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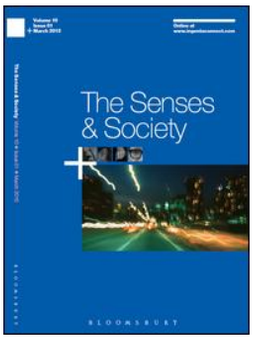

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Charlie Haden's earplugs

Daniel Fishkin

Composition and Computer Technologies, Department of Music, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA, USA

ABSTRACT

"Charlie Haden's Earplugs" explores how tinnitus, hyperacusis and misophonia have shaped the musicality and sonic production of the jazz bassist and composer. While Haden maintained a negative attitude toward his hearing damage over the course of his long musical career, viewing it as a limitation and a source of difficulty, this paper brings together evidence to suggest that Haden's condition also provided him a productive means to exert control over his sonic reality. In this way, these maligned conditions are part and parcel of Haden's personal engagement with the world, and therefore, part of his creative process and distinct aesthetic. This analysis is accomplished by a forensic account of Haden's listening particularities through his interviews, as well an analysis of his approach as an improvising partner. This paper also draws from extant models of disability studies to explore the concept of "deaf-gain" and how it may be transposed to the disorders from which Haden suffered. There are to-date many well-established accounts of the deaf experience in disability studies and in music scholarship. This paper offers insight to another cluster of hearing dysfunction, which not only suggests a new paradigm for imagining disability in music, but also revises the very concept of hearing as it is commonly understood.

KEYWORDS

Tinnitus; misophonia; hyperacusis; jazz; bass; disability studies

Bass

This essay begins with a mental picture of Charlie Haden.[1]

Haden, the heart of the rhythm section, yet far away from the drummer, weathered with age, on his platform riser higher than all other musicians, his body reflected by his iconic thick Plexiglas baffles, standing inside his earplugs and his bass, improvising with his eyes closed. Haden joked that he played with his eyes closed because he was always surrounded by bass elders like Mingus and Paul Chambers.[2] Haden was born with perfect pitch – did shutting his eyes aid him in tuning into his internal pitch barometer? He enfolds himself around his bass, crouching his head all the way down by the bridge, as if to get to the very source of his sound. I am not merely watching him play, but watching him listen.

There is another way to analyze this image-one that constitutes a wholly different kind of hearing. Haden suffers from hyperacusis and tinnitus. Look again at the earplugs and Plexiglas baffles that Haden uses, doubly, to protect from the loud sound of his

CONTACT Daniel Fishkin daniel.fiction@gmail.com

collaborators and to accentuate the sound of his bass, its hollow, wooden frame resonating against and with his body. In the light of this remediation, we can reconsider his closed eyes. Haden is doubling his concentration in order to hear the world of sound *outside* over the ringing *inside*, and vice versa, the *inside* over *outside*—to assert his musical choices over the vexing too-loud sound of his band-mates, and to differentiate those musical choices from the other non-cochlear sounds at play in his auris: the unhearable tinnitus that drones beyond each stroke of his fingers on the strings.

The sound-taming baffles are a recurring metaphor in Haden's visual iconography.[3] In his late career, Haden stood behind these baffles, sometimes all the way across the stage, to create distance from potentially loud sound. Yet, comprehensive analysis or even speculation about his hearing damage is not as easily found; when mentioned, it is often noted in passing. A short interview with Haden by Michael Jarrett (1998) highlights his frustration around his condition, which might speak to this paucity of literature:

> Tinnitus is a ringing in the ears that develops in people genetically. Mine developed standing next to cymbals, and having very sensitive ears.[4] I developed the condition at a very young age, and it got worse as I kept playing and didn't protect my ears. Then I started wearing earplugs. All along I had another condition which I didn't know but found out about ten years ago, called hyperacusis, which is extreme sensitivity to loud sound. It's like the volume is turned up in my head. A lot of people—when they have tinnitus—they lose their hearing. With me, my hearing has become more and more acute. Every time I take a hearing test, I go off the scale. I hear too much.

Is that a mixed blessing or just a curse?

