



THE MAD MINUTE

with **PETER BLAMEY**

Hearing Scientist



Turning the volume up to 11? Be warned, rock gigs pump out sounds similar to battlefields, says this hearing-software inventor.

Q. What's your favourite Melbourne sound?

A. The roar of the MCG when Hawthorn's playing.

Q. Are Melbourne music fans wrecking their hearing at gigs?

A. Not if they're careful about it. There's all sorts of technology, you can buy hearing protectors that regulate the amount of noise you hear. It's a piece of plastic that you can put in your ear. Most musicians use it while they're playing, they're the ones at risk.

Q. How do you tell if you're going deaf?

A. It's a matter of common sense. If you're finding that you're not hearing, that people need to attract your attention, that's a warning sign. Usually other people will tell you. If you're hearing a ringing sound in your ear, that can be a sign too.

Q. How do you diplomatically tell a friend they're deaf?

A. It's not easy. But you need to be sure that you're right, and just talk to them about how communication used to be a lot easier. About one in 1000 children are born with a serious hearing problem. By the time you're 60 or 70, it's about one in two.

Q. What are the main causes of hearing loss for people in their 20s?

A. Travelling in aeroplanes, diving, ear infections, explosions. It's important to notice hearing loss early because there's things we can do about it now and help you before it's too late. Hearing aids these days have a tiny computer inside them that's more powerful than your first PC. The levels of noise you get in a rock concert are getting close to the level of sound soldiers are exposed to.

Q. How do you protect your hearing?

A. I wear noise-cancelling headphones when I travel on a plane. It's mostly the hum of the engine – you're listening to it at quite a high level for quite a long time. Either wear earplugs or use noise-cancelling headsets.

Q. Australia exports hearing aids to Europe. What do they like about our technology?

A. The main thing for people is to have something that's comfortable and audible and our technology is much better than the amplifiers that have been used before.

Q. Which singer makes you wish you were deaf?

A. Bob Dylan.

Q. Is it true that you shouldn't use cotton buds in your ears?

A. Yeah, because it's such a sensitive mechanism and the eardrum is part of that. One of the interesting things about ears is the wax is an insect repellent. It discourages insects from crawling in.

Q. What's your suggestion for making the volume of TV ads sound like the program?

A. You can already buy a device that does that. It detects the difference between the program and the ad and limits the volume.

Q. Are ears erotic?

A. Absolutely, yes. There's nothing I like better than having my ear tickled.

■ *Hearing week runs until Saturday.*

— with **INGA GILCHRIST**