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Auracast™ Debuts at Sydney Opera

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It was at the Consumer Electronics Show in 2022 that the Bluetooth SIG (Special Interest Group) announced the development of a new assistive listening technology they named Auracast™. Unlike traditional Bluetooth®, which is basically a one-to-one broadcast system, Auracast is a one-to-many technology. Since then, all of the remarkable things Auracast can do have been repeatedly written about in news releases and stories - almost always in the future tense. With the announcement of the availability of Auracast in the world-famous Sydney Opera House in Australia, a test in New York's Lincoln Center, and installation in the Contact Theatre in Manchester, England, the future has arrived.

Though many headlines said the Opera House had introduced Auracast, it was actually one of the smaller performance spaces, the Drama Theatre, where the Auracast debut performance actually took place. That theatre, the Playhouse, and the Studio venues have all been permanently fitted with an Auracast assistive listening system (ALS). According to the [Sydney Morning Herald](#), the Concert Hall and the Joan Sutherland Theatre are in the process of being fitted. The system being installed in the complex was the result of collaboration between the ReSound division of hearing aid maker GN, the Australian National Acoustic Laboratories, and Hearing Australia, the largest provider of government-funded hearing services in Australia. They, plus representatives of Google, the Bluetooth SIG, and electronics giant Samsung, were present for what was billed as the first Auracast fine arts venue Auracast installation. Attendees used Auracast-enabled hearing aids, earbuds, and other devices to hear the Auracast, and reported universally positive reviews of the sound quality of the ALS.

The Sydney Opera Complex may be the first performing arts venue to offer Auracast on a permanent basis, but Alice Tully Hall in New York's [Lincoln Center](#) beat them in introducing the technology to a classical music audience. In November of last year, the ceiling of Tully Hall was temporarily fitted with a small ReSound hearing aid TV streamer for a performance of composer Richard Einhorn's *Voices of Light* by the New York Choral Society and the Mannes Orchestra. The sold-out audience included many of the same firms represented at the Sydney Opera Auracast debut plus assistive listening expert Andrew Bellavia and composer Einhorn who is also well versed in assistive listening and music recording technology. Following the performance, both the music and the Auracast ALS received praise from attendees.

In January, Manchester, England's [Contact Theatre](#) laid claim to being the first theatrical venue in the UK to have installed Auracast. The theatre collaborated with GN's ReSound, the Ewing Foundation, and assistive listening maker Ampetronic in the installation of an Auri ALS developed by the UK's Ampetronic and America's Listen Technology. Following that announcement, theatre management focused on training their staff to ensure a seamless, inclusive audio experience. The new Auracast ALS was one of many improvements made during a renovation of the theater that has now been completed.

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A church in Minnesota's survey of its hard of hearing members found, and reported to Loop New Mexico, surprisingly, that there was an equal number who had Auracast-enabled hearing aids and those with telecoils. That reported balance of the two different technologies, leads to speculation that other performance spaces will be following the lead of the above venues by supplementing their existing hearing loop or other ALS system with an Auracast partner.

Other Venues

In Ottawa, Ontario, a church member going by the name of Mingdee reported in the [Hearing Tracker.com forum](#) that his church had just recently supplemented the 400 seat church's sound system with an Auracast ALS. In this instance, the transmitter was a HomeSpot TV streamer. Though the SIG recommends mounting an Auracast transmitter in the center of a room's ceiling, this church simply mounted it on a panel with the control board for the sound system. There was concern for the coverage of the signal but Mingdee reported relief when it was found there were no "dead zones" in the sanctuary.

[Loop New Mexico](#) was consulted by a church in Minnesota for information and a recommendation on an ALS and it appears they are leaning toward a hearing loop plus Auracast for their 500 seat sanctuary. A church in the greater Chicago area is reported to have recently christened a new ListenTech/Ampetronic Auri system. These systems are expected to join many others when the SIG mounts a planned new page on their website. Like the [Find an Auracast Product](#), a Find an Auracast Venue page will make it possible to search online for suitable venues when planning a trip and, no doubt, be even more up-to-date than such listings that it's now reported are being accepted by Google Maps.

Several hearing aid manufacturers have already released Auracast-enabled hearing aids and most of the others have Auracast "ready" models that only need an over-the-air (OTA) software update to make them "enabled". Hundreds of Auracast capable earbuds, receivers, and other [devices are available](#) in stores or online that are capable of connecting to an Auracast ALS, so the situation is somewhat like that of the Iowa corn farmer in the movie Field of Dreams. He heard voices saying, "Build it and he will come." There could now be voices saying something similar about Auracast assistive listening systems.

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About Loop New Mexico

Loop New Mexico (LNM) is a not-for-profit clearinghouse for information focused on technologies and devices used by people with hearing loss to improve their ability to communication with others in public venues and in their home environment. LNM was originally founded by the Albuquerque, NM chapter of the Hearing Loss Association of America (HLAA), and was the first recipient of that organization's Get in the Hearing Loop effort in 2011. It was later spun off as an independent agent to continue the work of advocating for Assistive Listening Systems, informing people with hearing loss about assistive technology, and advocating for legislation to improve communication access for hard of hearing New Mexicans. Stephen Frazier, the Director of Loop NM, was trained as a hearing loss support specialist by HLAA. Steve has presented workshops on a variety of topics relating to hearing loss to local, state and national audiences. He has devoted much of his time over the last twenty years to advocating for people with hearing loss, and as a freelance writer (www.sofnabq.com). Email Steve using the link on www.loopnm.com.