

Alpha Music by an Omega Male
John B. Levine plays to your brainwaves
By Olivia Flores Alvarez

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Australian pianist and composer John B. Levine says his music will do you good. And not just in an 'aren't you a cultured jack-ass?' kind of way. He says his CDs, which are sold only through his Web site, www.silenceofmusic.com, can not only help you relax, but can even affect your health.



Show Details

Who / What:

John B. Levine

Music Genre:

Eclectic

"I get stories from people, like a lady who suffers from chemotherapy is using my music to help her get to sleep and to reduce the nausea. A family just lost their two-and-a-half-day-old baby in Maryland, and they're using my music to help with the grief," he told us during a recent stop in Houston.

"I get funny stories, too. One chap says he uses my music at home when he's not there. He's making a joke, of course. But actually he's got two cocker spaniels who suffer from separation anxiety and whenever he leaves, they start messing up the whole house. So he plays it when he's not there."

Levine was studying electrical engineering when he began learning about meditation. There was New Age music already available to assist in achieving that relaxed state, but Levine found it lacking.

"I started playing music to have more fun, not for spiritual or healing purposes," he says. "One day I read about New Age relaxation music, which is supposed to fix headache and insomnia and all those things. My question was, 'Could music really be that powerful to help all these?' After buying some of this music, I discovered that it really fell short of the mark. It actually got me angry that there were composers who would pollute the world with such music. My friend said, 'Well, stop complaining and do something about it!' So I did."

What Levine did was to study music, focusing on composing. He found (he says) that certain sounds and patterns can slow down the listener's brain waves, taking them from the beta level (awake and stressed) to the alpha level (awake and calm) in about four minutes. Levine uses the "centuries-old pentatonic and Lydian scales." (Don't bother looking that up -- basically, a

pentatonic scale has five notes to an octave, and a Lydian scale -- er, Lydian mode, actually -- comes from ancient Greek music theory.)

"I've got tons of stories from teachers that say it elicits good behavior from students in the classroom," he says. "A chap didn't believe me, so he did his thesis on the subject and found there was an 87 percent drop in talking when the music was being used in the classroom of disruptive teenage boys, what the teacher called 'her class from hell.' They measured the academic results as well, which came up to over 100 percent increase in performance.

"The teenagers really didn't care for my music, their music was Slash music. One of the students came up to the teacher and started complaining that they didn't like the music. The teacher knew that usually it takes only a few minutes for the brainwaves to go down to an alpha state, so she let him talk. By the time he finished, he couldn't remember what the issue was. Because by then, he was in a calmer state."

Levine says it doesn't matter if you believe in his music or not, if you want to relax or not. His music gets you to the alpha state no matter your attitude, your intention or, apparently, your species.

"My first CD put three little budgie [birds] to sleep during the middle of the day. That's what proved to me that my music had relevance. Everyone was saying it was nice, but I just thought everyone was trying to be nice to me. Because of my engineering background, I wanted more science to it. I thought, I can't just believe people saying nice words. I have to have something more definite than that. Then I got a phone call saying, 'Do you know what your music did to our three budgies? It put them to sleep during the day. Normally, we'd have to put a blanket over the cage and turn out the lights because if they see any bit of light, they won't go to sleep.' But every time they heard this particular song, 'Silence is Peace,' they went to sleep, even if it was during the day, in the broad sunlight. To me that meant that there was no placebo effect, there was no suggestion, no expectation. To me, that meant this was real."

We don't know if Levine's music will do all that for you. And we didn't have any budgies or angry teenaged Slash fans to try it out on, but we do know that if you're looking to relax, there is music out there that can help you, including, perhaps, Levine's. We can't say for sure because, well, we don't have any trouble falling asleep. (As a matter of fact, we're sleep-typing right this very minute. Shhhh! You'll wake us.) No budgies were hurt in the writing of this article.