



Review

by Sarah Fox

Elacin

ER - Musician

Hearing Protectors

I've long been an addict of live music and have been to my fair share of shows over the years. My teenage-hood involved waking on Friday, Saturday and Sunday mornings to a deathly screeching. It was a kind of invisible badge of honour among my friends, proof that you had indeed had a good night and seen a great band close up.

Stand in front of the speakers? Sure! All the better to hear the band/destroy my young healthy eardrums with. By age 26 I was more often on stage myself, playing keys and for the last four years have been with

Cobra Khan, averaging about 30 loud gigs (plus practices) a year. I don't think I started using any ear protection until I was in my early to mid twenties. Better late than never? Here's hoping.

So there I was minding my own business when the opportunity came along to review a high quality moulded ear plug system from Elacin, represented in Auckland by Acoustix Hearing in Remuera, Auckland. Yes please NZ Musician I replied – and might I add, thank you in advance if these things actually work.

I have been using some, I thought, relatively good quality plugs for practice, performance and puntership. Problem was, they were....muffly. If you have used off the shelf earplugs of varying quality you will likely know what I mean – no definition. Highs? What highs? Well I can FEEL the bass but... etc etc. I became utterly accustomed to not being able to hear myself in the practice room or on stage. As a consequence I regularly popped out one or both earplugs for certain songs, just to make sure everything was where and as it needed to be – which sort of negates the purpose of ear protection yes? Not much protection if you are not actually wearing them. Suffice to say, my hopes, nay, my expectations were extremely high for the custom-made Elacin product, which retail at \$320.

In order to explain the product best so readers can comprehend what you get for your investment, I will run through the process from start to finish, and hopefully give you a handle on what's involved.

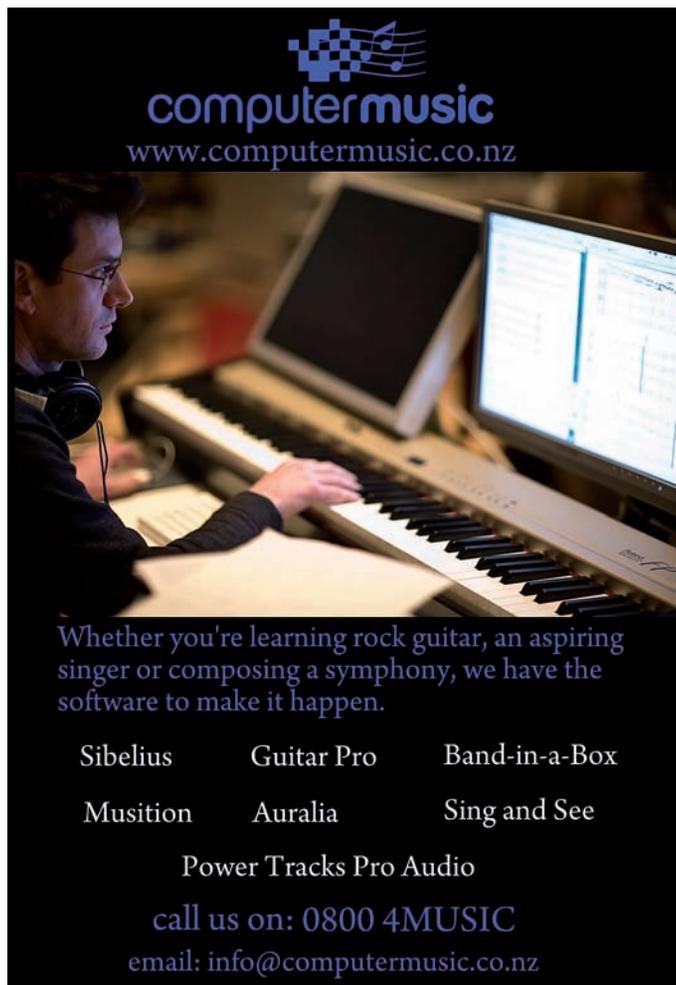
I made my initial appointment to see Thomas Muller at Acoustix Hearing. We start by discussing my music involvement and how and when I am using my current protectors. He then explains some of the finer details of the product itself – it is a custom-fitted silicone plug made from a direct mould with a removable ER-attenuator button that fits embedded to the exterior end. Attenuation is available as 9, 15 and 25dB depending on your requirements – 15dB typically being the most popular variant.

Thomas then has a look in my ear to check on the state therein (Photo 1). I suddenly become very conscious of waxy secretions. However, ears are this man's work so I figure he has likely seen it all. I learn I have nice clear ear-ways. I am quietly thrilled.

