Protecting Your Hearing Health

• Hearing health is essential to your lifelong success as a musician.

• Noise-induced hearing loss is largely preventable. You must avoid overexposure to loud sounds, especially for long periods of time.

• The closer you are to the source of a loud sound, the greater the risk of damage to your hearing mechanisms.

• Risk of hearing loss is based on a combination of sound or loudness intensity and duration.

• Loudness intensity is measured in decibels (dB).

• Recommended maximum daily exposure times (NIOSH) to sounds at or above 85 dB are as follows:
  o 85 dB (vacuum cleaner, MP3 player at 1/3 volume) – 8 hours
  o 90 dB (blender, hair dryer) – 2 hours
  o 94 dB (MP3 player at 1/2 volume) – 1 hour
  o 100 dB (MP3 player at full volume, lawnmower) – 15 minutes
  o 110 dB (rock concert, power tools) – 2 minutes
  o 120 dB (jet planes at take-off) – without ear protection, sound damage is almost immediate

• Sounds over 85 dB (your typical vacuum cleaner) in intensity pose the greatest risk to your hearing.

• Certain behaviors (controlling volume levels in practice and rehearsal, avoiding noisy environments, turning down the volume) reduce your risk of hearing loss. Be mindful of those MP3 earbuds. See chart above.

• According to the most recent research, controlling volume by playing with a variety of dynamic ranges is one of the best ways to protect your hearing in any practice or performance environment, regardless of room size.

• The use of earplugs and earmuffs helps to protect your hearing health in cases where you cannot control volume (e.g., performances of loud music), but is not as effective as. Foam earplugs are available in the dean's assistant's office for your use in loud situations. Brass and percussion players may want to invest in custom molded earplugs.

• Day-to-day decisions can impact your hearing health, both now and in the future. Since sound exposure occurs in and out of school, you also need to learn more and take care of your own hearing health on a daily basis. See other resources on this page for more information, and consider enrolling in the Healthy Musicianship course.

• If you are concerned about your personal hearing health, contact Olin Health Center.

• If you are concerned about your hearing health in relationship to your program of study, consult Judy Palac, chair of the Musicians' Wellness Team.

National Association of Schools of Music and the Performing Arts Medicine Association
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