

JOEL STYZENS

Award-winning & critically acclaimed multi-instrumentalist, composer, recording artist, educator, and hearing conservation advocate.

Online Press Kit: RelaxYourEars.com/epk





JOEL STYZENS • RELAX YOUR EARS

EUROPEAN SONGWRITING AWARDS

2023 Winner

BEST OF 2023:

*"Top 10 Contemporary
Album of the year"*

THE GUARDIAN



"Lush, comforting music that yearns
and soothes" THE GUARDIAN

"Open-hearted music" BBC

"Stunning new album" NPR

"Beautiful music that gently massages
away any form of stress"
MAXAZINE (Netherlands)

In 2006 severe tinnitus and hyperacusis suddenly threatened his livelihood and halted his professional drumming career. The result was discovering his unique voice as a composer and multi-instrumentalist.

Blending rhythmic Jazz influences with the emotional depth of Classical and World Music, Styzens crafts Neo-Classical pieces that invite listeners to pause, reflect, and find solace in his intimately rich and soothing compositions.

Best music of 2023 Music

John Lewis

Mon 25 Dec 2023 09:00 EST



12

The 10 best contemporary albums of 2023

9. Joel Styzens - Resonance

Chicago multi-instrumentalist and composer Styzens plays hammered dulcimer and classical guitar in this unorthodox outfit which also features Illinois jazz pianist Rob Clearfield, British cellist Sophie Webber and the Atlys String Quartet. You would broadly describe the music they make as minimalism, but where so much minimalism can be insistent, grating and aggravating, this is a form that does not play mathematical games or create fractal patterns - it is lush, comforting music that yearns and soothes.



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Chicago's alternative nonprofit newsroom

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GOSSIP WOLF

Hammered dulcimer player Joel Styzens celebrates a lushly orchestrated new solo album

by J.R. Nelson and Leor Galil
September 19, 2023



Joel Styzens with his hammered dulcimer
Credit: Sarah Boudreau

Music Played



Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart

Concerto for 2 Pianos in E flat major K.365 (3rd mvt)
Performer: Chick Corea. Performer: Friedrich Gulda.
Orchestra: Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. Conductor: Nikolaus Harnoncourt.
[MOZART: DOUBLE PIANO CONCERTO, K. 365 - COREA & GULDA: COMPOSITIONS. WARNER CLASSICS. 3.](#)



Chick Corea

Children's Song no.7
Music Arranger: Duo Aliada. Ensemble: Duo Aliada.
[EAST WEST. HAENSSLER CLASSIC. 1901.](#)



Philip Glass

String Quartet No. 3 (Mishima); mvt. I: 1957-Award Montage
Ensemble: Brooklyn Rider.
[ORANGE MOUNTAIN.](#)



Joel Styzens

Opening
Performer: Sophie Webber. Performer: Rob Clearfield.
Ensemble: ATLYS Quartet.
[RESONANCE. SELF-RELEASED.](#)

BBC
SATURDAY BREAKFAST
Listen now

Saturday - Elizabeth Alker

Elizabeth Alker with her Breakfast melange of classical music, folk, found sounds and the odd Unclassified track. Start your weekend right.

16 days left to listen
2 hours

Resonance
by Joel Styzens with Sophie Webber, Rob Clearfield, & ATLYS
1. Opening 00:00 / 03:08

VIDEO CLIPS (click to open in browser)

1. ENSEMBLE:



2. SOLO:



3. MUSIC & MOVEMENT:



4. LIVE INTERVIEW & PERFORMANCE:







JOEL STYZENS RESONANCE

relaxyourears.com A Sharp Records



- | | |
|------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Opening 3:09 | 9. Esplanade 2:39 |
| 2. To Hold 3:09 | 10. Heritage Garden 4:09 |
| 3. Ascendance I 3:02 | 11. Waterfall Garden 3:38 |
| 4. Ascendance II 1:43 | 12. Burijji 5:10 |
| 5. Ascendance III 2:39 | 13. Niwa 4:14 |
| 6. Resonance I 3:36 | 14. Walled Garden 6:37 |
| 7. Resonance II 4:20 | 15. Closing 4:40 |
| 8. Resonance III 3:05 | 16. Reprise (opening) 1:58 |