Thomas then explains about the moulding material he uses, which is not the same as used to mould for hearing aids. They require a very snug fit and so the moulding material for aids tends to expand in the ear cavity. The moulding material used for the Elacin product is best for in-ear protection as it expands without pushing out the shape of your ear canals. Thus you get a true shape and the most comfortable fit for the plugs. Sensible, as you don't certainly want to be always aware of something pushing against the inside of your skull when you are trying to concentrate on playing, listening or otherwise enjoying yourself.

So, back to the process. After a small piece of foam is popped in to protect the eardrum, my ears are injected with a rather odd feeling blue substance that renders me basically deaf. It is a strange sensation, but by no means a bad experience. Interesting though (Photo 2). The blue stuff takes only a couple of short minutes to harden and when removed is the perfect mould of my ear canal. Quite intriguing. So ends the first appointment.

The two moulds are sent away to a local specialist manufacturer to be replicated in a clear silicone material. Overseas-sourced products can have you waiting three weeks or more, but my Elacins are ready in four days. Perfect timing too as Cobra Khan are about to begin our North Island tour. The attenuator buttons that fit into the end of the protectors are manufactured in the US but kept in stock here. The technical data surrounding these is shrouded in mystery to protect the technical



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advances they have made. Fine by me, as long as I can hear everything when I am wearing them. In my second appointment at Acoustix I am given the earplugs (Photo 3), a small carry case and instructions on cleaning and care including some antibacterial wipes (they can be cleaned with mild soapy water after removing the attenuator button).

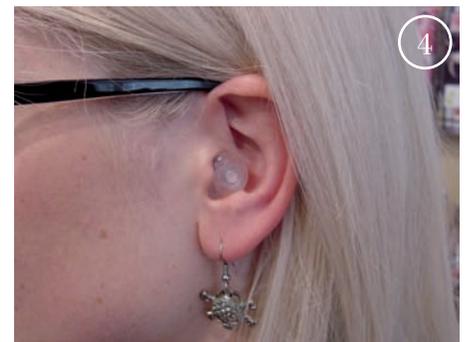
The first test comes in the practice room. A tiny, windowless room where volume knobs are kept alarmingly high to overcome Andy's relentless and heavy handed drum hits. I stand about 20cm from my cabinet and directly opposite Ben's. This is not ideal. First go? Wow, that's what I sound like in this band, and bugger, I think it is time for a new cab. This is quite the experience for me – this is the clearest I have heard us in practice for the entirety of the band's existence. I hear everything – Milon's lead breaks, Evan's screaming – and he doesn't have a mic so this is impressive. Most importantly, I can hear myself amongst the noise miasma, I can get the level right and I can actually enjoy the practice experience.

So, Elacin is off to a heartening and impressive start. The Auckland show and remainder of the tour follow providing an excellent opportunity to experience my new ear protectors in a variety of sound conditions. We play Whammy Bar in Auckland (for those

who haven't been, it's a highly sound reflective concrete shell with surprisingly good on and off stage sound), Basement in Taranaki, Hole in the Wall in Wellington, Royal Hotel in Palmy and Zone Bar in Whangarei. Venues range from small to generous with low to high ceilings and average to excellent sound.

I am now almost quite literally blown away. Even at venues where I do not have a dedicated foldback speaker I can hear myself through the PA. As I said to Thomas at my follow up appointment, these ear protectors have changed my life. Am I being over the top? No, absolutely not, and only getting a pair yourself will prove just how right I am.

Like choosing the right musical instrument, amplifier, microphone, pedal or cymbal to effect the best sound you possibly can as a musician, so too is the investment in good ear protection a considered and worthwhile undertaking. This is not only an investment in the wellbeing of your ears and hearing, it also insures that the live music/club/DJ experience is to be performed and experienced at its best. Far from Elacin being a product only for the music industry involved, it is a product for anyone who appreciates music for interest, for fun or for love. Ear protection is as important for engineers, musicians and DJs as it is for those who can spend countless hours of every



weekend pressed against a speaker stack or dancing in a bar or nightclub.

From the fitting to the end product, the level of service has been the highest with support and advice gladly offered at every stage, I am fortunate to have been encouraged to try them. Yes it has enhanced my experiences as both a musician and a fan and yes, I am encouraging all to seek out this product. No more bung ears for me, I am now in a far happier place.

Sarah Fox plays keys for Auckland outfit Cobra Khan who released their debut full length album, 'Helgorithms' through ElevenfiftySeven Records last year. www.helgorithms.com

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