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Some Protection Is Good; Too Much Is Not Good

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> The Parvum Bonum, Plus Melius Fallacy in Earplug Selection
> pp. 415-433.
> In Recent Developments in hearing instrument technology
> 15th Danavox Symposium, 1993, Ed. Joel Beilin and Gert Jensen.

SOMETHING ABOUT MEAD

This book chapter came out in a very prestigious publication, despite having only two of these symposia proceedings on my bookshelf. Only “invited” speakers of a very high calibre were invited to participate, and Mead, as always, was among the invited. This chapter appeared 5 years after the introduction of the ER15 musicians’ earplug and, to a certain extent, expressed frustration with the initial uptake of the product. Part of the issue is that the ER15 earplug was so novel, and many musicians were hesitant to try something new after previous attempts at hearing protection had failed them so miserably. I conducted an internal study in 1992 in which only about 1/3 of musicians agreed to get the ER15 (or the ER25 for drummers), but by 1997, almost all musicians I saw (94%) agreed to get them. Mead also had a great ability to “shock” readers by introducing Latin to our audiology set of tools- “Parvum bonum, plus melius” roughly translated as “a little is good; more is better” which, when it comes to music, is indeed a fallacy- 15 dB is exactly what is required in the vast majority of situations… and 30 or 40 dB of attenuation would be not only “not good” but unnecessarily too much. I especially like the Acknowledgements section, “The author is indebted to my teachers in this field…” It shows an amazing trait: we never stop learning and need to always be open to new information.

SUMMARY

The Outline of this chapter includes four sections – why musicians require the ER15; why most factory workers need more than 15 dB of attenuation (but not all); the problems with non-musicians’ earplugs for factory workers; and other solutions based on both the work of Elmer Carlson and Elliott Berger. Industrial-strength hearing protection attenuates higher frequencies more than lower ones, essentially creating the equivalent of a high-frequency (conductive) loss, with loss of important speech sounds that contribute to speech clarity and some factory warning signals.

Annotated by: Marshall Chasin