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.com**

In conversation with
tails.com



Carolyn Menteith
Dog Behaviourist & Trainer



Dr Sean McCormack
Veterinary expert



Music is considered a universal language, with people all around the world enjoying listening to their favourite artists, going to gigs and using music to express their emotions and moods.

But what about animals? Do they respond to different styles and speeds of music? Can music relax and calm them when anxious?

We spoke to two dog experts to find out what they thought about the effect music can have on dogs and their owners, along with a little research of our own.



Dr Sean McCormack

Veterinary expert

Head Vet at tails.com, Sean worked for over 6 years in clinical practice. Primarily treating dogs and cats, he also has an interest in exotic animals. Sean brings a unique breadth of knowledge on all things canine and understands better than anyone the unique emotional bond between dogs and their owners.



Carolyn Menteith

Dog Behaviourist & Trainer

Carolyn Menteith has over 20 years' experience working with dogs as a dog trainer and behaviour expert. She's passionate about building the very best relationships between dogs and their owners, believing that every dog is unique - and understanding that they each have their own individual personalities. Carolyn's role as resident behaviourist at tails.com sees her bring a wealth of expertise from the behaviourist world.



Q. tails.com is a well-known name for dog owners all over the country now, but where did it all start and grow from?

A. Sean: Well it all started by looking at the pet food options on offer and realising it was very much 'one size fits all', with off the shelf offerings in pet shops and supermarkets. As a group of absolute dog lovers and experts, the founding team wanted to bring a solution that recognised every dog is different and that many had multiple nutritional needs that needed prioritising, not just one. So the idea of truly tailored nutrition was born, getting to know every single one of our customers and their dogs and designing a diet and feeding plan just for them.

That was over 8 years ago now and we're feeding hundreds of thousands of UK dogs. Our vision is to improve the lives of dogs and their owners and our mission is to have changed the world of pet food for good. We're well on our way on both counts.

Q. Sean, we recently read an article written by yourself about music and separation anxiety in dogs. And as people continue to return to the workplace post-pandemic, this topic has become more and more relevant – why do you believe music can help dogs' anxiety when alone?

A. Sean: When we released 'Raise the Woof!', our Christmas single for dogs, I delved into all the scientific journals to find out what the evidence said on this. It turns out that **playing the right kind of music has been shown to relax dogs or relieve their anxiety.**¹ While classical music was predictably popular, gentle reggae vibes scored even higher on the dog enjoyment scale. In the home environment with separation anxiety, perhaps more relevant than the choice of music is predictability and consistency in routine to make dogs feel more settled and less anxious. So if that involves leaving the radio on when you leave, it's a good habit to keep. Carolyn can explain why separation anxiety is a tricky issue to crack however, and music alone isn't a solution.

Q.

Sean and Carolyn, as specialists in your respective fields, why did you decide to work with tails.com?

Do their values align to your own?

Do they raise awareness for important causes/causes you care about etc?

“

It is about celebrating the bond between humans and the dogs that share their lives..

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A.

Carolyn: The main reason I chose to work with tails.com was because of their desire to do the very best for dog owners and guardians, and their ethos of looking at every single dog as an individual.

Many behaviour and training problems have their roots in owners not realising that every dog is different - and so has different needs, strengths and weaknesses, exactly the same way humans do.

tails.com isn't just about food - it is about celebrating the bond between humans and the dogs that share their lives, and giving them information that will enhance that relationship.

A.

“

We also released the world's first music single designed for dogs in Christmas 2020 which raised funds for Dudes and Dogs, a men's mental health group...

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Sean: When I first spoke to James Davidson, our CEO, I was still working as a clinical vet in private practice but was really impressed by the tails.com proposal. I thought, "if they are truly doing what they say they are doing, tailoring diets to every dog's individual needs using clever tech and a complex nutritional algorithm, then that would be really exciting to me".

I have always had a keen interest in nutrition, having studied it extensively in my undergraduate Animal Science degree and in vet school. So I was tempted to join and be part of a new way of feeding our pets that would see them live long, happy and healthy lives. It turned out the team were very much delivering as they claimed, and I came aboard in 2016. I haven't looked back, it's been a great journey where I've learned lots. I work every day with a passionate, talented team delivering exceptional nutrition for dogs and now cats too.

The values we uphold as a brand massively align with mine, I became a vet to help people and animals

and I recognise the amazing bond between people and their pets. The team at tails.com is just as passionate about this. And we have done some amazing charity work including dedicating the proceeds of my recipe book to StreetVet supporting those experiencing homelessness and their pets.

