

# Giving Out Good Vibrations

Harp music therapy appears to calm anxiety

by Arden Moore

**K**athy Boettcher tried everything to tame Dejah, her anxious Siberian Husky. She spent hundreds of dollars in training tools, veterinary visits and consultations with animal behaviorists.

During most of her early years, Dejah was a sound, well-behaved dog who earned awards in the show ring. Problems didn't surface until she turned 8, and her once-comfortable world drastically changed. Due to a divorce in the family and relatives moving out of the house, Dejah suddenly found herself alone during the day. She couldn't cope and began to chew doorframes, pace frantically and pull down Venetian blinds. The Boettchers tried keeping Dejah in the enclosed back yard during the day, but she ripped window screens to break back into the house.

Even crating didn't help. Videotapes of Dejah inside the crate displayed her bending the metal bars and going berserk.

## Ideal Settings For Playing Harp Music For Animals

- ▶ At home, especially during thunderstorms for anxious dogs
- ▶ At veterinary clinics, especially in waiting rooms and in examination rooms
- ▶ At veterinary hospitals, especially before, during and after surgeries
- ▶ At animal shelters to reduce stress and anxiety among homeless pets
- ▶ In cars when transporting animals

"I've been a dog trainer and breeder for many years and never before had seen such a terrified animal," said Boettcher, a novelist who lives in San Diego with her

husband, Bruce, and daughter, Sheri. "Dejah clearly wasn't having a quality-filled life, and we were close to putting her down. It broke our hearts to see her become so frantic."

The family had worked with Patrick Melese, DVM, Ph.D, a veterinarian and certified applied animal behaviorist in San Diego, on various treatments for Dejah. He suggested they play a CD of harp music for her.

## Skeptical at First

"We were very skeptical but thought, why not?" Boettcher said. "It was amazing to watch with my own eyes. Within five minutes of playing this music, Dejah put her head down between her front legs and went to sleep. Gradually, we increased the amount of music, and we were finally able to keep her in a crate – calmly – for up to four hours."

The Boettchers played harp music for Dejah until she died of complications due to chronic back problems at age 9 last year.

"But thanks to the harp music, Dejah's final six months were peaceful," Boettcher said.

If you're searching for a way to calm an overly anxious dog, harp music may be the answer.

Sue Raimond of Mount Laguna, Calif., plucks harp strings for a living. She has successfully tested the effects of the vibrations and blended tones on wolves, dogs, cats, monkeys, goats, sheep, donkeys and gorillas. Her harp therapy has drawn the interest of leading veterinarians and animal behaviorists who regard harp music a complementary tool in modifying undesired behavior in family pets.

"As a veterinarian, I'm the first one to say it looked like something out in la-la land, but Sue presented some compelling stories and videos



documenting the responses in a variety of animals," said Gary Patronek, VMD, an epidemiologist at Tufts University School of Veterinary Medicine.

He invited Raimond, who's also an emergency medical technician, to deliver a presentation on harp therapy at Tufts Animal Expo last year in Boston. He then asked her to address about 125 veterinary students at the Tufts campus in North Grafton, Mass.

### Minimize Stress

"Will harp music cure cancer? No. But I consider it to be part of the class of complementary medicines that can be used to relieve stress in animals or used in a research setting or in animal shelters to minimize pain and distress," Dr. Patronek said. "Her harp music therapy certainly merits attention by the scientific community to study its effects and apparent benefits."

It's well documented music therapy can provide pleasure for people, especially those hospitalized with cancer or coping with terminal diseases, said Linda Chlan, Ph.D., RN, assistant professor of nursing at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis. She's conducted scientific research and published studies on music therapy used on critically ill human patients, including those on ventilators, for more than five years.

Among others, the University of Minnesota, the American Association of Critical Care Nurses and the Society of Gastroenterology have funded the studies. Reports have appeared in peer-reviewed professional journals, such as *American Journal of Critical Care*.

The studies centered on the therapeutic impact of music, not

harp music per se. In one recent study, 20 people listened to music wearing headphones for an hour, and 20 rested for an hour without listening to music. Blood samples from both groups, tested at 15, 30 and 60 minutes, showed that those who listened to music had lower levels of stress hormones.

"Music can minimize pain, decrease anxiety and serve as a powerful distraction for patients," Dr. Chlan said.

The same seems to hold true for dogs.

Dr. Melese has played the "Wait for the Sunset" CD of harp music, a collection of 13 instrumentals, produced and arranged by Raimond, for anxious dogs in his office.