> It's a curse. Right now, as I'm talking to you, I've got an earplug in my left ear. . . . When I play a concert, I have Plexiglas around the drums. I actually have to play on a big stage to distance myself from the drums. It's a real strain on me emotionally, physically, and creatively. Sometimes, even though I can hear everything, it's at a delay because I'm so far away from everything.

You're an exceptionally melodic bass player. I wonder if your condition actually contributed to that?

> No. If I had a wish in my life it would be that I didn't have these conditions. If you heard the ringing that I have in my head, you'd run down the street screaming. I've gotten accustomed to it now. I just accept it as a part of my being. But if I stop and think about it, it can really drive me nuts (Jarrett 1998, 47).

I hear too much. Is Haden complaining, or boasting?[5] Clearly, his hearing damage is not an asset, but a persistent detriment with which he has learned to cope. In this essay, I want to earnestly reconsider the suggestion of the interviewer. Without necessarily concluding that Haden's conditions have helped his innate melodic sense, this pessimistic dialogue indicates very succinctly that Haden's music has been indisputably shaped by his inner soundworld.[6] It doesn't matter if Haden mourns his hearing damage, or finds it interesting on some level. This passage lays bare a very simple truth – Haden's hearing is indisputably one of his chief musical influences. Psychoanalyst Monroe Street, in his prescient essay "Tinnitus, Speaking," suggests that the symptoms of disordered hearing might be a palpable way through which a sufferer can exert control over their life: "Tinnitus appears to be a way of achieving some semblance of 'autonomy' – that is, of being the one who decides how sound will be made and what sounds will be heard" (Street 2022).

Jazz is improvised music, and as such the real "work" of a jazz legend might be found equally at the concert hall rather than recorded in textbooks. An anecdote shared by T. J. Borden (personal communication n.d.) helps fill in the silences around Haden's hearing: "I saw him play once … he was playing duo with a local piano player and he kept telling him to play quieter to the point where it was getting absurd, at which point he told him to stop playing altogether." Haden quite actively conducts his amateur forte-piano partner throughout a progressive range of *piano* and *pianissimo*, concluding *al niente* before taking control with a bass solo. Haden's hearing, then, might be a kind of unwritten musical score.

In a revealing interview with AllAboutJazz, Haden discusses his frustration with the "dysfunctional mediocrity" of the pop radio hits that he hears played over loudspeakers as background music (my emphasis added):

> It's very tragic, because it's everywhere you go. If you have a supermarket nearby and you go to get some milk or whatever, you're going to hear it. If you go to the Gap, or you go to Bloomingdale's or any type of clothing store, you're going to hear it. Chances are, you're going to hear it very loud. *I have to put earplugs in when I go shopping*. It's so sad. But I don't want to expose my insides to this ugliness. It's wasteful. I don't think people realize it. (Deluke 2004)

Haden is not merely annoyed – he must exert acoustic control on his surroundings just to go shopping. While he does not use the term, these responses could constitute the condition now known as misophonia, or, hatred of sound. Misophonia, along with tinnitus and hyperacusis, is the final note in a dark triad of hearing conditions that stem from the problem of sonic excess. The Top 40 hits surrounding him are *tragic* and *ugly* and *wasteful*—and notably, not merely loud in the acoustic world, but in the emotional domain. Haden goes on, bemoaning the degradation of creativity in society, which he describes as sonic violence:

> It's insulting. Disrespecting… It's like: everybody calls this [in Iraq] a war. It's not a war, it's an invasion. It's an attack. It's an occupation. That's what's happening with [sterile, uncreative, even hostile music]. It's like being violated. It forces something on you that you really don't want. When I get on an airplane, I say "please turn that stuff off." Sometimes they do, and if they don't, I put in earplugs.

Haden's comparison of bad music with the US invasion of Iraq surprises me every time I read it. Haden was a political person, and his politics were intertwined – perhaps inextricably – with his creative expression. For example, in 1971, Haden was jailed in Portugal for speaking out against the fascist Caetano Regime prior to performing his "Song for Che," which he dedicated to the Black liberation movements of Mozambique and Angola (Goodman and Haden 2006). Haden's comment on the Iraq war is thus not frivolous – for Haden, striving for beautiful music is on par with fighting for democracy – they are each different aspects of the fight for freedom.

