

# Hearing aid users can get in on the act

## ■ Theater's loop sends signal to ear devices

By Rachel McGrath

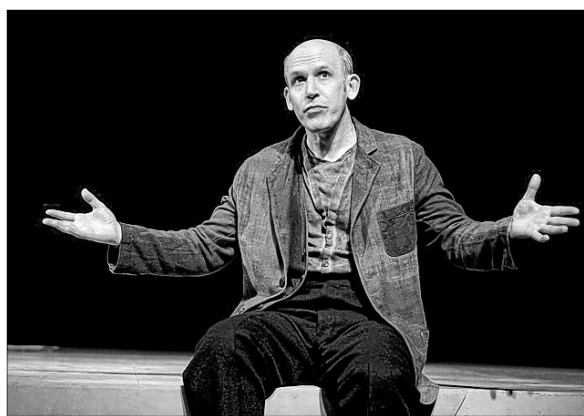
Special to The Star

The Rubicon Theatre in Ventura has installed a new hearing loop that makes it easier for those with hearing aids to hear what's taking place on stage.

Several Ventura County churches and organizations, including the Ojai Playhouse, also use the same kind of hearing loop that sends clear sound directly to a person's hearing device without the need for additional equipment.

Christina Burck, the Rubicon Theatre Company's executive producer, said some patrons had asked for the organization to consider enhancing audio for the hard of hearing about a year ago and, after doing some research, decided that installing a hearing loop would be the best option.

"We want to make sure that every single patron can experience theater without having difficulties hearing the actors on stage," Burck said. "Theater is often a very intimate experience, and we want our patrons to be able to focus on the storytelling and not struggle to hear the actors."



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Irish actor Conor Lovett performs in "Title and Deed" at the Rubicon Theatre in Ventura. The theater has installed a hearing loop so some people with auditory limitations can hear what is being said on stage.

The hearing loop cost about \$6,000, half of which was paid for by the theater and half by an anonymous donor, Burck said.

The hearing loop works by sending sound into an amplifier via an electrical current that the

amplifier then sends to a wire loop that surrounds the room. The resulting magnetic field that emanates from the wire loop can be picked up by tiny wire telecoils, or t-coils,

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that are built into many hearing aids and cochlear implants. The t-coil turns the magnetic signal into an audio signal producing clear sound directly into a listener's ears.

Burck said that the nonprofit advocacy organization Let's Loop Ventura played an integral part in making the project a reality.

"They came out and showed us how it worked, provided pamphlets and education material about the loop, worked with us on a payment plan and did the complete installation.

They were extremely helpful and very knowledgeable. Without them, we would have never installed the loop," she said.

Let's Loop Ventura is a project of the Independent Living Resource Center and funded by the California Communications Access Foundation. It was started by Kase Martis about two months ago, building on work she has been doing for the past year in Santa Barbara County.

"It's an access issue," Martis said. "You build a wheelchair ramp so people in wheelchairs can come into your space. An assisted hearing system is the same thing. It gives

the hard of hearing freedom and dignity."

Martis says about 20 percent of Americans have some kind of hearing problem and she works with venues and organizations to help them find grant funding and write grants to help pay for the installation of hearing loops.

She also is involved in outreach to those with hearing problems and hearing professionals to educate them about the value of hearing aids with t-coils inside them and making sure the t-coils are activated.

"Only 80 percent of hearing aids have them, and so it's important that audio specialists are aware

and make sure they tell their patients and customers how a t-coil works, how it's activated and why they should have one," Martis said.

Martis is also looking for those who are hard of hearing in Ventura County who will volunteer to serve as a hearing advocate and to spend time talking to organizations and groups they are involved with about the benefits and importance of installing hearing loops to help those with hearing problems.

Visit [loopventura.org](http://loopventura.org) for more information and for a list of participating hearing professionals in Ventura County.