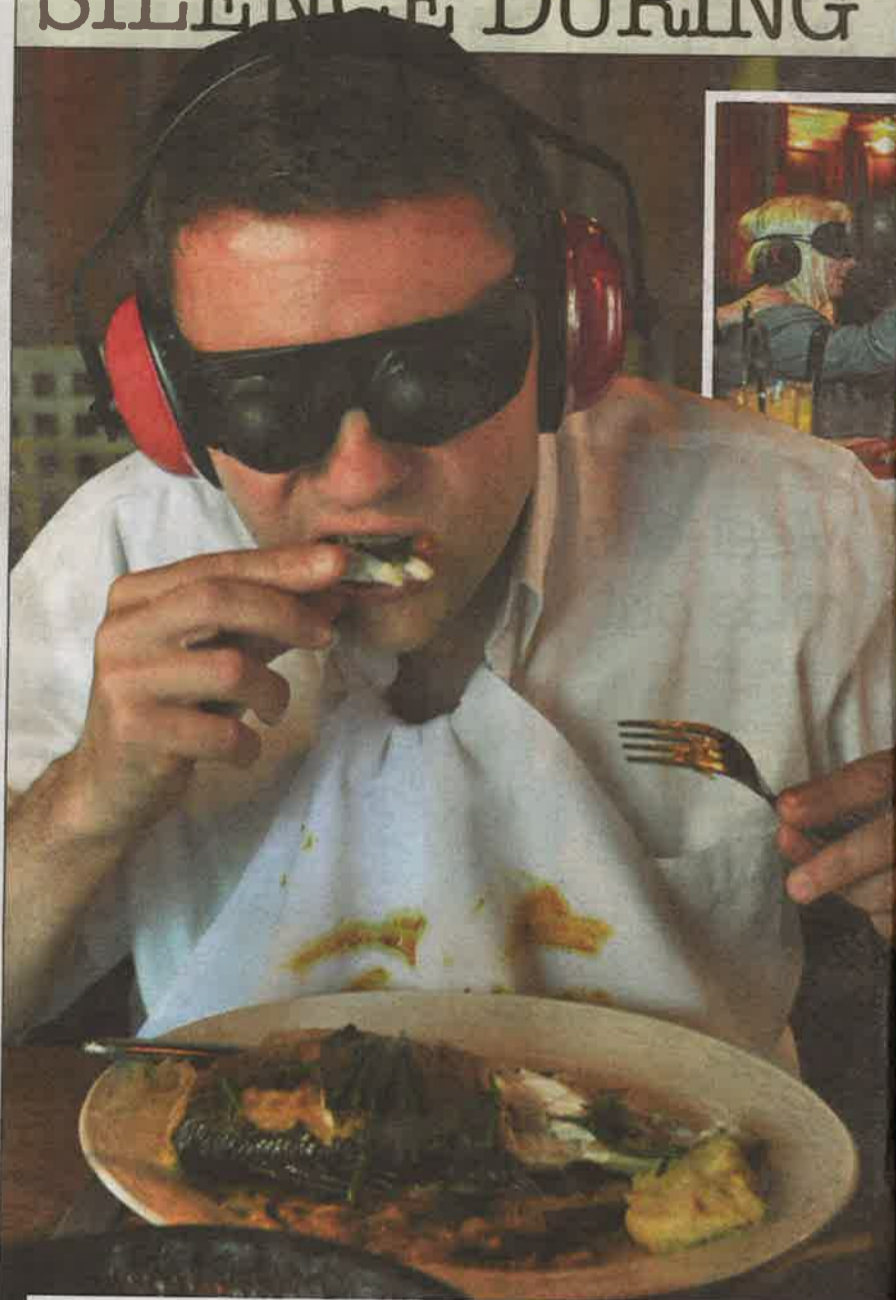


Sun & SCOTTISH
**MAN DINES
 SILENCE DURING**

**IN DARKNESS &
 CHARITY EVENT**



DINNER PARTY . . . Matt and fellow diners are led to their table but high spirits soon disappeared as they realised how hard it is to eat with no sight or hearing

THE Deafblind Scotland charity held a fund-raising bash with a difference — dining in total darkness and silence.

Over 50 customers descended on Glasgow's Mother India restaurant last week wearing eye masks and ear muffs to mimic what it's like eating out for a deaf and blind person.

Chief Features Writer **MATT BENDORIS** took part in this unique dining experiment . . .

Blind tasting

MY wife wishes she'd lost her sense of smell after I've had a curry — but imagine tucking into one without being able to see what you're eating.

I got to find out what it was like when I joined 50 other diners who arrived at Mother India tables in a blind conga line and in high-spirits.

But the laughter was soon replaced by silence as all light and sound was blocked out.

The brush of a waiter's hand on my arm told me the first course had arrived. But just where do you start when you haven't the foggiest what's in front of you?

I prodded my fork around the plate, picking up God knows what, feeling bits fall off my cutlery before it reached my mouth.

We were literally left in the dark as the organisers wouldn't tell us what we were scoffing until later.

All I knew was there were crunchy bits, minty tastes and fruit of some sort. It turned out it was something called papri chatta with dumplings.

CHEF . . . Monir created menu



NEW EXPERIENCE . . . Suzie and Derek

yoghurt, tamarind, mint and coriander. But it could have been the shavings off a barber's floor for all I knew because amazingly, without my sight I couldn't enjoy a single morsel.

You couldn't even engage with fellow diners for a bit of moral support as all I could hear through the muffled sound of my ear protectors was the clinking of glasses and the occasional piece of cutlery clattering to the floor.

Despite being in a packed room I soon felt isolated. Next up was some sort of fish — the only reason I knew that



was after choking on a bone. I simply gave up, so my half mangled seabass went straight in the bin.

Last up was a curry. I love my Indian food but there is absolutely no enjoyment being left with your mouth tingling from spicy food you can not see, and my chicken was soon sent back, virtually untouched.

Afterwards chef Monir Mohammed explained: "I wanted to design a menu for the occasion to really try to test people's taste buds."

Engineer Derek Lavender, 47, from Glasgow said: "It opens your mind to what life must be like for a deaf-blind person."

Even pouring the plonk turns into an epic. Artistic director Suzie McGill, 46, also from Glasgow, explained: "You can try to judge by feeling the cold liquid through the glass as it nears the top. It's very, very tricky."

By the end, I had an understanding of what it's like being deaf-blind and it's one lonely place — like living in the world but not quite being part of it. After two hours I began to feel quite sad and depressed.

At least I could take my mask and muffs off. God knows what it must be like to be confined to an existence of silence and darkness forever.

DIET IS SO HARD TO CONTROL

DEAF-BLIND people suffer from poor diets as they struggle to eat healthy foods, according to the charity's initiative officer Drena O'Malley.

She explains: "Eating is just a basic task and yet a deaf-blind person has got to struggle through with it three times a day. Cooking is even more difficult. So that lovely bit of seabass, you will find they won't pick dishes like that at all. They will go for pizza or mince and tatties."

"They have a very poor diet because they'll choose whatever is easier to eat."

Louise McCombie from the charity's specialist partner Counterweight said: "Like many of the UK population, deafblind people struggle with their weight."

"So we are working to make diet programmes applicable for the deafblind population."

Drena adds: "We hope people leave this event with more awareness of what it's like to be deaf blind and gives them just a wee bit more understanding of the lives they lead."



TABLE SERVICE . . . Matt sits down, event was held at Mother India, and guest struggles to pour herself a glass of wine at dinner