This stark statement, thus, clarifies that music is almost a matter of life and death for Charlie Haden.[7] Yet I can't help but feel a little sorry for Haden, who maybe received the wrong message from bad audiologists about guarding his hearing, therefore inheriting the wrong tools for sonic warfare. Pawel Jastreboff,[8] one of the leading medical researchers on tinnitus, speaking to media scholar Mack Hagood, suggests "The auditory system needs sound like the body needs food;" Hagood (2019) subsequently suggests that

tinnitus actually gets *stronger* when the auditory cortex is deprived of sound, whether by hearing loss or earplugs, "a phenomenon comparable to a sound engineer turning up the volume on a weak signal and thus amplifying the amplifier's inherent noise – the aforementioned random firing of synapses." (46)

Hagood, responding to Jastreboff's analysis of tinnitus and its reinforcement via the limbic system, goes on to articulate another critical point – if you worry about your tinnitus, if you are told that tinnitus is incurable, perhaps, by a doctor with poor bedside manner, it will *get worse*. "In the case of the tinnitus sufferer, a negative association attaches to tinnital sound, networking with the limbic system, creating a sense of fear or annoyance and reflexively activating a 'fight-or-flight' response in the autonomic nervous system . . . . Once made, these neural connections have a tendency to strengthen in a vicious circle, further increasing the perceived presence and volume of tinnitus. This feedback loop of suffering is a conditioned reflex" (Hagood 2019, 59). In other words, having tinnitus is not just *hearing* your ears ringing, but *fearing* your ears ringing.

But Haden's tinnitus isn't the problem here—*other sounds* are. It is crucial to realize that Haden is not speaking about merely the loudness surrounding him, but bad music. The aforementioned feedback loop[9] is not a cycle of pain, but generative. It is autopoiesis in action. From Haden's displeasure springs forth the intention to put beauty and peace into society. His earplugs are key: through his listening practices, Haden delineates his aesthetic convictions in the acoustic world.

These convictions come into focus on the bandstand. Let us turn to a fellow sideman – Marc Ribot explores the meaning of volume and tinnitus, in his essay *Earplugs*: "As soon as I started to play in public, I began to experience the struggle between the 'power' of my amp and the social and economic power of band leaders, club owners, paying members of the audience, etc.—the ones Sartre was talking about when he said, 'Hell is other people.' . . . The relation between amp wattage and social power can be even stickier within bands . . . you turn up, so I turn up, so you turn up, etc. . . . the only possible end point is the limit of human endurance" (Zorn 2000, 236).

Ribot suggests that the "shamans are cheating" by using earplugs – that musicians need to encounter the physicality of their loud sound undiluted. But Haden has used those earplugs to compose a different sonic outcome. Any jazz bass player can relate to the frustrating acoustical hierarchy of the rhythm section – the piano is always brilliantly loud, and the bass, muffled and not suited for sound projection, is sequestered under all the other instruments. Yet, Haden transcended this pecking order with his recurring interest in the duo format – a more delicate musical encounter grounded in a more sensuous relationship to silence – and also one is unmistakably, private, and intimate. Tinnitus, hyperacusis, and misophonia are *subjective* phenomena – no one else can share his experiences directly. Thus, these personal hearings of sound drive Haden to make an intimate music. Haden's earplugs are not a crutch as Ribot is suggesting, but rather they are synecdoche for his entire way of listening to the world, and thereafter responding to it. These earplugs are not a passive dilution of acoustic force, but a vehicle for sonic selectivity.

Dark listening

Here, I'd like to invoke a term to encompass the particular cluster of hearing problems, including tinnitus, hyperacusis and misophonia, that represent a fraught surplus: *Dark*

Listening (Fishkin and Hagood 2022). In doing so I seek to forge a connection between these perceptual phenomena not solely as medical conditions (ie, diseases you can get), but as a way of hearing not entirely different in praxis from other forms of embodied listening in the avant-garde, (such as Oliveros' Deep Listening, Michel Chion's three Modes of Listening), though entirely different in emotional tenor. I contend that to listen darkly is not merely to gain access to both a heightened sonic awareness and fraught emotional relationship to sound, but also to develop an embodied method for controlling one's sonic world through a diverse means of technological and aesthetic practices.