We also released the world's first music single designed for dogs in Christmas 2020 which raised funds for Dudes and Dogs, a men's mental health group encouraging men to talk more about their well being. A cause very close to my heart. And we also support various charities including rescue/re-homing organisation All Creatures Great and Small, Refuge4Pets who help get victims of domestic violence and their pets out of difficult situations and Give a Dog a Bone which helps older animals out of homelessness and older adults out of loneliness. I have to say that giving funds to these sorts of organisations is one of the best parts of my job for sure.

Q.

Bonfire Night

Even though it only comes around once a year, how do you feel dog owners can use music to help dogs around bonfire night & fireworks? Do they need to prepare in advance to help soothe their pup's anxiety?

64.8% of dog owners said their dogs are stressed/anxious on Bonfire Night.²

A. Carolyn: A high proportion of dogs suffer from noise phobia around firework season - and for many it is a time of real misery. From the very start of their life - and in that crucial developmental period when dogs can accept new things as normal and so 'safe' - puppies should be taught how to accept loud and unexpected noises as just being a part of life.

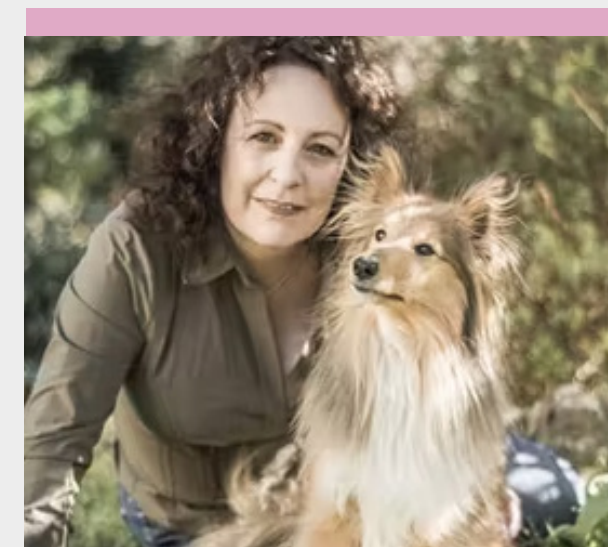
For dogs who haven't had this early 'head start', there are things owners can do (and it's never too early to start that!) - including very gradual exposure to unexpected noises and sounds at controlled times - but a true noise phobia needs help from an accredited behaviourist, as one thing is for sure... fireworks will happen every year!

Music can be really helpful over the firework season however as it can mask distant firework sounds and lessen their impact, and give dogs (and owners) something to listen to rather than just sitting and waiting for the next bang.

Q.

Have either of you had personal experience / seen the psychological or physical effects music can have with dogs? If so, please explain.

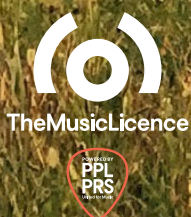
A. Carolyn: Having visited rescue centres both here in the UK and around the world, there is no doubt that kind of environment can be stressful for dogs - lots of barking, noise, and other external stimulation. **The right music - such as light classical, soft rock, easy listening - played at a low level definitely has a calming effect on the dogs.** Music can also help dogs who have low level anxiety or stress when in the home as it takes the focus away from unexpected noises coming from outside and replaces it with something calm and predictable.



When running training classes, playing music relaxes the owner too and helps them transform a boring obedience-type exercise into a fun, dance exercise where the dog and owner are working together! **When the owner is relaxed and having fun, so is the dog.** Training and working with our dogs should be fun and not a chore - and music helps to achieve that.

Sean: I've certainly seen some funny reactions from the tails.com office dogs as well as the dozens of video reactions from dogs when our doggy track was released. Although some weren't bothered or took any notice, others really had their interest piqued by certain notes in the song, or familiar sounds of squeaky toys and trigger word throughout "squirrel" and "treats" went down well. High pitched notes too.





Carolyn, what does a positive behavioural reaction look like when a dog hears music that it finds calming?