Joel Styzens: hammered dulcimer, acoustic guitar, additional piano and strings
Sophie Webber: Cello composition, string arranging
Rob Clearfield: Piano performance
ATLYS String Quartet

When an experience, a relationship, a word, or a sound resonates with us, we remember it because we feel it deeply. The surprise is not that we feel something but that resonance happens from the smallest exchanges to the most awe-inspiring moments. Each has the potential to transform us, individually and collectively. These sixteen pieces grew from some of my most resonant experiences.



JOEL STYZENS / Biography

Joel Styzens is an award-winning and critically acclaimed multi-instrumentalist, composer, recording artist, producer, educator and hearing conservation advocate specializing in piano, hammered dulcimer, drums, percussion and guitar.

He has toured nationally and internationally and has been featured on NPR, Chicago's nationally syndicated WGN and Fox television news broadcasts, and in such publications as Time Out, The National Music Examiner and The UK Hearing Times.

In January of 2006, Styzens woke up with the pitch A-sharp violently ringing in his ears.

Severe tinnitus and hyperacusis (constant ringing and extreme sound sensitivity) suddenly threatened his livelihood and completely halted his career as a professional drummer. The result of this sensory processing disorder was discovering his voice as a composer.

As he began therapy he started writing his own lower-volume acoustic music, incorporating the diverse set of influences from his career as a percussionist — creating a neo-classical music that blends the rhythmic sensibilities and nuance of a jazz drummer and the texturally rich and dynamic emotion of classical and world music into a sound that breathes and respects space as much as sound itself.

Increasingly, we live in a fast-moving world that is noisy and chaotic. Styzens creates intimate, colorfully rich music that is presented in an accessible form that encourages pause, reflection and helps people to de-noise, relax, soothe and recharge.





CHICAGO BOTANIC GARDEN



GARDEN SUITE

Six original pieces on the
“Resonance” album which are
inspired by the
Chicago Botanic Gardens:
Esplanade
Heritage Garden
Waterfall Garden
Buriiji / Niwa
Walled Garden



A Music Teacher's Battle with Tinnitus and Hyperacusis

DANIEL BORN, ATA DIRECTOR OF RESEARCH & SPECIAL PROJECTS

Joel Styzens, a Chicago musician and teacher at the renowned Old Town School of Folk Music, was diagnosed with tinnitus and hyperacusis over three years ago – a reality that essentially ended his career as a professional drummer. But that didn't stop him from developing a refined approach to his music and his dedication to teaching.

A Passion Becomes a Problem

Life changing experiences caused irreparable damage to Joel's hearing: childhood ear infections; practicing drums for up to four hours a day; performing on stage with rock and jazz bands six nights a week; and teaching music by day. "I had a life of nonstop sound from 1999 to 2005," says Joel. "I woke up one Sunday morning with a loud ringing in my head and ears." His tinnitus was accompanied by hyperacusis, an intense sensitivity to everyday sounds. He was 24 years old.



Cellist Katinka Kleijn and Joel Styzens

"In the beginning, I felt all alone with this, but then went through a process of acceptance," explains Joel. "I changed my negative emotional response to these problems into a more positive one. I started to focus on moving forward with my life, concentrating more on the present and figuring out how to keep my passion for music alive."

Creating Songs of Healing

Joel met with audiologist Jill Meltzer, Au.D., who explained that his audiogram indicated a high-frequency hearing loss and that the tone he hears is *A-sharp*. Under Meltzer's supervision, he began a treatment program called Neuromonics, a form of sound therapy. "I used the Neuromonics device for over two years, every day for two to three hours. It was something to go to for relief. My comfort level increased."



"I have some ideas, like restaurants and music venues that dedicate one night a month to being extra quiet so people with tinnitus and hyperacusis can go out and socialize again," says Joel. "I'd also like to start a tinnitus support group here in the Chicago area."

