

Sounds to Soothe

BY STEPHEN HARRISON

I have had tinnitus for about nine years and I first noticed it after a heavy bout of flu that clogged my ears. Initially it was a slight whistle in my right ear that I could only hear when it was quiet. I went through the U.K. medical system, had an MRI scan, hearing tests and met with a consultant at the end

night, though I do have trouble sometimes.

Initially I tried wearable white noise generators, but found them intrusive and annoying. Because of their position in my ear they slightly muffled external sounds and made it more difficult to hear.

the use of tones as a low cost, inclusive tinnitus therapy.

Theory and Technique

My working theory is that emotional response is the strongest factor in perception of tinnitus. The principal aim of my album is to provide a period of listening that masks tinnitus and relaxes the listener, thus overriding the heightened emotional response to tinnitus. My experience with tinnitus is that relaxation is the hardest thing to achieve, yet it can also be one of the best forms of therapy. In relaxation, the perception of tinnitus is lessened and quality of life is improved. Habituating to tinnitus then becomes easier to work on.

I have synthesized various tones into the music that bring about short periods of silence for me, suppressing and appearing to perceptually "reset" the tinnitus tones. These are combined with sounds that I have observed and that others have reported to mask and soothe their tinnitus. The music that has been specifically written to induce relaxation.

The music has a 10 hertz (Hz) frequency underlying the other tracks throughout, with the use of various effects at a constant pace. This corresponds to the brain's frequency when in the Alpha State (8-12 Hz), often known as wakeful relaxation.

I see the album as an aid for sufferers in difficult times and as an alternative to standard relaxation, water or noise CDs. I believe it will be useful as a partner to habituation treatments.

Stephen's new CD, "Sounds to Soothe" is available in the ATA store at ATA.org/store/harrison. (CC

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of the process. I was told I had a slight hearing loss in the mid-range of my right ear that was causing the noise I heard, and was told that there was no cure and nothing they could offer to help.

My tinnitus is bilateral, however I have a much louder whistle in my right ear than the high pitch whistle in my left one. I tend to notice my tinnitus above most ambient noise unless it is fairly loud. I also suffer from hyperacusis but have managed to tolerate sound again by constantly reminding myself that it isn't going to hurt me and by continuing to expose myself to sound, no matter how hard it is. I used to cringe at the sound of cutlery jangling, vehicle brakes and any compressed air release. Now I just wince a bit. I'm lucky enough that I can still sleep at

I am a musician, so I have a very serious attitude about my hearing. I need to have balance and clarity in the music and external sounds that I hear. I graduated with degrees in Popular Music and Music Production from Newcastle College. I studied there for four years, and then worked as a DJ for two years before ending up working in construction. Somewhere along this path, I believe I damaged my ears that caused the tinnitus I have today.

Music has always been my passion. I have a modest production setup at home and have kept writing, creating and enjoying it. I hope that in the future I can concentrate full time on composing music as an aid for tinnitus sufferers, possibly researching