

PARTING SHOT

A weekly snapshot from The Daily Astorian and Chinook Observer photographers



The Ocean Beaut comes up the Columbia River at sunset in September.

Joshua Bessex/The Daily Astorian

ODDITY

Hush puppies

Holistic vet says music cuts shelter barking and stress

By SUE MANNING
Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — Can music tame the savage beast? Can it hush puppies and calm kitties?

A veterinarian thinks so. Dr. Pamela Fisher has put music in over 1,100 animal shelters, saying that it calms dogs and cats, and even cuts down on barking.

Fisher started the nonprofit Rescue Animal MP3 Project nearly four years ago by asking artists around the world to donate dog- and cat-friendly music. The result was MP3 players packed with 30 hours of classics, including music by Beethoven, Mozart and Chopin, nursery rhymes like “Three Blind Mice” and harps, pianos and violins mimicking ocean waves and gentle breezes. She gives them free to animal shelters, sanctuaries and spay-and-neuter clinics.

“I have used therapeutic music in my practice and wanted to figure out a way to help the shelter animals in my own community,” said Fisher, a holistic veterinarian whose practice in North Canton, Ohio, includes alternative approaches like aromatherapy. Her “community” has grown to include shelters in all 50 states that house over 115,000 dogs and cats.

Dogs like Mozart, not metal

One fan is Tina Gunther, vet tech at the Cut Bank Animal Shelter near Cut Bank, Montana, and its sole volunteer (there are no paid employees). Winter temperatures at the rural shelter for six dogs and six cats routinely run well below zero, and “the wind blows nearly every

day. We call them black blizzards — the top soil is just blown away,” Gunther said.

To calm the animals, Gunther tried the radio. Besides hit-and-miss reception, the news and sports had people yelling and disturbing sound bites. Then the project MP3 player was installed for the dogs on one side. “The difference has been dramatic,” she said.

She and her husband had to buy a second player for the cats. “When they play songs they like, they go and sit by the speakers,” Gunther said.

No one has studied the impact of Fisher’s specific music recipe. But others have looked at how music and noise in general affect animals. A 2012 Colorado State University study published in the Journal of Veterinary Behavior found that dogs were more likely to sleep and less likely to bark when Mozart, Beethoven and other classical artists were playing, but not when heavy metal, altered classical and other sounds were.

Fisher’s website features many testimonials about the positive effects of her MP3 players, including a video from the Tuscarawas Humane Society in Dover, Ohio, that shows dogs relaxing and settling down after hearing the music. Tuscarawas shelter director Lindsey Lewis says on the video that the music has calmed the atmosphere and lowered the noise level.

A survey of more than 500 shelters conducted by Fisher also validated her approach, finding barking reduced by half and animals on average more relaxed.

“It just de-stresses them. They are still happy and wiggly, they just aren’t barking,” explained Tania Huycke-Phillips, the foster and facilities coordinator at Bay Area Humane Society in Green Bay, Wisconsin.



Dr. Pamela Fisher/Via AP

Dr. Pamela Fisher and her best friend, Lili, pose for a selfie in a field of flowers in Canton, Ohio. Fisher started a campaign nearly four years ago called Rescue Animal MP3 Project. Musicians donated 30 hours of music that stops dogs from barking and de-stresses and relaxes dog and cats. She has now provided over 1,100 MP3 players to shelters across the country. She was installing a player in a shelter in Akron, Ohio, when a glance rather than a sound won her over.

A mutt named Lili

Beyond the music, the shelter staff does all it can to reduce stress for the dogs, including toys, treats, food and spending time with them. “Reducing stress shows off their personalities and they get adopted quicker,” she said.

To buy the MP3 players, Fisher applies for grants, collects donations and holds fundraisers.

The music also helps relax staff members and that benefits the animals too, said Fisher, who grew up singing and playing folk music on the guitar.

The project brought Fisher a new best friend, but it took a look, not a sound, to seal the deal. She was installing the music system at Summit County Animal Control in Akron, Ohio, in 2012 when a mutt named “Lili stole my heart with her glance.”



A mixed-breed dog named Lili sits in her kennel at Summit County Animal Control in Akron, Ohio. Lili gave Dr. Pamela Fisher a look that she says convinced her to adopt her. Fisher was at the shelter installing an MP3 player for her non-profit Rescue Animal MP3 Project, which plays dog-friendly and cat-friendly music so the dogs will stop barking and the animals will de-stress and relax. More than 1,100 shelters across the country have taken Fisher up on her offer and swear by the results.

Dr. Pamela Fisher
Via AP

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