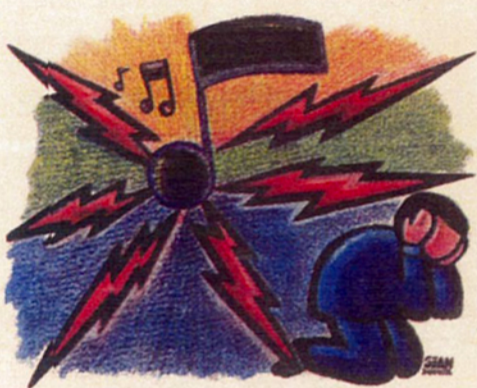


# N Echoes of a noisy world

Would you like to live in a soundless world or a noiseless world? SANJIV MALVI gives you a choice, in the first of his series on hi-fi

**E**arly on a Sunday afternoon, a few of us were sitting in the cool ambience of a restaurant sipping tea, discussing the government's new policies and what the future holds for India. One of my friends suddenly remarked, "Oh let's talk of lighter matters, let's crack a joke. I've been rattled all morning because of the hammering in my neighbour's flat ... the noise pollution!" What can you expect in a city like Bombay? You are not in the Himalayas, where you can experience the peace that silence

are widely used even today by mothers to help their little ones ease off into a state of slumber. It's the sounds and not the meanings which help babies relax. Even as adults we may have experienced panic and fear at the crack of lightning and the roar of thunder. All this must certainly show us how deeply sounds can affect us. How deeply they interact with our emotional state. Research has shown that it is the blasting sounds of explosions in the war which cause the most damage to the nervous system of soldiers. Fortunately there is a



and solitude can bring, nor are you in some fantasy land where beautiful sounds and music can conquer your mood. You can only cheer up and listen to the music in the background. I just then happened to mention how vital an ingredient sound is in our lives. Often we find certain sounds irritate us, certain sounds soothe us, sounds almost magically seem to alter our moods. Suddenly I found that the onus was on me, after all I was the audio specialist. In a moment, our discussion seemed to head in a new direction.

Those of us accustomed to the din of Bombay would naturally prefer a nice and quiet place to unwind in. The words 'nice' and 'quiet' go hand in hand and this is not a coincidence. Few people hate a quiet place and fewer still would consider going out of their way to relax in a place, where a jet plane takes off every 10 seconds.

Yes of course, we must bear in mind that depending on our mood we may choose a discotheque to let our hair down in, in lieu of a quiet place. Now isn't that some sort of an anomaly? Choosing a very noisy place to relax in? No, not at all. This brings us on to a

## SOUND TREATMENT

very interesting distinction between music and noise. A very lay distinction would be; music is what pleases the ear and noise is what irritates. Some might even say noise is what the neighbours make. Well in a more rational light, musical sounds have a definite periodicity, a definite level of loudness and any change in these are properly governed. On the other hand, noise is totally random in loudness and periodicity.

Let's concentrate on how much sound affects us. A classic example being the fact that at a discotheque or a party, while dancing our body movements change according to the beat. Have you noticed that most fast food restaurants have music with a fast beat? Did you realize that this could induce you to eat faster? You certainly can't relax or lounge about when the background music is fast. You may even find yourself chewing to the beat.

Different people prefer different types of music, really the same person could be attracted to different trends of music at different times. This depends so much on a person's mood. Different sounds and our emotional states have a direct correlation. In fact, have you noticed how much, the trendy music of the '60s is different from that of today? In a general sense today's music is much faster. This, I believe, is a reflection of an increased pace of life.

An increasing number of doctors have started recommending the use of recorded sounds, produced in the womb, to soothe new-born babies. The traditional lullabies

growing awareness amongst us about sound, about noise pollution.

Imagine yourself in a world with noiseless traffic, noiseless factories and silent neighbours and mothers-in-law. I was about to suggest an interesting experiment of observing ourselves and due reactions to different kinds of sounds when suddenly my friend's two-year-old let out a loud scream. She was obviously hungry. This scream broke up the peaceful atmosphere and we decided to call it a day.