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SPECIAL REPORTS

The Times

April 29, 2005

Beautiful noise

FROM PROFESSOR TIMOTHY G. LEIGHTON

Sir, Ben Macintyre is shocked on encountering a noise-free environment (Comment, April 23). It is strange that acoustics affects lives so profoundly and commonly, both as a nuisance and a necessity, yet remains so widely unnoticed. Through speech, acoustics has dominated our communications for millennia. Acoustical engineering underpins not only recorded music but also live transmissions, from entertainment in theatres and concert venues to public address systems.

Ultrasonic equipment is used to examine foetuses and organs and is common in physiotherapy and dentistry. Ultrasound is also used to manufacture pharmaceutical products and foodstuffs and, from the Second World War to the present conflicts, sonar has had an unrivalled role in the underwater battlespace.

Acoustic systems are also used to map petrochemical reserves and archaeological sites below the seas, as well as monitoring a huge variety of important commercial and environmental items, from fish stocks to the effect of global warming.

Yours faithfully,
 TIM LEIGHTON,
 (Fellow, Institute of Acoustics; Professor of Ultrasonics and Underwater Acoustics),
 Institute of Sound and Vibration Research,
 University of Southampton,
 Highfield, Southampton SO17 1BJ.
 April 26.



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