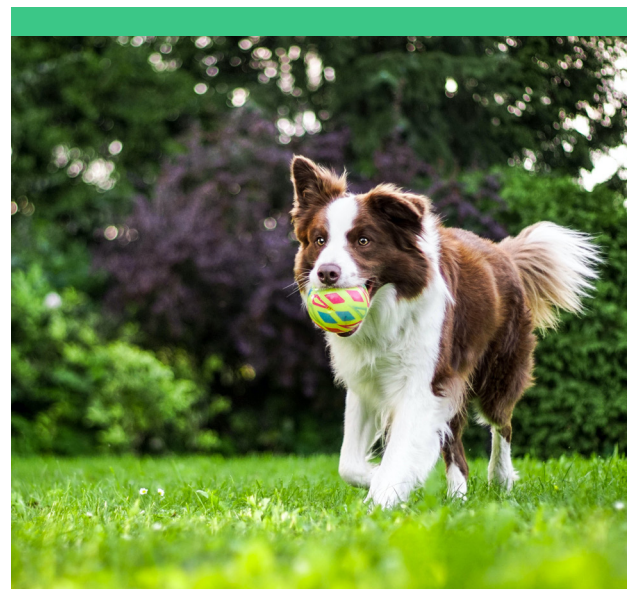
Carolyn: Dogs show how they are feeling through body language - whether excited, fearful, stressed or happy. A calm dog is relaxed and happy to chill out - just like us when we find music calming. Any tail wags are gentle and swaying, ears are relaxed, any wrinkling above their eyes or at the corners of the mouth smooth away, and breathing is steady and gentle.

What other tools / tactics would you both recommend to help relieve stress and anxiety in dogs?

Carolyn: Where to start... I could write you a book on that! The short answer is 'know your dog'.

Avoid situations that you know stress them out - and learn to recognise your own dog's signs and often subtle body language cues that they are feeling anxious or worried. Remember that they have feelings and emotions the same as we do - and take the time to recognise when they are struggling with a situation, and always ask yourself 'how are you feeling - and how can I make you feel better?'.

Sometimes that is avoiding a situation completely, sometimes it is providing a distraction or an alternative behaviour, other times it is get professional behavioural help. The even shorter answer is 'learn to speak dog'!



Is there a particular genre of music that seems to be most popular, or have you found it depends on the breed – for example, Jack Russells prefer drum & bass whilst Afghan Hounds are partial to reggae?

Carolyn: I love the idea of breed-specific musical preferences! I haven't actually noticed any, but **I certainly have seen dogs whose musical preferences mirror their owner's...** So I've seen musician's dogs who seem to love the type of music - or instrument - their beloved human plays, and I've seen music lovers' dogs enjoy everything from opera to heavy rock depending on their persons' preference. This is probably more to do with sharing their owner's enjoyment and pleasure - and that their human is far more relaxed and happy when listening to their choice of music. Music is a social experience - and it certainly seems our dogs share that.

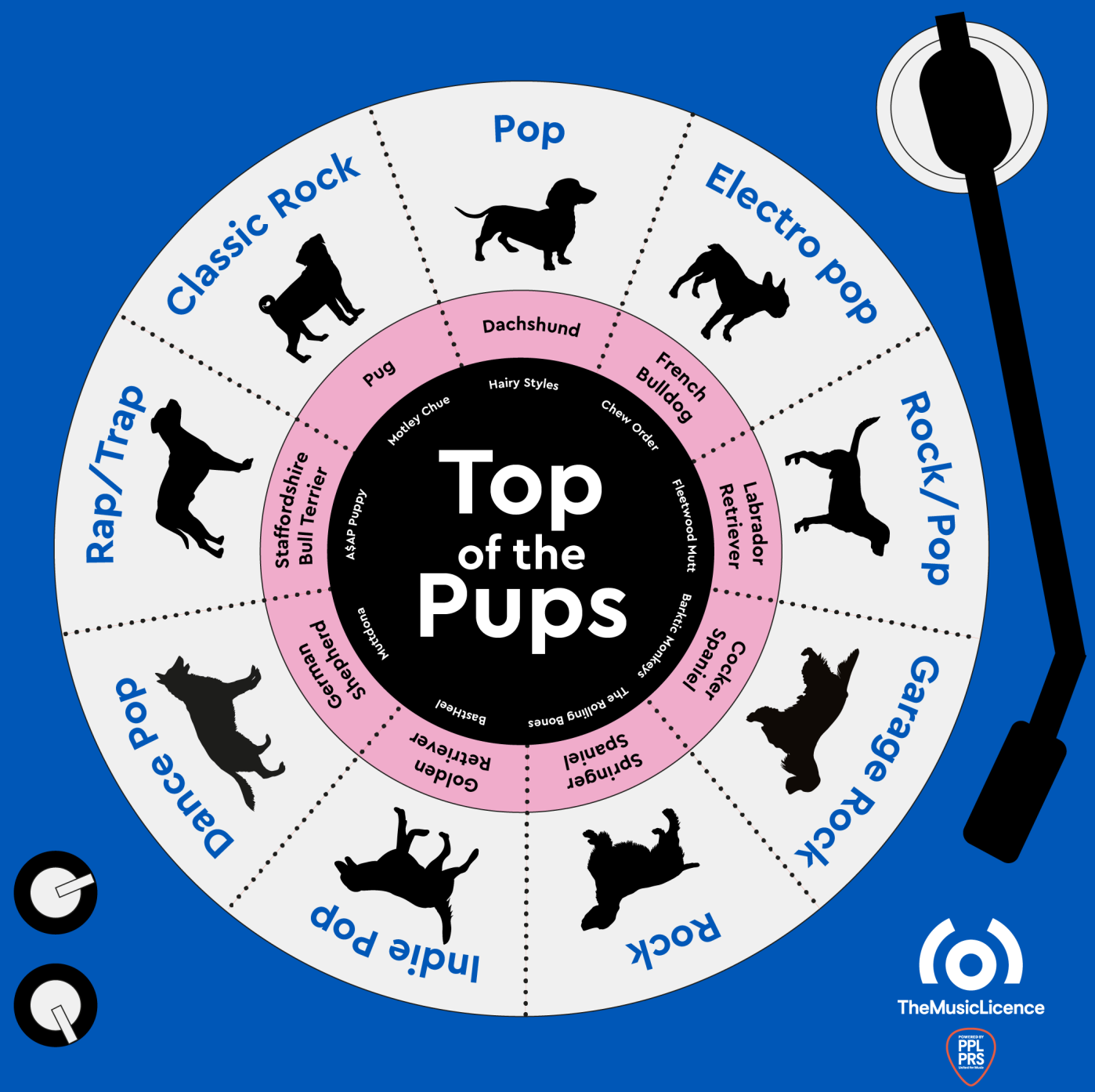
48.8% of dog owners said they play music/the radio to relax their dogs when anxious.²