Let me offer a colloquial analogy to explain what I mean. *Dark Listening* is succinctly demonstrated every day at tinnitus support groups. Already a worldwide phenomenon long before social media, there are countless versions of these networks for Tinnitus sufferers now on Facebook, which I frequent every day. There is even a "Tinnitus Success Stories" group (https://www.facebook.com/groups/TinnitusSuccess/), which, in a twist of dark humor, hosts weekly posts by new members daunted by the lack of success there – they had hoped to find hope, but instead find countless armchair experts of tinnital suffering. These listeners are hyper-attuned to their individuated hearing: they know what their triggers are, they know what medicines help, and they know what makes it worse. They are already listening darkly.

Dark Listening is, of course, a tongue-in-cheek reference to the ubiquitous philosophy of the experimental composer, Pauline Oliveros. While her early career contributions to American electronic music are vast, Oliveros broke artistic ground with her landmark *Sonic Meditations*, a collection of text scores meant to be performed by *anyone*, regardless of musical pedigree. These pieces collapse the boundaries between performer/audience – they take place in the listening ear of the performer, who then hears the piece herself. Take, for example, her piece, *Native*, whose entire score reads, "*Take a walk at night. Walk so silently that the bottoms of your feet become ears*" (Oliveros 1974). *Sonic Mediations* led Oliveros to formalize the practice of *Deep Listening*:

> I began with myself. I started to sing and play long tones, and to listen and observe how these tones affected me mentally and physically. I noticed that I could change my emotional state by concentrating my attention on a tone. I noticed that I could feel my body responding with relaxation or tension. Prolonged practice brought about a heightened state of awareness that gave me a sense of well-being. (Oliveros 2005)

For Oliveros, the direction of her attention is critical to extend the passive process of hearing into its active form. However, the restorative sonic healing praxis offered by *Deep Listening* might not be attainable for all ears. Curiously, if a person with tinnitus, hyperacusis, or misophonia attempts to do the work of deep listening, the meditative sonic spotlight resultant from active listening might simply amplify their symptom, as well as the anxiety and frustration attached to it.[10] This observation underscores the previously-discussed conclusions of Jastreboff and Hagood – simply by deep listening to tinnitus, you become better at hearing it, thus making it louder. In this regard, it's perhaps no surprise that Oliveros (2022) would note, "*Deep Listening* is a birthright for all *healthy* humans" – the emphasis is my own.

Oliveros' approach is just one of countless sonic manifestos of the avant-garde. The tradition of experimental music pushes *listening* to the center of the practice of music, and as such, we can look to nearly any significant personality in the history of experimentalism

for a personalized formulation of listening. Yet many of these formulations share similar insufficiencies. Elsewhere I have discussed at length John Cage's famous discovery in the anechoic chamber – where he first realized that silence does not exist (Fishkin 2016). Tinnitus complicates Cage's revelation. Simply put: if a person with tinnitus listens to *4'33"*, rather than hearing the unintended sounds of their environment *outside*, they will simply hear their own ears ringing *inside*. While that experience may retain the lack of intentionality that Cage intended, surely it contains none of Cage's sonic curiosity. Tinnitus may destroy one's opportunity to hear Cage's piece or inscribe itself as a permanent soloist in each performance of it.

Thus, the different forms of hearing damage challenge seminal pedagogies of listening in the avant-garde, possibly rendering them useless in practical terms, or worse, assaulting them conceptually. Combined with the sheer ubiquity of noise-induced hearing loss and tinnitus, this suggests we might need a new school of sound to figure out how to listen, when listening itself goes off the rails.

Tinnitus, hyperacusis, and misophonia remain poorly understood in musical discourse as well as Western medicine. As articulated by Jastreboff (1990), "While it is the most common of auditory disorders, affecting some forty million people in the United States alone, tinnitus is also the most enigmatic and elusive" (221). Jastreboff notes that a recent body of scientific literature has arisen to classify medically the neurological and clinical links between these interrelated disorders, only in 1990s was hyperacusis named as a real condition by auditory neuroscientists, and prior to 2014, few clinical studies about misophonia had been undertaken.[11] Furthermore, these disorders might in fact be symptoms of other problems, including noise-induced hearing loss, but also other conditions that impact the vestibular system or brain. Rather than a discrete list of disorders, *Dark Listening* constitutes nodes within a particular listener's relationship to sound – a listener who has heard or is hearing too much: too much noise, too much volume, or too much emotion.

