

# In Praise of Hearing Better

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At the height of one's career as a band director, having a hearing check-up can be daunting. After all, those of us who teach band count on our sense of hearing as one of our primary diagnostic tools. Furthermore, it is part of our collective identity as music educators—we are people who actively engage our hearing in every class and rehearsal.

“What will people think if I start wearing hearing aids?!”

Many of us, myself included, have made statements like this, “Those judges need to have their hearing aids checked.”

However, we would never ridicule someone who wears glasses or contact lenses. On the contrary, we would be horrified at the idea of someone driving who needs help correcting vision issues but doesn't wear corrective lenses.

We, as a society, must change our attitudes about hearing aids: people who wear hearing aids are doing something to improve their hearing! In the same way that glasses bring our vision up to standard, hearing aids do the same for our ability to process sounds. Our profession should lead the way in promoting the idea of good hearing health, both preventative and corrective.

There is another misconception we as music educators need to eradicate: people who wear hearing aids have a deficiency in hearing pitch. Pitch acuity and hearing loss are two different things. Many people who need hearing aids have lost

the ability to sort the frequencies of certain consonant sounds, but that is completely different than the ability to hear pitches, intervals and chords.

To quote Dr. Ross Tonini from an online article in the *Baylor College of Medicine News*, “Generally, it's assumed that rock and rollers are at greater risk for hearing loss, but it's actually classical musicians that have higher rates of noise-induced hearing loss.” [www.bcm.edu/news/ear-nose-and-throat/hearing-loss-musicians-not-rock-and-rollers](http://www.bcm.edu/news/ear-nose-and-throat/hearing-loss-musicians-not-rock-and-rollers). Prolonged loud sounds can damage hearing acuity, even starting in beginner band.

Drumline participants have led the way, using earplugs for years. Some piccolo players, even in symphony orchestras, wear hearing protection in their left ears. Music educators should investigate the issues of hearing loss caused by prolonged loud sounds.

Fascinating information can be found online in the *Hearing Review*, including these articles about earplugs designed especially for musicians: [www.hearingreview.com/2014/07/high-notes-musicians-earplugs](http://www.hearingreview.com/2014/07/high-notes-musicians-earplugs) and [www.hearingreview.com/2015/12/unt-develops-new-approach-assessing-musicians-earplugs](http://www.hearingreview.com/2015/12/unt-develops-new-approach-assessing-musicians-earplugs).

Preventative measures, such as the wearing of hearing protection, must become a concern for all of us who teach.

Corrective measures are also important. Have your hearing checked sooner rather than later. Most importantly, if hearing aids are suggested by your audiologist, wear

them with pride! Wearing hearing aids is a sign of a person who has chosen to improve his/her hearing, and we should admire that.

Rather than thinking “oh great, another concert adjudicator with hearing aids,” let us think “thank goodness that judge is taking good care of his/her hearing!” A judge wearing glasses will see the score better with them than without; a judge wearing hearing aids will hear the sounds with more clarity than without them.

Let's commit to making better hearing health a priority for our students and for ourselves, and let's commit to understanding the advantages we all share when one in our profession wears hearing aids.

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