

Pianist has developed Alphamusic to take stresses away His music soothes their ravaged souls

NOT many of us could successfully meditate in the middle of a rock band sound check, but musician John Levine is a master at evoking calm in any situation, as patients at St Luke's Hospice have discovered.

The Australian-born composer visited St Luke's, in Basildon, to perform a type of music he calls Alphamusic, in a bid to prove it can have healing powers.

John, who now lives and works in Cambridge, started a tour of 20 UK hospices at St Luke's day centre, in Nethermayne, where he spent an hour performing for patients, their carers and staff.

The professional pianist and composer, who has supported some of Australia's most famous bands during his career - including INXS and Men at Work - began designing Alphamusic 20 years ago.

His work has been widely praised by healthcare professionals around the world for having a positive affect on people.

Alphamusic is said to work by tapping into the brainwaves. When we are calm, peaceful and happy we are said to be in an alpha state, but when we are anxious or stressed our beta brainwaves take over.

John works with audiences by performing relaxing scores on the piano, while also taking them through a range of sensory exercises and breathing techniques.

As a youngster John had two hobbies - electronics and music.

Through years of hard work he eventually found a way of combining the two to create a type of music to transport people to a calmer place.

The music can be particularly beneficial for terminally ill patients, such as those at St Luke's, who are living with cancer and other lifelimiting conditions.

John said: "I wanted to find out how the mind can affect the body. I discovered you can keep calm in a state of chaos, if you really want to."

He told the audience how it is possible to block out even the most blaring of sounds and used an example of meditating during a

By EMMA PALMER

blaring sound check when he was a youngster.

"The group was doing a sound check on stage and there was bashing and screeching going on and musicians yelling at the top of their voices.

"So, I sat on the floor and eventually managed to relax and find my centre. It is possible to let ourselves block out stress, we just need to know how."

When people told me how much my music was helping them I just thought they were being nice

John's music has been the subject of academic research into pain management and the topic of a University of Cambridge thesis into behaviour management.

Deb Hickey, head of care services at St Luke's Hospice and organiser of John's visit, said: "We are delighted to be able to offer this alternative therapy concert to our

patients. It offers support in a very non intrusive way.

"This is powerful type of therapy and one which the hospice is continuing to explore."

John spent the afternoon working with hospice staff, teaching them how to use his de-stressing skills on a regular basis.

Patient, June Hopkins, 76, of Wickford, who is recovering from several bouts of chemotherapy after being diagnosed with breast cancer, enjoyed John's concert.

She said: "I feel really relaxed. This is not something I ever thought I would try, but I'm glad I've experienced it."

Across the globe 250,000 people, including health professionals, have bought John's CDs and use his music in many forms of therapies.

During the summer John's Emerald Forest composition was played at the Live Earth concert and the Concert for Diana, both at Wembley Stadium.



■ Gentle tunes - John Levine performs at the hospice

Picture: MAXINE CLARKE TUC394

ust one more victim of a sinister illness