44.1% of those who play music said they prefer to place classical music for their pets.²

Sean: It's reggae all the way for most dogs according to the research, but it's context-specific. If a dog has grown up in a house where classical or jazz is played often, and they associate that genre with relaxation time or positive interactions with their human family, then that music is likely to release feel good chemicals and happy hormones. It's very much down to the individual dog rather than breed I think.

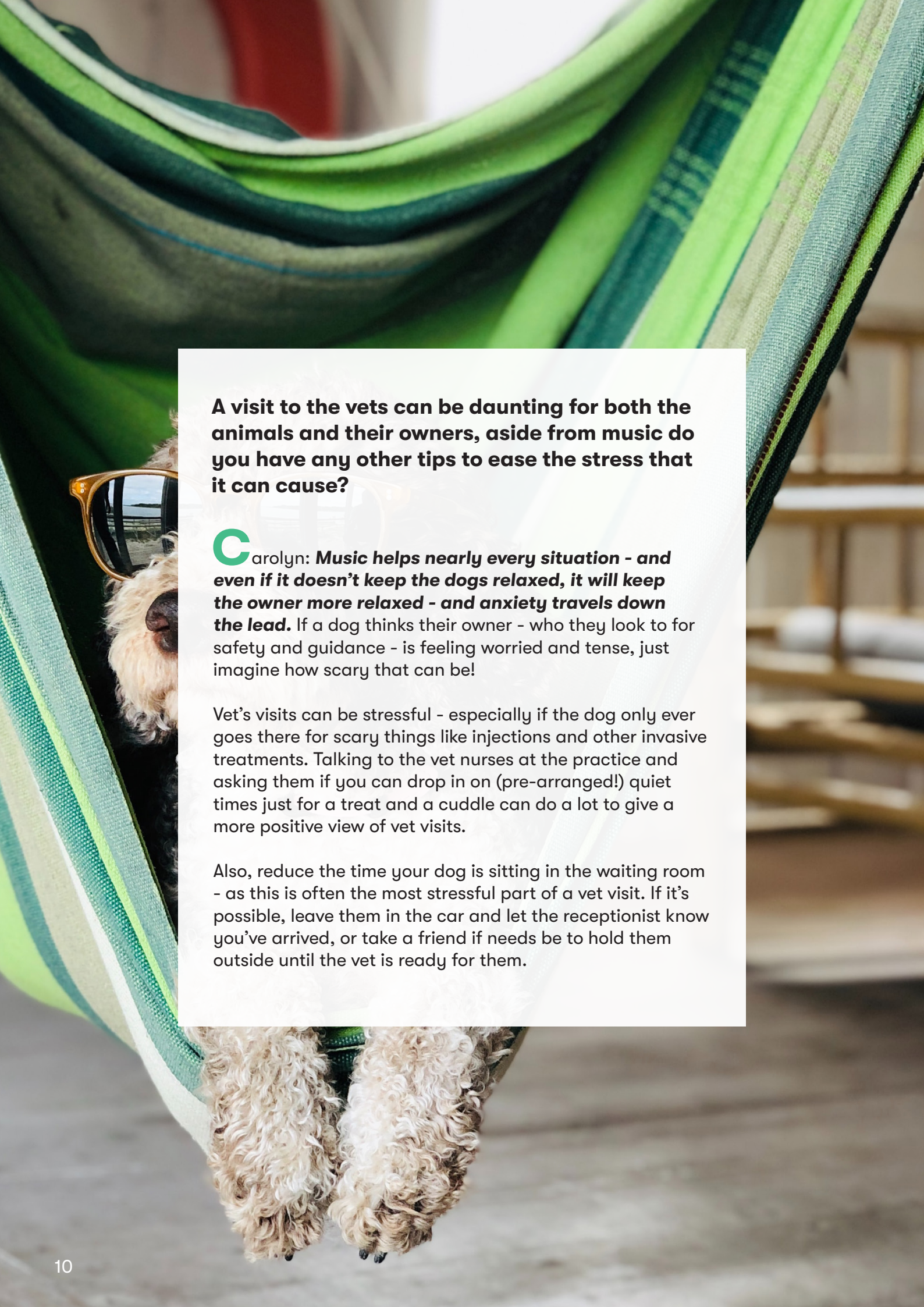


Paws for thought



The results are in – and fascinating – to give you a feel for what your dog may like listening to!

PPL PRS worked with dog food brand tails.com, scanning thousands of playlists (and so millions of songs) that feature the UK's most popular breeds of 2022 in the title. Dog owners are evidently making musical mixes for their much-loved pet and the similarities denote what works best for each breed!



A visit to the vets can be daunting for both the animals and their owners, aside from music do you have any other tips to ease the stress that it can cause?

Carolyn: *Music helps nearly every situation - and even if it doesn't keep the dogs relaxed, it will keep the owner more relaxed - and anxiety travels down the lead.* If a dog thinks their owner - who they look to for safety and guidance - is feeling worried and tense, just imagine how scary that can be!

Vet's visits can be stressful - especially if the dog only ever goes there for scary things like injections and other invasive treatments. Talking to the vet nurses at the practice and asking them if you can drop in on (pre-arranged!) quiet times just for a treat and a cuddle can do a lot to give a more positive view of vet visits.

Also, reduce the time your dog is sitting in the waiting room - as this is often the most stressful part of a vet visit. If it's possible, leave them in the car and let the receptionist know you've arrived, or take a friend if needs be to hold them outside until the vet is ready for them.

Just for fun with tails.com