"I have noted that the music did indeed help some anxious dogs to calm down, relax and eventually go to sleep," Dr. Melese said. "But this was not done in any controlled manner, so it is hard to

### Here's How You Can Learn More About Harp Therapy

Harp therapist Susan Raimond has composed and produced seven CDs — also available on tape — to relax pets and people. She operates Pet Pause in Mount Laguna, Calif. Copies of her CDs, tapes and videos are available by calling (800) 971-1044 or e-mailing [petpause2000@yahoo.com](mailto:petpause2000@yahoo.com).

You can also contact the American Music Therapy Association, based in Silver Spring, Md. Founded in 1998, the professional group represents more than 5,000 music therapists worldwide. It also sets the educational and clinical training standards for music therapists. For more information, contact [www.musictherapy.org](http://www.musictherapy.org) or (301) 589-3300.

tell how many of these dogs would have done this about the same time the music was started.

### Useful Adjunct

"My overall impression is that harp music playing can be a potentially useful adjunct to behavioral therapy for anxious, stressed dogs. Although at this point we have little evidence to really say it helps, it has little to no downside or adverse side effects so I am willing to recommend it clinically in my behavior cases."

How does harp therapy work? Raimond, who's studied its effects for 16 years, believes the instrument's construction plays a major role. "When I pluck a string, it vibrates, but so do other strings surrounding that one, giving vibratory properties." The vibrating string also sends out overtones — higher tones. Some, like a dog whistle, are inaudible to the human ear. "You produce harmonic overtones, and it seems to work at a cellular level in lowering blood pressure and reducing stress levels, but certainly scientific research is needed to validate this," she said.

Raimond, a harpist for the Imperial Valley Chamber Orchestra for 16 years, has provided harp therapy for the San Diego Zoo and the California Wolf Center in Julian, Calif., among others. She also worked in pain management with the University of California-San Diego School of Medicine. Researchers there found harp music reduced the need for patients' pain medication by 40 percent.

Based on observation and client feedback, she estimates her live music is 95 percent effective in calming animals, including deaf ones who appear to relax when they feel the vibrations. Playing the music



# YOUR DOG

## SUBSCRIBER SERVICE CENTER

### 1. To change your address

Attach your present mailing label to this form, and enter new address here.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. To order or renew subscription

Enter name and address above, and check subscription term. Subscription rates:

- New                       1 year - \$32
- Renew                     2 years - \$64

These rates are good in the U.S. only. In Canada: 1 year CDN\$39, 2 years CDN\$72. For all other countries: 1 year \$48 (air), 2 years \$96 (air).

- AmEx                       MasterCard
- Visa                         Check Enclosed

Card # \_\_\_\_\_

Expiration \_\_\_\_\_

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

### 3. To give a gift

Enter your name and address above and the recipient's name and address below. Same rates apply.

- 1-year gift                 2-year gift

Send gift to:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_

State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Mail to:  
**Your Dog**  
Subscription Services  
P.O. Box 420234  
Palm Coast, FL 32142

on CDs or audiotapes yields about an 87 percent effective rate, she said.

A dog must hear at least three minutes of music for it to take effect, Raimond said. Generally at this point, most dogs will start to sit down. Within 10 to 20 minutes, most lie in a resting state with some sleeping soundly. She recommends playing music as needed – not continuously – because some animals can become desensitized to it.

“Use it when you need it, much like taking an aspirin to fight off a headache,” Raimond said. “Play the music during times when you know your pet normally becomes irritated to help alleviate that irritation. And the best part is that it also helps to calm you down, too. Animals can read our emotions, and here is something that can maximize health for both you and your pet.”

Boettcher concurred on both counts: “Sue Raimond is remarkably gifted and a true lifesaver for our dog. Anytime Dejah started to appear agitated, I would put on the CD and it

## Will Dogs Enjoy The Same Benefits As Humans Do?

Based on scientific studies, the American Music Therapy Association and Linda Chlan, Ph.D., RN, at the University of Minnesota cite these health benefits of music therapy on people:

- ▶ Slows heart rate
- ▶ Lowers blood pressure levels
- ▶ Slows breathing
- ▶ Helps speed post-surgery recovery time
- ▶ Elevates endorphin levels
- ▶ Bolsters immune function
- ▶ Decreases stress-related hormones

would help. It also helped calm me, too.”

*Arden Moore of Oceanside, Calif., is a regular contributor to Your Dog and pet columnist for Prevention magazine. She's the author of Real Food for Dogs (Storey Books).*



Practicing what she preaches, harp therapist Susan Raimond of Mount Laguna, Calif., relaxes with her dog, Jackson, in a sylvan setting.