It is, perhaps, already contentious to call these conditions disorders. A long thread in disability scholarship focuses on the distinctions about what constitutes disability itself. Tom (2014) notes: "The social model is distinguished from the medical or individual model. Whereas the former defines disability as a social creation – a relationship between people with impairment and a disabling society – the latter defines disability in terms of individual deficit" (216). This contrast can set in sharp relief the politics and thought processes underlying the search for a cure, and simply living well. In terms of hearing loss, the forces that might derive a profit from the medical model of disability might invest or venture a tremendous amount of capital toward researching the still poorly understood mechanisms of hearing, so that deafness might be cured. Whereas the social model might posit the unique richness of D/deaf[12] culture in order to reconfigure loss into surplus. In their pioneering essay, "'Deaf-Gain' and the Future of Human Diversity," Bauman and Murray (2014) broadly detail the "extrinsic" assets to humanity at large offered by the Deaf experience: from a creative diversity and cultural surplus to scientific scholarship, offering scientists new understandings of neuroplasticity, as they study the brain's language processes happening outside the auditory cortex (241). Bauman and Murray (2014) reframe deafness "from sensory lack to a form of sensory and cognitive diversity that offers vital contributions to human diversity" (246). This analysis might help us reframe our descriptions of disabilities as ways of experience, as well as disorders.

If Deafness, then, is not a disability but way of experiencing the world, what would it be like to *hear deafly*? Jeannette DiBernardo Jones explores this provocation in her essay about Deaf music making. Sound is vibration, which can be deciphered through the process of the sounds vibrating the tympanum, stimulating hair cells, which are translated to signals for the brain via the auditory nerve. Sound, however, is also felt by the body, in our hands and organs, and anywhere we can touch. Therefore, for a Deaf listener, "the whole body becomes the membrane. Both Deaf and hearing people can feel sound vibrations, but hearing people tend to focus only on the auditory perception of these sound vibrations. Without that distraction, deaf people tend to use their whole body to perceive sound vibrations" (Jones 2015, 58). There are limits to this generalization. It assumes deafness is marked by middle-ear dysfunction, when in fact deafness might also involve hair cell loss or dysfunction with the auditory nerve – the "membrane" of the body does indeed resonate to vibration, we cannot conclude it is parsed in an analogous manner. In a broader sense, Deaf musicality collides with language, as Deaf people hear through their hands and gestures. Thus, American Sign Language plays a distinct role in Deaf musical aesthetics. Deaf musicality seems to happen somewhere in between the visual AND auditory cortex – punctuated by the visual rhythmic/semiotic patterns of ASL, the primacy of Deaf Community and the sensation of loud sounds shaking the body.

From this slightly rosy-lensed account of Deaf musicality, we return to Dark Listening, and thus confront a seemingly unending tide of support groups online, the proliferation of snake oil remedies in the absence of a cure, perpetual news of tinnitus suicides,[13] etc. Whereas Deaf culture is informed by collectivity – formed by the creation and use of a shared language system, ie, signing – tinnital culture is defined negatively, shaped by the isolation of loss and the drama of damage. Listeners suffering from hyperacusis may shun the concert hall, fearful of unpredictable volume swells. Those with misophonia may be alienated from the chewing sounds of their loved ones. What does it mean when sound, when it is *too much*, takes on a wholly different meaning – drive you crazy, or worse? We discussed different forms of listening before; The "dark" in Dark Listening refers, then, to dark energies, trauma, and damage. For a dark listener, a once-liberatory experience of sound has been charged by negative affects, perhaps with no recourse. A tinnital listener may not hear deafly, but *deathly*.

