



Studiobricks: a portable soundproofed room within a room

STUDIOBRICKS

down two floors to see if they could hear me.' After moving in, some musicians, like Hanslip, slowly increase their practice time. 'I built up my practice over a few months so they'd get used to it,' she says.

**SOME STRING PLAYERS** try to reduce their sound by using a rubber or metal practice mute. The metal ones mute the sound more, but the rubber ones are lighter. While they allow for quieter practice, they do seem to be controversial. 'I don't like using a practice mute,' says violinist Rafal Zambrzycki-Payne. 'I don't think it's particularly good for the violin and you can't hear much. They're OK for a short while, but not a couple of hours.' Benedetti is also not a fan: 'Everything changes too much. The sound, the feeling, the articulation and even intonation changes slightly, and I never find it that useful.'

Johnston, on the other hand, likes using a mute: 'I often use one. They're not bad to practise with. It dampens the sound, the resonances are very different and you have to listen more carefully because it's so much quieter. When you take it off there's more zing in your sound and you feel even more alert and alive because the instrument's awake again.'

## ON GOOD TERMS

### Top tips for getting along with the neighbours

- Communication is essential. Make sure you talk to your neighbours
- Practise at reasonable hours and choose an acceptable cut-off time
- If necessary, discuss acceptable practice times with your neighbours
- If you're thinking of moving, check the soundproofing of a potential new property. Take your instrument with you and ask some to listen to how far your sound carries

Modern technology can also be useful for facilitating quiet practice. Most electric instruments can be used with headphones, through the use of an amp or effects processor, or another device with a headphones output. Portable external headphone amps are also available, as are specifically silent instruments such as the Yamaha silent range, but all electric instruments can be played without an amp. The sound will be audible, but won't carry through the wall to a neighbour. John Jordan of Jordan Electric Violins says: 'Playing without an amp is as effective as playing a muted acoustic instrument.'

For those really worried about making too much noise, or those who need extra space for an ensemble or piano, there is the option of hiring a practice room (see box on page 72). Some universities and colleges will even allow former students in to practise for free, while others offer a discount. Alternatively, take a leaf out of Johnston's book and enlist the help of those around you. He practises in two houses owned by friends, and rarely at home. Johnston advises others to try for a similar set-up. 'Don't hesitate. Ring, write and ask friends and family. I can hardly believe that I have such good working spaces.'

**ONE DRASTIC SOLUTION** for reducing sound is soundproofing a room to practise in. But it's not easy – or cheap. The simplest soundproofing system normally involves a combination of acoustic sealant, rubber panels and two layers of acoustic plasterboard on each wall, along with heavy, 'mineral-loaded' matting for the floors. While effective, it isn't what the experts recommend. 'The best solution, regardless of location or room size, is a room within a room,' says Stephen Young, from soundproofing suppliers Sound Service (Oxford). 'You contain the music within an enclosure. The structure isn't directly fixed >

## GET OUT OF THE HOUSE

Practice rooms for hire vary in price and opening hours. Here's a snapshot of what's available in London and New York

### London

#### Jaques Samuel Pianos

142 Edgware Road  
+44 20 7723 8818  
www.jspianos.com  
£6–£17 per hour

**Open** 9am–6pm,  
Monday to Friday;  
10am–5pm, Saturday

### Central London

#### Rehearsal Rooms

22 Fish Street Hill  
+44 20 7283 1213  
www.centrallondon  
rehearsalrooms.com  
£15 per hour

**Open** 10am–11pm,  
Monday to Friday

### The Music Studios

29 Marylebone Lane  
+44 20 7486 0025  
http://themusicstudios.co.uk  
£12.50–£17.50 per hour

**Open** 12–8.30pm,  
Monday; 10am–8.30pm,  
Tuesday to Friday;  
10am–5.30pm Saturday

### New York

#### Pearl Studios NYC

500 and 519 8th Avenue  
+1 212 904 1850  
http://pearlstudiosnyc.com  
\$21–\$60

