experiment in how composition can open space for different sensory experiences and ways of participating.

The picture shows *Huia cavitympanum*, the Bornean Hole-in-the-Head Frog, which is the only frog to communicate through ultrasound.

Experts by Experience

Neil Canham

I have had Meniere's disease for around 17 years. In recent years, as a musician, the hardest symptoms to deal with have been bilateral hearing loss and diplacusis, both of which fluctuate wildly. As a former science teacher, I feel compelled to try to understand what is going on and try to explain to others. To that end I run a Facebook support group for Meniere's and have recently taken to writing about both my personal experiences and also the underlying science and physiology. I've been lucky enough to interview a couple of the most prominent Meniere's researchers and have gained a substantial insight into the work that is being conducted. Maybe some of my writing could prove useful to this community too.

- [How does hearing work?](#)
- [Salts, Ions, Hair cells, Fluids, and Sacs](#)
- [Music to my ears](#)

Beverly Biderman

I have a bionic ear: the first successful artificial sense organ ever developed.

When I was born, I was genetically programmed to go deaf, just as my father and his mother before him had. The hair cells in my inner ear, or cochlea, gradually stopped waving in response to sound. They became unresponsive, atrophied, mute. And I became progressively more deaf.

By the age of 12, I was completely unable to understand speech without lip reading, needing my mother (yes!) to act as an intermediary for dates on the phone. It was terrible timing. I did not attend a school for the Deaf: I was mainstreamed, as my parents resisted suggestions that I leave home to attend a special school. I struggled, sometimes trying to pass as hearing due to the widespread stigma of deafness, sometimes succeeding by overcompensating. Because I had become progressively deaf during childhood, I had speech, albeit with a noticeable defect. A speech pathology professor once told me he could draw my audiogram based on my speech. That was because it's very difficult to replicate in your speech what you cannot hear.

But all that changed when I got a cochlear implant as an adult. The tiny implant in my inner ear has 24 electrodes or points of electrical stimulation to artificially replace the 20,000 hair cells in your ear if you have normal hearing. My implant is connected to a hearing aid-like digital processor I wear behind my ear that rapidly converts acoustic sound to electrical signals. These signals pass to the electrodes in my inner ear and then along my auditory nerve to be interpreted as sound by my brain.

Electrical stimulation of the cochlea to treat deafness was at first derided and treated as quackery. Alessandro Volta in the late 18th-century famously experimented on his own ears by connecting two rods to live electric circuits and sticking one in each ear. He reported feeling something like a hard blow to his head and liquid boiling. Understandably, he did not repeat the experiment.

Later, in the 1960s, as the technology was developing in California and Australia, the papers of cochlear-implant researchers were routinely rejected at medical conferences.

But the technology has progressed. Cochlear implantation has become a safe, recognized surgical approach to deafness since 1985 for adults, and since 1990 for children. Opposition to the devices by those in the signing Deaf culture has declined considerably as their success and safety have become more widely understood.

Current devices, while still driven by the same principle of electrode stimulation, have become smaller and smaller and in the near future will become totally implanted. The programming of the devices has become more sophisticated, with fruitful sharing taking place between cochlear implant and hearing aid manufacturers.

When I was first implanted at Sunnybrook Hospital in Toronto, and the current was turned on, what I heard was buzzes and beeps, and voices sounding like Mickey Mouse and Donald Duck. Strange sounds surrounded me. I had no idea that soft plastic bags made a loud rustling noise, that carrots squealed when you sliced them, that dry leaves made whishing sounds as you stepped through them, that the wind makes a lovely sighing sound in the trees.

So I began my language-immersion course, connecting the strange sounds I heard with their sources, and squirrelling the connections away in my brain. Thankfully, the brain is plastic, and the buzzes and beeps and Mickey Mouse voices gradually started to sound normal; some music even sounded pleasant.

I learned to hear not only by identifying sounds but also by listening to children's talking books. My favourite was *Make Way for Ducklings*, which I listened to over and over again. "Mr. and Mrs. Mallard were looking for a place to live ..." At first, the sounds I heard and the text I saw on the page had absolutely no relationship. But slowly, over time, I started to make connections, and began to understand speech even without lip reading. By that time, it was too late for dates over the phone, but never mind. I was happy.

When I threw a stone into a pond, instead of falling soundlessly, it made a satisfying "plunk." I felt connected to the world around me as I had never felt before. The stress of lip reading with almost no sound information, of constantly being on the alert for vehicles that might run over me, for people calling me behind my back, abated. I felt mellow, relaxed, less tired at the end of the day. The worry crease between my eyebrows hasn't yet disappeared, but my face looks noticeably less strained.

I'm still deaf, however. When somebody speaks too quickly on the phone or has a heavy accent, I stumble. When I sleep, I take off my external devices, and hear nothing. I'm completely deaf in the shower and when swimming. But in this very wired age, I'm grateful to be wired for sound.

*Beverly Biderman lives in Toronto. She is the author of **Wired for Sound: A Journey into Hearing**, Rev 2016.*