Michael Davidson, a Deaf poet and scholar who acquired his hearing loss quite late in life, suggests that the notion of loss might be under-explored by a disability-forward praxis. The problem with the phrase Deaf Gain is that:

> . . . The phrase restricts the affective realm surrounding deafness to a forward looking, positive agenda. Somewhat lost in this vision is the embodied experience of populations for whom loss of hearing poses a challenge, even trauma, to the lived reality of community, work, family, and solidarity. (Davidson 2016)

Davidson is asking us not to sanitize descriptions of loss. However, there are fundamental differences in the meaning of sound by the hearing world and the Deaf World. For the Deaf listener, sound is about *communication*: "being deaf has less to do with silence than with negotiations with hearing people's expectations of what sounds are supposed to do" (Padden and Humphries 1990, 91.) Yet, for a Hearing listener, sound is about *sound—how* it sounds, how that *feels*, how sounds *combine* and what that means. For a listener with hearing *loss*, the *experience* of hearing has been dramatically charged with meaning.

Taking recourse to the deaf/hearing binary may not fully explain the reciprocal tension behind Loss and Gain. Jessica Holmes (2016) posits that "Ultimately, deafness can engender new and unexpected types of singing within a disability aesthetics that questions the very sonic basis for music" (542). At the same time, within a century of experimentalism, an entire movement of music has emerged that, in its own way, questions the sonic basic of music as well, from Cage to Oliveros, and beyond. Yet, for Davidson, loss itself is a potent affective register with centuries of aesthetic inquiry. This line of thinking is concurrent within larger discussions in the field of Disability Aesthetics: "Disability has emerged as a central aesthetic concept not only because it symbolizes human variation but also because it represents the fragility of human beings and their susceptibility to dramatic physical and mental change . . . disability aesthetics embraces beauty that seems by traditional standards to be broken, and yet it is not less beautiful, but more so, as a result" (Howe et al. 2016, 531). The reality and drama of hearing loss suggests a wholly different taxonomy from the aesthetics of deaf gain.[14] For someone who loves or needs or depends on sound, *losing sound*, and losing the predictability of the way one experiences sound – is a tragic rupture.

All of this brings us back to Charlie Haden: "If I had a wish in my life it would be that I didn't have these conditions. If you heard the ringing that I have in my head, you'd run down the street screaming." Though Haden rationalizes his conditions as noise-induced hearing loss, he has certainly gained a very different set of parameters through which to hear the world – a volume gain, as well as new sounds, and the acquisition of a new set of emotions to accompany sound experience. While a disability-forward reading might critique Haden's pessimism about his hearing as problematically entrenched in the medical model of disability, this perspective would miss the forest for the trees. Recall that Haden is fighting a righteous war – against injustice and ugliness – through his music-making. Thus, consider Haden's dialogue is direct Intel from the front lines of a sensitive artist describing what he needs to make the music happen, how he wants to hear the world, and the great burden that this process entails for him. What has been gained is not merely the world of tinnitus, but an embodied practice for controlling it!

Haden is listening darkly to his tinnitus and hyperacusis – it is what he wishes his hearing was not. There are two definitions of darkness at play here. On one level, Haden's experience of his hearing conditions is charged with bleak pessimism and angst. It is the opposite of his desire. On another level, darkness is *negative* space – it is an absence that denotes presence, a classical pairing of light and dark. To consider the structure of noise-induced hearing loss, this metaphor might make sense – if tinnitus occurs because the auditory cortex has been deprived of sound, as Jastreboff has suggested above, then the sound of the ringing it is a kind of inverse-material – a negative reflection of stereocilia that no longer resonate in response to acoustic stimulus. The ringing sound of tinnitus is the *presence* stimulated by the *absence* of hearing at particular frequencies.

Of course, not all who listen darkly are great jazz musicians. It takes a special kind of creator to listen to the darkness and come back inspired. In this regard, the notion of darkness we are discussing goes beyond Davidson's formulation of ruptured hearing: to listen darkly is not merely to retrieve damage as an exploitable aesthetic parameter, but to engage in a dialogue between opposites, or to use darkness to recover the light. This way of hearing is connected to many listeners and thinkers in past centuries of aesthetic inquiry. John Keats wrote famously and briefly of this ability in a letter to his brothers,

coining the phrase "Negative Capability" to describe the capability of great writers to explore aesthetic beauty even as it leads them into areas of ethical or philosophical ambiguities. This Negative Capability is defined as "when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason. This pursued through volumes would perhaps take us no further than this, that with a great poet the sense of Beauty overcomes every other consideration, or rather obliterates all consideration" (Keats 1899, 277). My intention in invoking Keats is not to historically locate negativity in any particular milieu – the attitude we are discussing is not culturally contingent, but rather part of a larger aesthetic inquiry that spans many historical movements & traditions. Rather, this term indexes succinctly that Haden – like many artists throughout time – possess a particular constitution that can weather the storm. Haden is able to listen to the "ugliness" of the world without himself succumbing to it – He is able to venture to the nether world and emerge unscathed.

