

## Book Review

### **Mechanical Sound by Karin Bijsterveld**

This is a book which is intriguingly different from that which the title suggests; indeed a 'history of noise nuisance' might be more appropriate. For this reason I hope it does not miss its intended audience because it provides a good review of the adverse social consequences of noise, with proper attributions throughout.

This is not an erudite academic text relating to sound and noise problems in the 20th century but rather a massive historical catalogue of noise nuisance, and as such it is a delight to read. Indeed it is a book in which one can delve at random and be both rewarded and intrigued by the perceptive depth and thorough catalogue of issues relating to both unwanted noise and the beauty and satisfaction which a true appreciation of wanted sound, such as the art of music, can provide.

Because the data within is a quite credible source of historical information if taken at face value, a chapter by chapter review is not felt to be appropriate. Suffice it to say that anyone interested in subjective acoustics ought to obtain a copy to read as I feel their application will be well rewarded. Whilst the academic quantification and regulation of noise is reviewed in very interesting detail it is not in the conventional scholastic manner normally associated with the subject. A salutary warning to current researchers however, is that because of the frequent repetition of what has long been known, their studies may not be as original or profound as they think. Politicians in particular, who never appear to read or react to the historical recording of any event let alone noise nuisance, should take note 'that noise could cause damage on the ear ... was a claim made in the fifteenth century' and that night time noise nuisance was mentioned in the 'Statute of the Streets during the reign of Queen Elizabeth 1 (1558–1603)'. In contextual terms however, the comparison of noise with unpleasant odours provides a more realistic baseline for setting the historical priorities of everyday living.

It would be churlish to criticize this book; yes, there are examples which might have been included as no text can be totally inclusive, but they would not add to the novelty of the approach taken in this instance. Anyone seeking personal comments and previously unrecorded differences of opinion among a number of the great research names of the 20th century will be intrigued by some of the statements made therein.

This is an invaluable idiosyncratic repository of historical information relating to noise nuisance, the value of which could easily be overlooked by a less dedicated reader who might be misled by the title. It is worthy of a place in the bookshelf of anyone interested in the study of the wiles and guiles of a largely ill-defined and unquantifiable subject. A thoroughly good read.

C.G. Rice

*Professor Emeritus ISVR, University of Southampton, Southampton, UK*

*E-mail address: [cgrice@sky.com](mailto:cgrice@sky.com)*