



Access to hearing care

## Sticking out your tongue at hearing loss

Who doesn't know the Rolling Stones' legendary logo of a mouth with the tongue sticking out? When more than 40,000 fans came to see the rock veterans play at Zurich's Letzigrund stadium, volunteers from Sonova were on hand to distribute hearing protection on behalf of the Hear the World Foundation and to inform concert-goers of the possible consequences of excessively loud music for their hearing.

It's as if someone has turned on a tap: an endless stream of hundreds of concert-goers files past Katrin Egli and Feifei Pilet, the two Sonova volunteers. Although the performance at Zurich's Letzigrund stadium by what must be the world's most venerable rock band is not due to begin for another three hours, people are still in a hurry to get to their seats. Even so, most still make a quick grab for one of the little blue packs of ear plugs that Egli and Pilet are handing out.

Attending regular amped-up concerts without ear protection can cause lasting hearing damage. This is why the Hear the World Foundation has launched a campaign to raise awareness about listening habits and offer tips on ways to protect your hearing.

It's Egli and Pilet's first outing as volunteers for the Hear the World Foundation. 30-year-old Katrin Egli, who works for Sonova as Project Manager Global Pricing and Lifecycle, is wearing a fiery red sweatshirt with the words "Ear Brigade" emblazoned across it. "Volunteering here is a nice change," she says cheerily, without stopping to reach into her red shoulder bag for more ear plugs to hand out. "It's fun and I'm glad I can do my bit for our foundation."

The free hearing protection is a hit with concert-goers. "I was a bit taken aback at first," says 60-year-old Thomas Berger. "But it's only logical, really." His parents had warned him about listening to loud music when he was young: "They always told me I wouldn't be able to hear a thing when I was older." Berger has taken his 22-year-old son Philipp on a special trip from Stuttgart for the concert and both father and son are glad to receive some hearing protection. There is a hint that it might indeed get loud at the Letzigrund as Mick Jagger and his bandmates take to the stage, three hours before the concert is due to begin, and play the first familiar bars of their hits as a soundcheck.

Concert-goers at the Letzigrund stadium are receptive to the foundation's campaign to raise awareness about preventative care. "If it gets too loud for me, I'm going to use the earplugs," says 47-year-old Böbu Hüssi from Solothurn, stashing the little blue package in his pants pocket.

Hüssi is also more than happy to have his picture taken. In addition to handing out ear protection, Egli and Pilet are inviting concert-goers to strike the signature Hear the World pose for conscious hearing – with their hands cupped behind their ears – for a snap taken by an automatic photo booth. Feifei Pilet presses the start button on the display to prime the camera, there's a quick countdown, then a flash. A few seconds later, Hüssi has his personal memento photo in his hands. Those who wish can also receive their picture by email. Thomas Frank, who has come down from Berlin specially for the concert, needs no second invitation; the couple link arms and grin into the camera. They are both delighted with the snap and the 45-year-old Berliner thinks the foundation's awareness campaign work is "a cool initiative". He says he thinks the topic of preventive healthcare is important: "When I go to concerts, I always take earplugs with me." A lot of his friends already have hearing problems, he remarks; when they were young, they used to listen to too much loud music without protection.

The Hear the World Foundation has been working with Swiss concert promoters abc Production since 2016. "We don't want to wag our fingers or appear patronizing – we'd rather meet visitors halfway on a friendly basis and make them aware of the preventive measures they can take," emphasizes Elena Torresani, Head of the Hear the World Initiative, adding that there are still plenty of people who are unaware that excessively loud music can result in permanent hearing damage. "We'd like to make sure that people can enjoy concerts without regretting it afterwards." This is also the reason for the photo booth, which is an opportunity for the Sonova volunteers to engage with concert-goers and raise awareness of hearing protection issues. "We want to use the photos to make sure that Hear the World's campaign sticks in the memories of the audience," explains Torresani. The foundation is also showing a short preventive health infomercial in which international stars point out the dangers of excessively loud music and recommend the use of hearing protection at music events.

André Béchir, CEO of abc Production, is delighted to be working with the Hear the World Foundation. "For a concert promoter, working with a hearing aid manufacturer and doing preventive healthcare work is a no-brainer," he says. "People coming to a concert are in a good mood and full of excitement and anticipation. That's the best moment to sensitize them to the issue and make clear to them that it is every individual's responsibility to protect their hearing."

Three hours later, Sonova volunteers Katrin Egli and Feifei Pilet have handed out almost all their earplugs. "It was a lot of fun," observes 33-year-old Pilet with a grin, as Egli pulls at her sleeve – the Rolling Stones concert is due to start in just a few minutes and they still have to find their seats. They both quickly pocket a little packet of earplugs. "Now we're ready for anything," says Egli, laughing.