

Hospitality

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Robots on reception

Gimmicks or new service standards?

Kendal College's can-do attitude

Julie Barker FIH
promoting university catering talent



WHY MUSIC

in your venue is more important than you think

 Institute of Hospitality



Hitting *the right* **note**

*Music occupies a curious position in hotels and restaurants. Most guests are unlikely to even notice it. However, **Ben Walker** finds there is more to music in hospitality than meets the ear*

If or a sound intended to be soothing and unobtrusive, the music played in the public areas of hotels has often provoked loathing and derision. Elevator music, or Muzak, traditionally consisted of instrumental orchestral versions of popular songs and was named after the US company which dominated its supply for most of the 20th century.

In 1986 the rock musician Ted Nugent made an unsuccessful bid to buy Muzak Holdings for \$10m just so he could shut it down (Muzak was subsequently bought in 2011 by Mood Media for \$345m and the Muzak brand was retired).

For others, elevator music has been a positive inspiration. Revealing why the second *Specials* album was so stylistically different from the first, Jerry Dammers said: "For years, 'lift music' had been regarded in rock circles as the ultimate in bad music. So when we got to America I finally got to hear this supposedly awful 'lift music' in the lifts of the hotels, and it was fantastic! Some of the hotels still had trios playing this weird stuff in the lobby and I thought: 'That's it. That's a new sound and direction.'"¹

Dammers was ahead of his time, anticipating the 1990s 'easy listening/lounge music' revival by some fifteen years. Today, the 'lift music' he refers to scarcely exists and there is very little demand from hoteliers and retailers for smoothed-out instrumental versions of pop hits, except in Japan.

Inappropriate

So, with Muzak out of the picture, what kind of music should operators play in their venues? Of course, the answer depends on the type of venue, its identity and its target audience.

The Ace Hotel in Shoreditch, for instance, has a vinyl record store in the lobby and hosts regular gigs and DJ sets. The eclectic range of music showcased – krautrock, ambient, italo, Japanese techno – is what you'd expect given the location. Afternoon tea is accompanied by a classic album, such as Nirvana's *Nevermind* or Talking Heads' *Remain in Light*. Music is clearly central to the hotel's identity.

For most hospitality businesses, however, this is not the case. When opening a new business, owners spend a great deal of time and money in getting their décor and menus just right. Music tends to be an afterthought. While writing this article, operators had little or nothing to say on the subject of music in their venues, reinforcing the impression that it's simply not that important. Perhaps surprisingly, given that it is owned by Sir Richard Branson, the

press people at The Roof Gardens would gladly contribute to features on other subjects such as recruitment, but did not feel "well-placed" to say anything about the music played in the restaurant.

For most mainstream venues, a quote from Clayton Burton, CEO and president of Eos Music Corporation, sums up the situation well: "The truth is the typical guest just doesn't pay much attention to the music. Hotels are going to want to have some kind of music – something pleasant and mainstream – or the public space will seem dead. But most often you almost want your guests not to pay

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Music can help guests decide whether they want to return or not

attention to it – that's why it's called background music. Unfortunately, if the music is drawing their attention that means there is something wrong with it, or it's out of place."²

We can all wince at the memory of inappropriate music played in a venue. Such experiences encouraged Rob Wood, a former professional DJ and music journalist, to set up Music Concierge, a service aimed at boutique and luxury hotels and brands.

"I remember reviewing a hotel on a Greek island. It had a cave complex and was a very unique location," he says. "The management had thought of everything. It was brilliantly executed but they played the same Phil Collins album everywhere all the time. It was completely wrong for the experience. It was played on a loop to the point where everyone wanted to shoot themselves. The hoteliers didn't even notice. The guests did!"

Evidently, music can determine how customers feel during their stay and to what extent they are likely to



develop suicidal tendencies. It can also help them decide whether they want to return or not.

Upmarket

At certain times of the day and in certain areas, silence will undoubtedly be the best option, but, importantly, a number of studies have shown that playing classical music in a restaurant leads to customers spending significantly more than when no music or pop music is played.

Research by the universities of Leicester and Surrey found that diners tended to treat themselves by spending more on starters and coffee. The same results were obtained when the controlled experiment took place in a student refectory as well as in a restaurant. The researchers said the most likely explanation was that playing classical music creates an 'upmarket' atmosphere which encourages guests to act in an appropriately 'upmarket' manner and be freer with their spending.

By the late 1990s, the smooth, relaxing sound of Café del Mar CD compilations was ubiquitous in hotels, restaurants and bars across the world. The ability to convey a calm, relaxing and contemporary ambience explained Café del Mar's success. But trends move quickly and, in Wood's view, these compilations have had their day.

"So many hotels have used that approach that it has become generic. You're not differentiating your brand. You're verging on becoming a cliché," he says. "The reason that style is used is that it >>>

References:

1. *Mojo Magazine* May 2015, page 41
2. *Hotel Management Magazine* 8 October 2012



Rob Wood, founder of Music Concierge

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Music copyright bodies and hospitality have had long-running disputes

>>> doesn't jump out at you and scare you while you're eating your cornflakes. It's background music and it often does need to remain in the background. But it doesn't have to be generic, wishy-washy or muzaky. It can be intelligent, engaging and inspiring."

Wood's own music tips include a new strand of Brazilian music mixed with reggae (Flavia Coelho's album *Mundo Meu*) which creates a "beautiful summery feel," and a new wave of minimalist piano music as practiced by musicians such as Nils Frahm.

Delivery

Who should manage the music in your venue? You may have a music-savvy member of your team who'd like to create some playlists. According to Wood, there are drawbacks to doing it yourself.

