

## The Type of Music Found Calming to 85% of Dogs

Can you use music to help your dog relax when he's feeling anxious, tense or frightened? This type of music emerged as the clear winner in this shelter of 50 dogs to help them calm down and rest. Not a fan? This other type calmed about 85% of dogs in a home setting and more than half fell asleep.

Analysis by Dr. Karen Shaw Becker

### STORY AT-A-GLANCE

- When classical music was played in an animal shelter, the dogs spent significantly more of their time quiet and resting than when other types of sounds were played, including heavy metal music, which led to increased barking
- A separate study found that when classical music was played in animal shelters, the dogs barked less and slept more; when heavy metal music was played, the dogs had more nervous shaking
- Solo piano music or piano music with simple arrangements calmed about 70% of dogs in a kennel in one study
- Harp music led to a decline in respiration rates and other visual measures of discomfort, such as restlessness and anxiety, among dogs in a veterinary hospital
- Pay attention to your dog's behavior when playing calming music to get a feeling of which type he likes best

If you're stressed or anxious, turning on some tunes may help you calm down. It turns out the same holds true for dogs, many of whom enjoy listening to soothing music if they're tense or frightened. The question, then, is what type of music do dogs most enjoy? They can't simply create their favorites playlist like you can, so we must use our best judgement in choosing the melodies that are music to our dogs' ears.

Fortunately, we don't have to guess, as plenty of research has been done to unveil dogs' musical preferences. Similar to humans, classical stands out as the perfect choice when your dog needs to unwind.

### Classical Music Is Calming for Dogs

Dogs in shelters face stressful conditions, including loud noises and interactions with unfamiliar people. Researchers set out to determine how different sounds — human conversation, classical music, heavy metal music, pop music and a control — would affect the behavior of 50 shelter dogs.

Classical music was the clear winner. When played in the shelter, the dogs spent significantly more of their time quiet and resting than when other types of sounds were played, including heavy metal music, which led to increased barking.<sup>1</sup> According to the researchers:<sup>2</sup>

*"Classical music appears particularly beneficial, resulting in activities suggestive of relaxation and behaviors that are considered desirable by potential buyers. This form of music may also appeal to visitors, resulting in enhanced perceptions of the rescue shelter's environment and an increased desire to adopt a dog from such a source."*

A 2012 study similarly found that when classical music was played in animal shelters, the dogs barked less and slept more. When heavy metal music was played, the dogs had more nervous shaking.<sup>3</sup>

## **Piano Music, Harp, Soft Rock and Reggae Are Good, Too**

Not a classical music fan? Try playing piano music for your pup instead. Solo piano music or piano music with simple arrangements calmed about 70% of dogs in a kennel in one study. In a home environment, 85% of dogs became calmer, and more than half fell asleep, when solo piano music was played.<sup>4</sup>

Another study on dogs in a kennel tested soft rock, Motown, pop, reggae and classical to see how they affected behavior.<sup>5</sup> No matter what type of music was played, the dogs spent more time lying down instead of standing, and when the music was stopped, the dogs were more likely to bark.

Further, heart rate variability was significantly higher among dogs when soft rock or reggae were played, which is indicative of reduced stress. Harp music is another good option. It led to a decline in respiration rates and other visual measures of discomfort, such as restlessness and anxiety, among dogs in a veterinary hospital in another study.<sup>6</sup>

## **Where to Find Pet-Specific Tunes — and When to Play Them**

If you're looking for music specifically for canines, you can find tunes produced in frequencies that only dogs can hear. You can also find pet-specific tunes on popular music streaming apps and online.<sup>7</sup>

Songwriter, producer and engineer Terry Woodford also created Canine Lullabies, which marry the steady, soothing thump-thump sound of a heartbeat with traditional lullabies that dogs love. "Through a Dog's Ear" is another popular classical arrangement designed specifically to calm dogs.

Its creator, veterinary neurologist Dr. Susan Wagner, believes even routine noises in a typical home may be damaging to pets' well-being. PetMD reported, "She [Wagner] ... says that we can counteract this noise pollution and enrich their environment through certain types of music that have had a relaxing effect on dogs in previous studies."<sup>8</sup>

You can also experiment by playing some of your own favorite music for your pup, from classical to nature sounds (like ocean waves). Keep it on a low to moderate volume and simply pay attention to your dog's behavior when the music is on to get a feeling of which type he likes best. You can also rotate through different playlists so he doesn't get bored.

Consider playing calming music for your dog when you leave the house as well as when you're home. If you only play it when you're away, your dog may come to associate the songs with your absence.

Your dog may enjoy soft music when he's in his crate resting or during times of stress, such as fireworks or thunderstorms. You can even play relaxing music in the car when you're on your way to the vet. If you're involved with fostering, playing classical music when a new dog is adjusting to your home may help ease the transition.

For those who work with rescue organizations or animal shelters, also keep the Rescue Animal Mp3 Project, founded by holistic veterinarian Dr. Pamela Fisher, on your radar. This nonprofit group donates MP3 players filled with calming music to shelters, clinics and sanctuaries to create a better environment for the animals.<sup>9</sup> The music benefits dogs and people alike, and one of the goals of the project is to get the animals adopted faster.

## Sources and References

- <sup>1,2</sup> [Animal Welfare, Volume 11, Number 4, November 2002, pp. 385-393\(9\).](#)
  - <sup>3</sup> [Colorado State University October 16, 2012](#)
  - <sup>4</sup> [DVM 360 April 1, 2010](#)
  - <sup>5</sup> [Physiology & Behavior March 15, 2017, Volume 171, Pages 207-215](#)
  - <sup>6</sup> [The Harp Therapy Journal, 8\(2\), 1, 4-5,15. Boone, A., & Quelch, V. \(2003\).](#)
  - <sup>7,8</sup> [PetMD May 20, 2022](#)
  - <sup>9</sup> [The Rescue Animal MP3 Project](#)
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