To maximize his treatment process, Joel had to phase out the majority of his live drumming from his musical repertoire. He switched to acoustic guitar and began the slow, synchronous process of healing and constructing a new album of relaxing, spiritually elevating songs. He joined forces with Chicago Symphony Orchestra cellist, Katinka Kleijn, and a host of music friends to create *Relax Your Ears* (available at www.ata.org/store). "Writing the new music for the album was a form of therapy for me. If it wasn't for my hearing issues, *Relax Your Ears* would not exist," says Joel.

Joel Styzens' Life Today

"The sound of traffic horns, dishes clanking, alarms or squeaking car brakes makes me want to jump out of my skin," says Joel. To manage this, he wears custom-molded musician's earplugs – with an interchangeable filter that allows him to fine tune the level of protection – during loud events and while practicing and performing. He also masks Chicago's city sounds and the high-pitch, ringing background noise in his head with in-ear, adjustable white noise generators.

Joel still teaches percussion but now uses electronic drums played at lower volumes than conventional ones. He is also moving toward teaching acoustic guitar and piano.

Changing the World, One Idea at a Time

"I have some ideas, like restaurants and music venues that dedicate one night a month to being extra quiet so people with tinnitus and hyperacusis can go out and socialize again," says Joel. "I'd also like to start a tinnitus support group here in the Chicago area." He spreads tinnitus awareness on his new Web site www.relax-your-ears.com, and through his record label, A-Sharp Records.

"I feel like I can do something positive to provide hope and to inspire and help people with tinnitus and hyperacusis. There are so many things I want to accomplish and I feel like I am just getting started. I get a good number of e-mails from people around the world telling me how my message and music have inspired them. I feel like this is what I am supposed to be doing with my life." ☺☺☺

Spring 2010 | Tinnitus Today

Chicago Tribune

Sounding the call for support

Musician forms tinnitus group

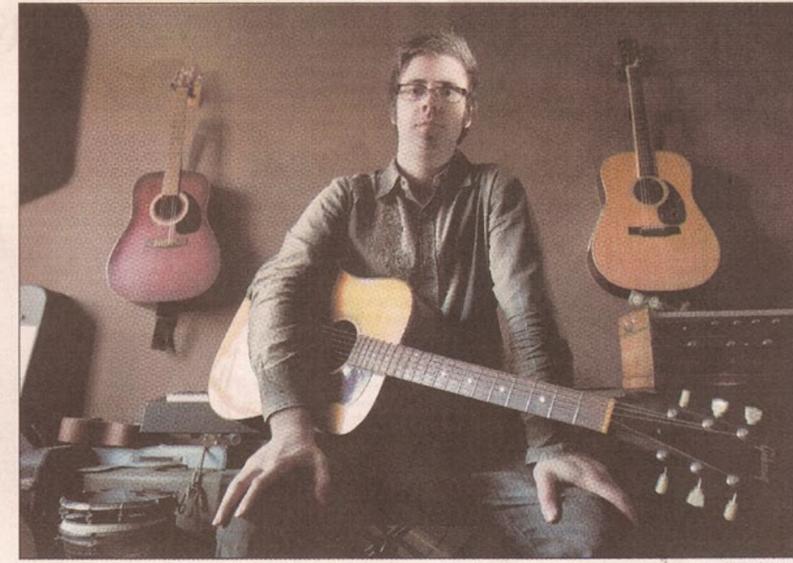
By Kevin Beese
SPECIAL TO THE TRIBUNE

Joel Styzens gets a break from the constant A-sharp hum in his head only while in the shower. For four years, the music composer has suffered from tinnitus, a maddening ringing in the ears, and hyperacusis, an oversensitivity to certain sounds.

"I am one of the cleanest people you'll ever meet," the 28-year-old Styzens quipped of his need to shower at least twice a day for a few minutes of relief.

Styzens has come to terms with the condition he attributes to a lifetime in music, most notably playing drums in the jazz and rock scenes. But he knows that tinnitus is no laughing matter, and like many others with the disorder, he also suffered from severe depression.