This is not to say that Haden's hearing is detached from emotion. Nor is Haden alone – anyone committed to music who develops any of these conditions is liable to be seriously disturbed, and subsequently must relearn to listen in order to recover their experience of sound. Beethoven detailed the extent of his hearing loss and its emotional impact in a document now called the *Heiligenstadt Testament*:

> If at times I decided just to ignore my infirmity, alas! How cruelly was I then driven back by the intensified sad experience of my poor hearing. Yet I could not bring myself to say to people: "Speak up, shout, for I am deaf." Alas! How could I possibly refer to the impairing of one sense which in me should be more perfectly developed than in other people . . . (Mai 2007, 47)

In other words, someone who is supposed to be "good at hearing things" might not only struggle with social isolation as a result of hearing trouble, but also mourn the loss *itself*—for a musician or sound lover, losing control of your gift – your calling – may itself be an artistic crisis. And for Charlie Haden, as a master of the duo art form, who is supposed to respond in real time to the sounds which his partner produces – is he not supposed to urgently be able to hear his partner? Or, perhaps the tinnitus is his first duet partner – that Mephistopheles on his shoulder, the stimulus from which his diligent listening emerges. Consider this interview with Zabor (1984):

Haden: I could do duets for the next twenty years. When I think of all the great musicians I haven't played with, I could play duets for the rest of my life . . . when just two people are playing you can listen so much more clearly.

Zabor: Have you ever found yourself getting in the way because the music's going especially badly or especially well?

Haden: When I have trouble with that, it means I'm not involved in my work. I want to be able to rise above myself more and more, to be able to give to others and rise above that ego, and I hope other people will be able to do that too. (Zabor 1984, 44)

Haden's Dark Listening is not only the ear-plugged delineation of his aesthetic convictions – but the inverse template for the reverent humility that is the fundamental requisite for any improvising partner. An artist like Haden, spends his *entire life* practicing how to *not hear himself* in order to be a better improviser.

Surviving tinnitus is the practice of not hearing yourself.

In his essay on Charlie Haden's country roots, music scholar ken tianyuan Ge details the extended quotations of folk tunes during Haden's collaboration with Pat Metheny, on their live album *80/81*:

> Consider the transition at 10:00, in which Jack DeJohnette's intensely physical drumming elevates the tempo (a march-like 120 BPM) of Metheny's "first" folk song to a heightened level of energy. Metheny's guitar and Haden's bass gradually fade in at 12:20, establishing an open, thirdless tonal center in D. The understated attack and volume of Haden's bass, especially in his lowest string (again, detuned to D), seems to invite an empathetic adjustment of volume from DeJohnette. This mutual adjustment of texture is completed at 13:20 when Haden begins playing "Joe Clark" in a lyrical rubato. His melody does not immediately assume the forefront of the musical texture: it *emerges*, the ambiguous new tempo flooding and overtaking the perceptual ground upon which we stand. He invokes an inverse virtuosity: if jazz's trumpeters and saxophonists "took the music up" to new heights by exploiting the upper tessituras and altissimos of their instruments, then Haden's insistent, premeditated low D effectively widens the dynamic range of the song, encouraging us to build our listening from the bottom up. (Ge, 2020)

Ge's description of Inverse Virtuosity is compelling. Haden's absence becomes a presence, slowing down the time of the improvisation, which, for a brief time, seems to contain two distinct tempi. Rather than a technical (outward) virtuosity, perhaps this virtuosity of *listening* is about inward pyrotechnics – how to hear musical possibilities rather than wield them. That detuned D-string, too, has been ringing in Haden's musical ecosystem since at least 1959—since Ornette Coleman changed music history with his stirring composition *Lonely Woman*, built also around Haden's open fifths around D and A, including the low D pedal tone. By now, we realize that Haden is not merely listening to Metheny and Jarrett, but also straining to hear them through his earplugs and Plexiglas baffles, through his tinnitus and hyperacusis, and indeed, through the everyday sonic banalities which suffuse his (and our) existences.