The main stumbling block is the sheer volume of music required. Even a single dining room with the same music played every day (not an advisable policy), would require at least ten hours of music, or 200 songs. At the other end of the scale, a resort hotel with numerous bars, restaurants and spa facilities will need vast volumes of music in order to create specific ambiances in each of its public areas.

Suppliers of music for business have enormous libraries. Mood Media, whose UK clients include Tinseltown Restaurants, Costa Coffee and Premier Inn, has a digital library of 1.5 million commercially recorded songs, including 500 versions of the Beatles' song *Yesterday*, the most covered song in history.

Founded in 2007, Music Concierge is a relative newcomer. With annual sales of £1m, its clients include Jumeirah Hotels, COMO Hotels and Resorts, The Upper House in Hong Kong; and Claridge's and Dormy House in the UK. When creating playlists for a new client, Wood says that his first port of call is often his own record collection: "I have been a collector since the age of nine and worked in music my whole career. I have a massive collection which is still growing, much to my wife's annoyance."

Wood's links with record labels are another help and his creative team are constantly expanding their knowledge.



Music Concierge provides music services to Dormy House in the UK and The Upper House in Hong Kong (below)

"When we work with a new hotel, in the Middle East for example, we might be presented with a whole new music genre that we're not so familiar with. We might say: 'We think this hotel needs a very traditional Arabic sound, relaxed, with a lot of this particular instrument.' If we don't have a lot of that type of music, we will search for it and become experts on that particular genre. We have good contacts around the world, and offices in London, Dubai, Johannesburg, Hong Kong and Brisbane."

Streaming

Once the consultancy phase has been completed and approved, a piece of

hardware containing the playlists is slotted into the hotel's AV system. This can then be managed remotely from Music Concierge's headquarters in Hertfordshire.

"As we speak there are around 500 different hotels around the world and their music is being managed and regularly updated by us," says Wood. "We create playlists for each part of the day and schedule them to change automatically. Hotel staff don't need to do anything. The atmosphere always adapts to the trading pattern throughout the day."

In general, music for business can either be delivered by satellite or streamed over the internet, but installing it directly at the venue guards against connectivity





problems.

"We have clients in the Maldives for example, where connectivity isn't great and the internet will go down often," says Wood. "But the music will still play. We're only using the connection to update and manage the content."

Thanks to streaming services and websites like Soundcloud and YouTube, consumers can now listen to new music at little or no cost. Although the best-known streaming services such as Spotify are aimed at consumers only, it can only be a matter of time before streaming services for business become better-known and more widespread.

Copyright

Commercial premises, be they offices, factories, hairdressers or restaurants, have to pay copyright licenses to play music in public, although a paid-for music service will take care of this obligation for you.

In the UK, hospitality operators require two licenses, one from PRS for Music, which distributes royalties to songwriters and composers; and one from PPL, which relates to the recording itself and pays the performers and the record company. A PRS licence also covers live music. Since 2012, venues such as hotels, bars and restaurants have been able to stage small-scale live music events without needing an additional licence.

The music copyright bodies and hospitality have had long-running disputes, culminating in two major court cases. The

first concerned whether a hotel room is a private or public space. Radio and TV broadcasts include copyright music, so a hotel guest watching TV will be enjoying music at certain times. While the hotel industry's lobbying organisations argued that a hotel room is a private domain, the European Court ruled that the successive occupants of a hotel bedroom are a 'public' so the rules on public performance of music still apply. UK hoteliers, therefore, have to pay a licence of around £3 per year each to PRS and PPL for every bedroom they operate.

In the second case, the Copyright Tribunal agreed with the British Hospitality Association and the British Beer and Pub Association that operators had been paying too much in music royalties since 2005. PPL was forced to pay back around £20m.

Since these cases, relationships have been "much better," says Martin Couchman FIH OBE, deputy chief executive of the BHA. "PPL are constantly campaigning about the value of music. If we're talking about nightclubs, then music is a key reason people pay to enter, so the value is obvious. But the value of background music in a hotel is much harder to define."

Indeed, even if you put together the most carefully curated cutting-edge playlist, most of your customers are unlikely to take any notice. But then again, the sub-conscious effect could be significant. ■

Mr & Mrs Smith and Music Concierge

Rob Wood, founder of Music Concierge, says: "Out of my experience as a DJ and editor I knew how to choose and present music for different audiences, so quite organically, brands started approaching me and asking me: 'Can you help us with our sound identity and choose music for our marketing communications?' One of the first companies to approach me was Mr & Mrs Smith, the collection of boutique hotels. Founder James Lohan said he thought that music and travel were natural bed-fellows and he wanted to do a CD series for Mr & Mrs Smith customers, to reinforce the brand. The first CD was called 'Something for the weekend' and it was the soundtrack to play in the car as you've packed your bags and you've left work on a Friday night for your weekend away in a country house hotel."

Costa Coffee and Mood Media

For one strand of the in-store playlist, Mood picked a predominantly acoustic selection of tracks from up-and-coming singers and songwriters. "The artists were not well-known and by supporting new artists, Costa has cast a cool and aspirational air to its in-store environment," says Mood Media. To provide juxtaposition, Mood interspersed relaxing chill-out tracks, with light beats and gentle breaks. Artists include Boards of Canada, Nightmares on Wax, Morcheeba and Aim. Mood installed high-quality sound systems in each Costa site, consisting of an MP7000 hard drive system. Costa staff can select alternate tracks at random through the centrally controlled channel, and Mood updates the channel each month with around 60 new tracks (approximately four hours of new music) and it contains a total of 20 hours of music at any one time.

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