Forced to give up playing the drums and facing the



Musician, composer and teacher Joel Styzens, 28, developed tinnitus and hyperacusis four years ago. He has formed a tinnitus support group to help others with ringing in the ears. CHRIS SWEDA/TRIBUNE PHOTO

UK HEARING TIMES

www.hearingtimes.co.uk ■ February 2010

Film Reviews



ALL ABOUT STEVE



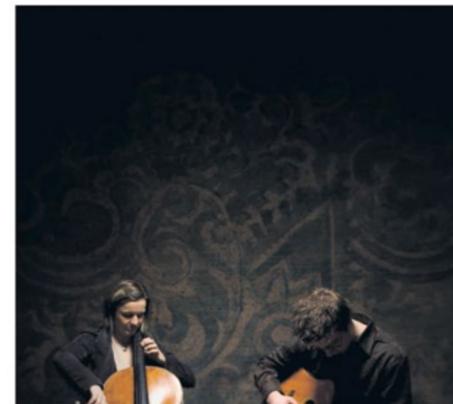
The first half of All About Steve is

Music to your ears

Esther Kane

Ask someone to name a musician with hearing loss and the most common response is Beethoven. But in the world of music and entertainment, there are countless figures suffering with hearing loss, impairment, tinnitus or various other hearing conditions.

What happens to someone after their enjoyment of music becomes hindered or lost altogether?



TimeOut

15 Down the Line + Jennie DeVoe
SPACE. \$10-\$20.

15 Proclamation + Black
Witchery Reggie's Rock Club.
\$TBA. 18+

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 12, 2011 | SECTION 4 | CHICAGO

Classical

classical@timeoutchicago.com

SHH & HIM Styzens, right, suffers from hyperacusis. Beethoven did, too.



Tinnitus soldier

A little hearing loss won't stop composer Joel Styzens. By Mia Clarke

Four years ago, Joel Styzens awoke to a musician's worst nightmare. "I got up one day with constant ringing in my ears," he says between sips of a late-morning latte at Logan Square's Lula Café. The percussionist, a music instructor at Old Town School of Folk Music, was 24 at the time; he'd played drums since age nine. Styzens was diagnosed with tinnitus—the perception of sound when no external source is present—and hyperacusis, an oversensitivity to certain frequency ranges. Despite holding a music degree from Millikin University, Styzens considered abandoning his career.

"With hyperacusis, regular noises like laughing, babies crying and car brakes squeaking become excruciating," the Springfield native says. Immediately, I regret arranging

our meeting in a café. While Styzens remains upbeat and talkative throughout our conversation, the measured, soft timbre of his voice suggests his struggle. He admits that his reaction to sound leaves him perpetually on edge. "I could barely stand to go outside for the first few months," he says. "It's still hard just to walk down the street. I never know when a car horn will go off."

After multiple ear infections as a child, plus many years of giving drum lessons without adequate ear protection, Styzens's past caught up with him. Once a freelance jazz and rock drummer playing up to six gigs a week, he had to give up a major source of income. But the Lincoln Park resident was determined to keep his position as a percussion and piano teacher at Old Town—and to continue to create music. He underwent several treatments: acupuncture, cranial psychotherapy. "None of them miracle cures," he notes, "but many have helped."

Styzens then picked up an acoustic guitar for the first time. "I had one laying around the house," he says. Initially, the tinny sound bothered his ears, but he adapted and later found the tones therapeutic. Ideas for compositions came flooding. "I experimented with [moving] my fingers on the strings and tried to translate the patterns in my head," he says. "I knew what I wanted when I found it."

"I never know when a car horn will go off."

The result of Styzens's experiments can be heard on an exquisite debut album, *Relax Your Ears*, a collection of soaring, delicate instrumental songs that feature his main collaborator, CSO cellist Katinka Kleijn. Styzens wrote "Life Line" for his mother because of the support she's offered throughout his ordeal. The record was released last year on Styzens's own label, A-Sharp—named after the pitch of his tinnitus.

