

## The dangers of being a musician

### **Many musicians suffer from hearing loss.**

It can result from the booming drums or the blaring guitar amplifiers of a hard-rock group. But it can also result from the violin or the piccolo flute of a symphony orchestra.

For a musician whose livelihood depends on rehearsing and playing music 4-8 hours a day, the danger of a hearing impairment is always present.

Deafness or hearing impairment resulting from prolonged exposure to loud noise is most frequently associated with industrial workplaces, airports etc. The damaging effects of this kind of noise are also the most studied type of noise-induced hearing loss.

But according to an article in "The Hearing Review", February 1999, by otolaryngologist Ken Einhorn, up to 52 % of classical musicians and up to 30 % of rock or pop musicians suffer from music-induced hearing loss, MIHL.

It is hardly surprising that music can cause damage while on the job. The sound pressure of a large concert orchestra may reach 112 dB - of amplified rock bands even up to 130 dB, far more than that accepted in an industrial environment.

For the musicians who are regularly subjected to this kind of noise, the resulting problems can be devastating. Symptoms begin with losing the ability to hear high-frequency sounds and tones. In many cases, this causes problems for musicians and singers who must be able to hear and play high notes equally as well as low ones in order to play or sing along with other orchestra members. Often, a musician who suffers from loss of high frequency hearing will try to compensate by playing louder at high-pitched notes, which leads to an artistically unacceptable performance.

As the problem grows, the musician might react oversensitively: suffer from increased blood pressure, headaches, fatigue or experience some sounds or instruments as being painfully loud, a state that often leads to tinnitus.

Another common symptom is the inability to perceive changes in pitch. This state, known as displacusis, is extremely problematic for singers, who have to be in control of their voice and stay in tune at all times. A hearing-impaired singer is also at risk of damaging his or her voice by constantly singing louder in order to monitor his/her own voice.

There is no cure for MIHL, but the use of modern hearing instruments is gaining more acceptance among musicians.