As his hearing loss vexes him, Haden's actions in response create real ripples in the acoustic realm – many silences, with disparate affects. While there is no cure, there are ways to get used to tinnitus: one such way is to *use* it, heeding its call to engender a new sonic reality for all who are listening. His tinnitus doubtlessly roaring in his ears, yet never heard by his partners or his audiences – the loudness of every sound surrounding him and the perilous feelings thereafter – the earplugs, the baffles: these are unique filters which frame his sonic waking life. These symptoms and technologies are real agents – part and parcel of a troubled hearing that relentlessly determines its sonic consequences for all to experience. We hear these sonic consequences in every pluck, in his preference of the intimate duo setting, in the reverent contemplation of Haden's sonic affect – and we know their opposites – their inverse impressions: from the loud bandstand, to the raucous supermarket loudspeaker blaring facile pop hits, even to the insensitive collaborator who can't hear what Haden hears. This is the paradoxical tension of *Dark Listening*—it is both generative and prohibitive, creating new ways of listening and sounding at the same time it tears others asunder.

Notes

1. Please begin by listening to Charlie Haden's bass solo on Ornette Coleman's "Law Years" from the Complete Science Fiction Sessions.
2. This story has been repeated many times throughout Haden's life, but is recalled in conversation with fellow bassist, Flea (Leigh 2006).
3. In several of his obituaries, he stands aside his own reflection in his Plexiglas (The Telegraph 2014).
4. A diligent reader will note that Haden's etiology of tinnitus et al is non-canonical, and represents his own understanding of his condition, rather than a comprehensive medical definition. Though Haden conjectures his tinnitus may have emerged from playing near loud drummers for so many years, noise-induced hearing loss is just one possible cause for the symptom of tinnitus. I use the term hearing damage, however, to preserve the emotional impact of my subject's experience of these conditions, without intending to further stigmatize disease.
5. Elsewhere, Haden lectures his students, "We've been given special ears. It doesn't make you better than anybody else, but you're able to hear things other people don't" (Smith 1997).
6. Haden is not alone. Indeed, many musicians who describe their tinnitus simultaneously describe *themselves*— eg, their own way of hearing and their way of engaging with sound. I found Barbara Streisand discussing her tinnitus with a daytime show host "Q: What do you hear that I don't hear? A: I hear high frequency noise. When I went to have my hearing tested, I had supersonic hearing. I *hear* more. [. . .] And this is one of the reasons I always felt different when I was a kid (Streisand 2018, 0:24–0:41).
7. In another interview, he admonishes his students, "you must risk your life for every note" (Gravity 1994).
8. Pawel Jastreboff distinguished himself in the field by coming up with the first metric to test for tinnitus in the brains of rats – and later invented *Tinnitus Retraining Therapy*, a psychodynamic response system for learning to cope with tinnitus in lieu of a chemical or surgical cure (Jastreboff and Hazell 2008).
9. Consider, too, microphone feedback – regardless its colloquial association as an "annoying" sound.
10. And indeed, through focused listened onto one's own troubled relationship to sound, that iterative process of attention-directing might yield a sound that cannot be unheard. In other words, Passive hearing, amplified by active listening, gives way to a new level of hearing.
11. Edelstein et al. (2013) authored one of the first papers to take a stab at creating diagnostic criteria for Misophonia through interviewing people who experience it. Edelstein et al. (2013) also connect the data of misophonic sufferers to normal music listeners, creating data for the psychological experience of this puzzling condition.
12. Whereas the lowercase spelling of deaf indicates the absence of hearing, capital-D Deaf indicates Deaf Culture – positing Deafness as a community rather than a condition.
13. One of Jastreboff and Hazell's 2008 most radical suggestions is to suggest a suicide help line specifically for tinnitus sufferers, to spare them from the affective drama of going to a doctor who will shrug and say "there's nothing you can do."
14. It also suggests an aesthetics of hearing too much that refuses generalization. Since these conditions are all subjective, phenomenologically, there is something untranslatable about these disorders – something hyper-personal, which will, by virtue of their specificity, will never translate to a real cultural identity, such as Deafness has.

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