Gradually, Styzens has been making peace with his condition. "I was freaked out and angry when this happened. I was depressed for a year," he says. "I've stopped seeing it as an intruder in my life. I want something good to come out of it." He talks with other sufferers about ways to deal on a day-to-day basis, educates his students on the potential risks of unprotected ears (percussion lessons are given on a Yamaha electronic drum kit) and is brainstorming Chicago's first tinnitus support group. He'd like to arrange music performances at lower volumes and trips to restaurants where the music is softer and the tableware isn't clattered.

His Friday 11 performance at the Old Town School Concert Hall will be a quiet affair but no less stirring. Cellist Kleijn developed a problem of her own: repetitive elbow strain due to years of bowing. She's taking a break for a few months, so Styzens has enlisted the help of another local pal, young British cellist Sophie Webber.

During our chat, it's impossible not to notice all the noise that must be torturing Styzens, despite the white-noise generators he wears in his ears: Led Zeppelin's *Physical Graffiti* on the stereo, a woman's stinging laughter, a bucket of ice dumped into a cooler. "Yeah," Styzens says, "the ice thing was a pretty painful moment."

Joel Styzens supports House of Waters at Old Town School of Folk Music Friday 11. See Listings.



JOEL STYZENS • Composer, Sound-designer, Multi-instrumentalist
RelaxYourEars.com • JoelStyzens.com

MUSIC ALBUMS (Original compositions 2009 - 2023)

Relax Your Ears – 12 original compositions for guitar, cello, and piano

- “Best of Classical” CD Baby • Indie International Award Winner

Listessence – collaborative album – 6 original compositions for hammered dulcimer

Resonance – 16 original compositions for dulcimer, guitar, string quintet, and piano

- “Top 10 contemporary album of 2023” -The Guardian • European Music Awards Winner 2023

Handbird – In-progress, 17+ original compositions for piano and strings (2025)

PRESS QUOTES

“Lush, comforting music that yearns and soothes”— THE GUARDIAN

"Phenomenal album" — NPR

"Open-hearted music" — BBC

"Exquisite album" — TIME OUT

"Music that you feel down in your soul" — NATIONAL MUSIC EXAMINER

"Magical... lush instrumentals [that allow] you to dream of new landscapes" — SPECTRUM CULTURE

FILM / COMMERCIAL / SOUND-DESIGN / MUSIC PLACEMENT (2006-2023)

Short-film – “Devil’s Work” – Political-thriller (Music score, sound-design)

- Shortlisted for an Academy-Award nomination
- Official Selection: Los Angeles Film Festival • 'Top Honors' – Columbia Film Festival, NY

Feature Documentary – “I am a Visitor in Your World” (Music score)

- 1st place doc. winner – Athens Film Festival • Official Selection: Woodstock Film Festival, NY

Short-film – “Bicycle Notes” – Animation (Music score, sound-design)

Official Selection at the following festivals: Sound of Silent Film Festival – Chicago, IL •

Festival de cine de Madrid, Spain • High Desert International Film Festival, Nevada •

Lakino Kids Festival, Berlin, Germany • Bang Awards Film Festival, Portugal • Festival del

Cinema Veramente indipendente Trevi, Roma • Second Place at the Bikefest, Bogotá, Colombia

Short-film – “Baking Is Hard” – Comedy (Music score, Sound-design)

- 'Official Selection' ROMA Film Festival

Red – A Crayons Story, ASL (Music and sound-design) – Accessible Children's Storybook Films

ApartTogether: “8 hearts. 7 countries. 1 song” - Online movement and music collaboration

Short-film (web series) – “Through The Looking Glass” – Switzerland-based Dance & Music

Short-film (web series) – “In a State” – San Francisco-based Dance and Music project

Short-film (web series) – “Bike Again” – social justice/music/dance (composer)

Commercial – Check, Please! TV - Appeared on NBC & checkplease.tv (composer)

Commercial – Hallmark company – The Elf and the Ornament (composer, sound-design)

Promotional marketing short – COMETRY.org (composer, sound-design)