Which ONE song would you pick to play to calm a dog?

Carolyn: Can't choose one but something gentle and probably soft rock...

Sean: It's got to be "Don't Worry, Be Happy" for me, a reggae classic.

And finally, if you could choose one song to listen to for the rest of your life, what would it be?

Carolyn: Now that's a tough one... My music tastes vary wildly depending on my mood, what I'm doing - and whether I want relaxing, uplifting or getting in the mood for party time. Music has such a huge influence on mood, attitude and behaviour so just one for the rest of my life...? Impossible.

If I really had to pick I guess off the top of my head 'Hallelujah' (Leonard Cohen) - but in all its various incarnations and cover versions...

Sean: It's a hard choice between any of Kelis' many bops and bangers. Kelis is definitely my spirit animal.

To complement the expert views on music and your pet, we also conducted a short survey of dog owners to find out how they help to de-stress their pooches, and this is what we found:

67% of owners distract their dog with food or toys when they are stressed, and 48% play music to help soothe their anxieties.²

Of that 48% who put some tunes on during stressful moments, just over 40% of owners play classical music, with 'pop' coming in second place with 30%.²

Many dog owners also said that they leave the radio or TV on for their pets when left alone.²

A visit to the vets can be a stressful situation for all animals, not just dogs, and music can be a welcome distraction for both the animal and the anxious owner.

Playing music or the TV in waiting areas, recovery rooms and, where appropriate in treatment rooms could help to make a visit to the vets more enjoyable.

Find out more about the benefits of playing music in your vets or other animal wellbeing business, visit:

pplprs.co.uk/themusiclicence/sectors/veterinary-animal-services/



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1. <http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/135846/>
2. Survey of 400 dog owners conducted on 13/06/2022 via Attest.