

Playing a Different Tune For Your Dog

Calming music soothes stressed-out dogs, advocates say.

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Many young people, preferring modern rock, hip-hop and dance music, work at the SPCA, Avanzino explained. The dogs, which seem to like oldies and soft contemporary music, couldn't stand the noise.

"It was a conflict of the species," Avanzino said.

The species are in synch at the 1,500 Animal Best Friends Sanctuary in Kanab, Utah, because neither has much choice about radio stations. In this remote section of the country, two signals come in clearly: National Public Radio and country. What they listen to depends on who is working, director Faith Maloney said.

"I don't know which the dogs like better," she said "The people who like classical say the dogs like it, and the people who like country say the dogs like it, too."

Maloney said she plays the radio for the animals because it adds a "homey touch." The dogs like NPR's news broadcasts the reporters' voices are soothing and the country station's ballads.

"I hope they don't listen to it too much," she said about the ballads. "They might start cheatin'."

While much of the discussion about the effect of music on dogs remains unscientific, it is starting to get professional notice. Dr. Houpt said one of her students has proposed a summer project on the subject, and Ani Williams, a Seattle-based musician, now lectures on the importance of music in assistance dogs' lives.

"Human studies have shown that relaxing music can slow the breathing, relax the muscles and reduce the heart rate," Williams said. "From my own personal experience, I've seen a similar effect on dogs."

As a sound therapist, Williams advocates the use of music to help therapy and service work dogs relax.

"These kinds of dogs tend to suffer from stress-related symptoms and burnout," Williams told a recent education conference in Atlanta. "I believe that providing them with relaxing music such as New Age or quiet classical for a time during the day can help give them a positive emotional response."

Perhaps the catalyst isn't so much the music but the meaning the sound of people nearby. Take the case of Moose, a barrel-chested chocolate Labrador in Twenty-nine Palms, Calif. He doesn't know a thing about New Age, but he loves the TNN television channel, owner Lisa Dobbins said.