**Open** 8am–11pm daily

#### Kaufman Center

Goodman House,  
129 West 67th Street  
+1 212 501 3300  
\$17–\$25 per hour  
http://kaufman-center.org

**Open** 9am–9pm,  
Monday to Thursday

#### Rehearsal Studios NYC

853 7th Avenue  
+1 212 586 9055  
www.rehearsalstudiosny.com  
\$20–\$30 per hour

**Open** 9am–10pm or 11pm  
(by appointment) daily

to the rest of the building and gives you a much more efficient level of soundproofing.'

Young recommends using a 'stud partition' system, independent walls with gaps between them and the regular walls, and a separate ceiling and floor. On top of the walls and possibly on the ceiling (depending on where you don't want the sound to go), you'll need to install sound absorbing panels. Young estimates a cost of around £36 (\$55) per square metre for walls and ceilings, and £48 (\$74) per square metre for floors. That's not including triple-glazed windows and an airtight door between your inner and regular room.

Less permanent soundproofing solutions are also available. Musician and businessman Guillermo Jungbauer has created Studiobricks – easily assembled soundproof cabins, designed to fit inside one of your rooms or part of one. Jungbauer based his concept on the ideals of the Swedish furniture giant Ikea: you order the studio, it's delivered and then you put it up yourself. Jungbauer thought of the idea after moving three times. 'I've always had a soundproofed cabin but it was so heavy and hard to move that I decided to design my own light version.' But like soundproofing a room, it's still an expensive option. Even a small studio (120cm by 120cm) will cost in the region of £4,700 (\$7,200).

**EVEN IF MUSICIANS** have understanding neighbours who love music, they're not always able to control who stays in the room next to them when on tour or while travelling. Luckily though, most complaints in hotels are less terrifying than Sitkovetsky's experience. The average person is usually adverse to direct confrontation and makes a call to reception instead.

To pre-empt any potential complaints, it's best to talk to the hotel receptionist or concierge. In Sitkovetsky's experience, most hotels will give him a corner room on an end if he asks for one. Violist David Aaron Carpenter does the same, and lets them know when he expects to practise. 'As long as you notify them that you need to be quite far from other guests, you usually don't have any problems. I try to practise in the afternoon between 12pm and 5pm, when most people are out.'

It's also worth being bold and asking for a room specifically to practise in. It may be possible for you to take over one of the hotel's conference rooms, which can often be used late into the night. 'On one occasion,' says Sitkovetsky, 'I got back from a concert at 11pm and needed to practise because I had a different programme to perform next day. I wanted to practise at full power for at least an hour and half, and I stayed in a conference room until about 1am.'

Of course, some neighbours do enjoy listening to musicians on the other side of the wall. Johnston once lived next to a family with a young baby. 'The walls were very thin and I was really aware of them. But when I spoke to them, they said they loved hearing the cello.' Hotel guests can have the same attitude: Gringolts once had a note slipped under his door saying, 'Thank you so much for the beautiful music,' and cellist Amit Peled even got a gig through practising scales in a hotel. He started at 7am and just as he was near finishing there was a knock at his door. He explains: 'Without opening the door, I said: "OK, I'll stop. I'm sorry." But the man immediately said, "No. Please open the door. I am fascinated by the way you practise scales."' He turned out to be the conductor of the Chicago Chamber Orchestra and a former cellist. The following season, the conductor asked Peled to play with his orchestra. 'I have my early rising habits and scales practice to thank for my Chicago concerto debut,' he says. ■

**'Talk to your neighbours.  
Sometimes the two sides  
fail to negotiate properly  
and the problem escalates'**

CAROLINE ALDRED (INCORPORATED SOCIETY OF MUSICIANS, UK)



Have you had any problems with your neighbours?  
Let us know via Facebook or Twitter, or email  
us at [www.thestrads.com](http://www.thestrads.com)