MUSIC PLACEMENT

- NPR (National Public Radio) Music feature, 2012 & 2014 – Various music from “Relax Your Ears”
- Best of the Best: 2012 Third Coast Festival Broadcast (Joel Styzens. "A-Sharp" - Relax Your Ears.)
- Chicago O'Hare International Airport 2011 Music Selection (“Relax Your Ears” album)
- RE: Sound [from the Third Coast Audio Festival], episode #138 (“Viv” - Relax Your Ears)
- RE: Sound [Third Coast Festival], episode #138 (“For You” - Relax Your Ears)
- National Public Radio's *All Things Considered* – (2008 Percussion piece feature)

MUSIC AWARDS & SELECTIONS

- Top 10 contemporary album of 2023 – The Guardian
- Officially selected for the *Chicago Band Roster*-- featured Chicago pianist, creating new works, 2021
- “Official selection” on Pandora Radio – “Relax Your Ears”
- CD Baby's Editor's Pick & 5/5 Stars for “Relax Your Ears” (album) by Joel Styzens
- “Relax Your Ears” (album) named *Best Classical Pick & Top Seller* by CD Baby
- ESS (Experimental Sound Studios) Artist in Residence winner
- Chicago O'Hare International Airport 2011 Music Winner (“Relax Your Ears” album)
- Second place in the Indie International Songwriters Contest for “A-Sharp”
- Relax Your Ears selected by the American Tinnitus Association
- Talent Seekers International 2010 Award recipient
- Roger Shuller Jazz Award (Millikin University)

SELECTED RADIO FEATURES & PUBLICATIONS

- “Drift and Dream,” Recommended Music - Spectrum Culture, October 3, 2023
- Dulcimer Players News Magazine feature: cover feature and interview, February 2022
- NPR (National Public Radio) Interview/Music feature, 2012 & 2014 – “Joel Styzens: A-Sharp”
- Soundtracking "Bicycle Notes," an animated digital short: Chicago Artist Resource feature 2014
- Featured on Chicago's premiere classical radio station WFMT / 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014
- Chicago Tribune: "Sounding the call for tinnitus sufferers" / Jan 12, 2011
- Time Out Chicago, 2010 "A Classic Year", Featured artist, Jan 2, 2011
- Time Out Chicago Magazine: "Tinnitus soldier" (Jun 12, 2010)
- ATA International Journal: A Music Teacher's Battle with Tinnitus and Hyperacusis / Apr 18, 2010
- National Music Examiner: "The Avatar: Joel Styzens turns painful noise into music" / Apr 2, 2010
- UK Hearing Times: "Music to your ears" / Feb 5, 2010

SELECT PERFORMANCES

- Old Town School of Music, Szold Hall, Chicago, Sep. 29, 2023 (Sold-out show, 150+ in attendance)
- WGN-TV Live Midday News Ensemble performance, September 25, 2023 (Nationally syndicated)
- Chicago Botanic Gardens, Morning Music, August 24, 2023
- Thirsty Ears Classical Music Festival, (Piano/cello duo), Aug. 2020
- Beethoven Music Festival (solo piano), Preston Bradley Hall, Chicago Cultural Center, Dec. 16 2019
- Beethoven Music Festival (piano & dance duo), Hairpin Arts Center, Chicago, IL
- Hyde Park Music & Arts Salon Series (piano & dance duo), Nov. 2019
- Chicago Botanic Gardens, Music on the Esplanade (soloist/trio. 500+ in attendance.), Aug. 2019
- Thirsty Ears Classical Music Festival, (solo pianist), Aug. 2019
- International Performances, Bogota, Colombia— various (solo pianist), 2018
- ESS: experimental sound studios Artist showcase (piano, cello, saxophone trio), 2016/2017
- CIMMfest, live music and film score event (performed my original film score live with film), 2016
- International performances: Switzerland: Lucerne and Zurich — 2015
- WGN-TV Live Midday News performance, 2010
- Old Town School, Maurer Hall (Sold out show, capacity; 400+ people), Chicago, IL, 2010
- WBEZ Chicago Public Radio, Eight-Forty-Eight live performance, 2010
- International Dominican Republic Tour: La Ramana, Santo Domingo— 2003/2004