

# Bark for Bach



"...and this next piece is by Poochini."

Pic © NH/Shutterstock.com

Do dogs appreciate music? And can particular genres have an effect on their behaviour? **Claire Jackson** looks at some interesting research from the USA.

**D**oes your pet prefer Puccini to pop, or Bach to the blues? New research suggests that classical music may have a beneficial effect on canine behaviour and even improve a dog's overall well-being.

Dr Lori Kogan, associate professor at Colorado State University, analysed the effect that different types of music can have on dogs in rescue shelters. Over a period of

four months, she assessed the behaviour of 117 dogs of various breeds, all from the same kennels. Of the sample, 83 were temporary boarders and 34 were rescued Dachshunds.

"We played several different varieties of music, including one created specifically for animals, and we looked at vocalisation and body movement – sleeping or other activity – and nervous body shaking," Dr Kogan

explains. "We found that the dogs were most relaxed when listening to classical music."

## CALMING CLASSICS

The dogs were exposed to 45 minutes of three different genres of music – classical, heavy metal and compositions edited specifically for animals from Through a Dog's Ear (see 'Balancing Bach', page 39). The rescue shelter dogs' behaviour was recorded every five minutes. The results suggested that classical music leads to kennelled dogs spending more time sleeping and less time vocalising than when exposed to other music types, or to no music.

"There have been numerous studies that have examined the impact that classical music can have on humans and we can make certain generalisations," Dr Kogan continues. "We know that classical music tends to relax people, and heavy metal tends to agitate or energise them, and I think we see similar trends in animals.

"My interest lies in applied research for things that make the world better for humans and animals. To me, if we can enrich a shelter environment through something that is fairly low-cost and easy to do – like music – then I think we should pay attention."

Dogs are thought to benefit



Various classical compilation CDs are available for canines – and their owners.

from listening to music that has a moderate tempo, medium pitch and clear texture. Baroque and classical works are ideal, and some romantic era pieces are also suitable.

Last year record label Decca released *Classical Music for Dogs*, a compilation of pieces carefully selected to

delight a doggy audience. The download-only collection (available from iTunes) features works by Bach (who else?), Beethoven and Debussy, as well as Saint-Saëns, Elgar, Grieg and Rimsky-Korsakov's 'The Flight of the Bumble Bee'.

Dr Kogan's study featured works by Beethoven, Strauss

## Classical music primer for dogs

- Pachelbel – Canon in D.
- Chopin – Nocturne No 5 in F sharp, Op 15, No 2.
- Vaughan Williams – The Lark Ascending.
- Debussy – Arabesque 1.
- Einaudi – Two Sunsets.

and Bach and overall there seemed little difference in the reaction from the dogs to the different composers.

Several companies have taken the selection process further and refined compositions especially for dogs, such as the US website Canine Lullabies, which offers classical lullabies orchestrated to the rhythm of the human heartbeat and claims to 'reduce barking, reduce hyperactivity, minimise thunder phobia, and calm whimpering puppies'.

## BALANCING BACH

Lisa Spector is co-founder of Through a Dog's Ear, an organisation that specialises in music therapy for the prevention and treatment of canine anxiety. Through a Dog's Ear provides music for owners to play to their dogs, and its portfolio includes the iCalmDog, a portable player preloaded with piano music. Lisa, a Juilliard School trained musician and dog-lover, worked closely with a veterinary neurologist to create her canine music – with fascinating results.

"We bring dogs into our world and we expect them to adjust to our human environment, filled with a variety of crazy sounds, smells and visuals," explains Lisa, who owns two Labradors – Sanchez, 11, and Gina, five. "Through a Dog's Ear music provides balance for dogs. It also calms their people. As we all know, feelings get transferred down the leash. Our dogs will sense what we are feeling, so if we can add calm to our lives, our dogs also benefit."

Through a Dog's Ear focuses on 'simple sound' and its music minimises the intricate auditory information found in most classical works. The idea is

that the details in conventional music can be too much for both humans and dogs if they are experiencing health difficulties.

However, Dr Kogan's study indicated that such edited music might not be as effective as straight classical melodies: "Both boarded and rescue dogs responded to all the classical music selections by sleeping more than they did during exposure to any other type of auditory stimulation.

"However, this is one study. There is a need for follow-up studies looking at music altered for animals before we can make a strong determination one way or another."

## SOUND & STIMULATION

There are several things to consider when exposing your dog to electronic sound.

"Dogs have a very sensitive hearing system and can often be on alert," says Lisa Spector. "Many people leave the TV on for their dog when they are home alone. But TV can be filled with all sorts of stimulating sounds – gunshots, doorbells ringing, trucks and so on.

"Even classical music (as originally written) can be very complex for dogs. A classical radio station will often play loud pieces written for a full orchestra when they are trying to energise their human listeners at 3pm, but that may not be best for calming dogs."

Of course, the music we share with our dogs must be carefully chosen and sensitively administered, but there is much to be gained from playing Mozart to your mutt.

"Sound is a potent energy that is not to be taken for granted," concludes Lisa. "It has a profound effect on all species." ●

## About the author



**Claire Jackson** is a classical music journalist and editor of *International Piano*

magazine. Bow, her Miniature Dachshund, enjoys works by Mozart, Bach and Vivaldi.