

GENELEC®

CASE STUDY

**Genelec bridges
the gap between
sound and silence
at LiLi Time Café**

SHANGHAI CAFÉ
WELCOMES THE DEAF
AND HARD OF HEARING
COMMUNITY FOR MUSIC
AND CONVERSATION





SINCE SOUND EXISTS WITHIN THE PHYSICAL REALM,
DEAF PEOPLE CAN STILL EXPERIENCE MUSIC
THROUGH VIBRATIONS OF AIR MOLECULES



“Deafness isn't the opposite of hearing. It's a silence full of sound,” famous playwright Mark Medhoff astutely observes. Sadly, the condition of deafness is one that is often misunderstood, or worse neglected in our society. LiLi Time, a café located on the busy Mengzi Road in Shanghai, is an exception; cultivating a community where people that are deaf or hard of hearing can feel

comfortable. In fact, the enterprise's founder Zhang Lili actively employs staff that are hard of hearing, encouraging them to step outside their comfort zone.

The origin of LiLi Time is as heart-warming as its mission. Zhang Lili originally settled in Germany with her husband but returned to China in 2013 to open a café in Shanghai. After trying her coffee, one hard of hearing

” WE CHOSE GENELEC DUE TO THE SUPERIOR SOUND TEXTURE AND THE DIRECT EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCE THIS EVOKES.

customer left a note exclaiming that he wanted to learn the art. She gave the young man a chance to work and became more attuned to the deaf community as a result. In 2019, she officially opened LiLi Time, a venture dedicated to connecting the deaf and the hearing through mutual understanding and appreciation.

Recently, the café chose to enhance their audio setup with a [Genelec](#) loudspeaker system, and there is good reasoning behind it. Sound exists within the physical realm — it is essentially “touch at a distance” as neuroscientist Diana Deutsch of the University of California in San Diego claims. Deaf people can still experience music through vibrations of air molecules. Zhang Lili admits that she hadn’t heard of the Genelec brand before, but that she and several members of the team shared a common love

for music, believing that good sonic quality can bring a positive emotional experience, which is why LiLi Time ended up choosing a Genelec solution over other audio brands.

“Actually, when people wear a hearing aid, they can hear a little sound,” Zhang Lili explains. “The deaf customers and staff will tell me that they can feel the vibration of the sound. After considering our options, we chose a Genelec audio solution due to the brand’s superior sound texture and the direct emotional experience this evokes.” She continues by drawing the parallel between good coffee and music: “Both are linked to our physical perception, albeit different senses, and both contribute in equal parts to creating a warm space, where people can be comfortable and communicate freely.” An added benefit of high quality loudspeakers in this type of environment is in preventing the



” CUSTOMERS ARE DRAWN TO GENELEC’S DISTINCTIVE, EYE-CATCHING DESIGN AS WELL AS THEIR PRECISE SOUND.

‘recruitment’ syndrome that hard of hearing people can sometimes experience — which manifests itself as a reduced tolerance to loud sounds. This means that the range of acceptable loudness to the listener can be quite narrow, so a distributed loudspeaker system with good performance is key to achieving the best results.

After a comprehensive discussion with Genelec’s Beijing team, it became apparent that the solution had to deliver on three principal tasks: the distribution of high fidelity BGM (background music), the accommodation of live musical performances, and lastly the system needed to be easy for visiting musicians to plug into and operate. To this end, a combination of Genelec [G One](#) and [G Three](#) two-way active loudspeakers were specified, delivering on all fronts.

Each model was selected to suit the acoustics and functional requirements of each room. For the more expansive first floor, G Threes were implemented for broad sound coverage, while the ultra-compact G Ones were selected for the more intimate environment of the café’s upper level. The provision of simple rear panel room compensation switches on both models also meant that the response of each loudspeaker could be tailored to each room’s individual acoustics.

With the addition of a digital mixer, staff now command complete control over the café’s audio levels via the familiar interface of a mobile phone or iPad. What’s more, the active design of the [G Series](#) loudspeakers removes the need for bulky external amplifiers, offering a compact and flexible plug-and-play solution for visiting singers and bands.



Si Xuan, café designer and frequent performer, is thrilled with the upgrade: “Our live music capabilities have been significantly improved. Not only do we have total, wireless control of BGM, but we can easily plug in guitars, keyboards, and other instruments, and have the capability to fine-tune the sound remotely in real time.”

It is evident from the care that Zhang Lili and Si Xuan have put into the café’s interior design that aesthetics were also a consideration. Zhang Lili excitedly recalls: “Since the install, we’ve received lots of positive feedback from customers, who often take pictures of the loudspeakers. They are drawn to Genelec’s distinctive, eye-catching design as well as their precise sound, and the sustainability of their recycled aluminium cabinets is simply the cherry on the cake!”

Zhang Lili has firmly resisted any idea of automating the café’s ordering process via the use of an iPad or any automatic ordering system, since this defeats the purpose of

the enterprise: “Automation will considerably reduce the opportunity for our deaf and hard of hearing employees to communicate with guests. Sometimes, they are anxious about communicating with others because they can’t hear themselves, and they worry that their pronunciation may be misunderstood. However, I constantly encourage them to interact with guests as much as possible. At LiLi Time, we have fostered an environment where they feel comfortable with expressing themselves and being understood by people.”

One of the café’s baristas, nicknamed Xiaoyu, was offered an interview at LiLi Time after struggling to find work in Shanghai: “I’ll always remember that day. I was very nervous during the interview because I didn’t know how to express myself, since I hadn’t studied coffee and didn’t have any experience in serving. But everyone looked at me with a smile on their face and gave me great encouragement.” He continues, “Over time I’ve witnessed the number of customers in the café increasing, and more and more customers are happy to let me talk to them in sign language. All of this makes me feel so happy!”

Indeed, LiLi Time provides a space where everyone is encouraged to express themselves, and their artistic talents. It serves as a place of refuge for all staff and guests alike to be at ease, and enjoy quality coffee, music, and company.



THE KIT

- 2 x G One
- 2 x G Three

GENELEC OY OLIVITIE 5 | 74100 | IISALMI, FINLAND | TEL. +358 17 83881 | ENQUIRIES@GENELEC.COM | WWW.GENELEC.COM