

Music for Pets by Kari O'Brien

Behavioral problems in pets are one of the foremost reasons people relinquish their pets today. Problems such as separation anxiety, improper elimination, chewing and howling can present themselves in a newly adopted pet, or one that's been your companion for years. When underlying medical issues have been ruled out by a veterinarian, finding the root cause of behavioral problems can seem daunting to even the most committed pet owner.

There are many solutions to dealing with these situations. In addition to working with a professional trainer through programs such as Our Companions Stay-at-Home Program, observing how your pet responds to noises and vibrations in your home environment may provide valuable tools to lessen, or even prevent, destructive behavior.

Janet Marlow, author of *Zen Dog: Music and Massage for a Stress Free Pet* advocates establishing a feeling of connectedness and safety for your pets in the home environment through the use of calming music. Marlow, a composer and researcher, has developed a CD music series specifically for the purposes of soothing over-reactive pets while establishing balance and well-being in their environment. Because dogs and cats hear frequencies considerably lower and higher than humans, Marlow uses a unique process to design music that is adjusted for their hearing sensitivities.

Marlow strives to educate pet owners that music can be an extremely effective means when trying to alleviate an anxious pet. "Dogs and cats are energetic beings and music, being a physical substance that permeates the air, can have positive effects to elicit calm." She emphasizes that many behavioral problems often transpire as a pet's physical reaction to unsettling elements in their home environment. "We place pets in an unnatural environment and they have to adapt to strange noises and vibrations which they often cannot distinguish from threatening sounds." Marlow points out that an animal's instinctive "fight or flight" reaction to loud noises such as garbage trucks, traffic, thunderstorms and the like, often keep them in a reactive nervous state throughout the day which in turn may manifest as behavioral issues.

The vibration Marlow's music creates is just as important as the sound that it resonates. In playing her music at your pet's ear level (no subwoofers or speakers placed on a bare floor please) the sound and vibration form a partnership that recreates the disbursement of sound as it would in nature.

In keeping with such principles, Marlow's music can be used as an instrument to conceal the startling sounds and vibrations of thunderstorms that cause angst in many pets. "The sound of thunder is disturbing to humans, so you can understand why a dog's acute hearing – combined

with its sensitivity to atmospheric changes – can trigger behaviors of anxiety.” Marlow states that in turning up the volume slightly higher, the music becomes both a relaxation device and masking instrument due to her carefully crafted sound and vibrations used in sync to drown out those that are causing the anxiety or pain.

Marlow’s music can also be used as a reassuring tool for pets with separation anxiety by routinely playing her music a few minutes before leaving the house and leaving it on repeat mode while you are away. Marlow feels that in doing so, you can help your pet associate your exit with a positive and stress-free feeling.

Marlow points out that her music has also been shown to produce a comforting sensation for pet owners. Being that our pets often respond to our human emotions, such a mood enhancement could certainly lend itself to a well-adjusted household.

When managing a pet who exhibits behavioral issues, it is important to remember to also incorporate professionals, such as trainers and veterinarians, into your efforts.

As we have learned from Janet Marlow, sometimes it really can be as simple as being aware of your pet’s response to your home environment and continually making changes to keep them happy and balanced.