

LISTEN, HEAR!

by Geoff Plant



hear**LIFE**

Three Weeks of Music

INTRODUCTION

I was at a conference for CI users recently, and heard music described, not for the first time, as the “holy grail” for researchers and manufacturers in this field. Music seems to be an important part of the lives of most people with normal hearing, and there is a growing realization that it is also important for many people with CI's.

Adults with cochlear implants often tell me how much they miss “easy access” to their favorite forms of music. Their implants provide them with speech information that enables them to communicate easily, even with strangers, but music is not so well received. “Why isn't more being done in this area?” is a question that I am often asked.

We also recognize that music provides unique opportunities for children to acquire important speech and language skills. Nursery rhymes and songs provide children with information on rhythm, rhyme, pitch, etc., and we want children with CI's to have access to such learning experiences.

MUSIC ACTIVITIES

MED-EL recognizes the importance of music for adults and children with CI's, and I'm currently engaged in a number of music – related projects. One of these is being undertaken in conjunction with the Department of Music at Edinburgh University in Scotland.

I've been working with Zack Moir, one of their PhD students, who is interested in looking at the effects of music training for children with CI's. Zack is a very talented saxophone player and composer, and he hopes to develop a repertoire of songs and activities that can be used with children who have CI's. I've visited Edinburgh several times to liaise with Zack and his supervisor Katie Overy, but these visits have to be relatively short, and it has been impossible to arrange for any practical sessions.



Zack playing the saxophone during his visit to Boston

We decided that the best thing to do was for Zack to come and work with me in Boston for three weeks in the early summer. This was achieved through sponsorship provided by Edinburgh University, MED-EL, and the Hearing Rehabilitation Foundation (HRF). Zack arrived on June 16, and over the next three weeks we devoted all of our time to music-related activities.

The owner of the building in which I have my office generously donated a large space for our use during this period. We needed somewhere that was large enough to do group work, and we wanted it to be isolated, so that the “noise” of the activities didn't disturb other tenants.

The program consisted of two major activities:

1. Interviewing adults with CI's about their music experiences before and after they received their cochlear implant(s).
2. Running a four-day music workshop for children aged 6 -8 years. Six children with CI's enrolled for the course.

ADULT CI USERS

I was able to arrange for Zack to meet with six adult CI users. All of these people have a great interest in music, and several of them had attended Music Focus Groups that we had conducted at the Hearing Rehabilitation Foundation. We spoke to them about their musical experiences before and after receiving their implant(s), and asked them to tell us about their musical likes and dislikes. All shared the belief that it was often necessary to make compromises, but that music could still be a positive experience.

On most occasions, Zack would play the saxophone for our visitors, and this enabled him to locate the ranges which CI listeners found the most comfortable. He would usually play a familiar piece such as "When the Saints Go Marching In," starting simply and gradually increasing the complexity of his playing. On occasions, I would provide a simple rhythmic accompaniment, using a hand drum or a cymbal shaker.

Only one person, a jazz fan, expressed a liking for the upper register of the saxophone, but all liked the lower registers. All thought that the use of the hand drum helped provide rhythmic cues, and improved the overall experience, but they found the sound of the cymbal shaker quite shrill and off-putting. Information such as this will help Zack in developing his compositions for children.

The HRF has a collection of DVD's of musical performances by a wide range of performers. I've been waiting for over a year for a DVD of Bruce Springsteen performing the songs from his tribute album to Pete Seeger, and this was released while Zack was in Boston. We played it to several of the adults, and they all rated it very highly. I've found that DVD's, which allow CI users to both hear AND see the music, are a wonderful way of reintroducing adults to music. Listeners don't have to "sort out," or even guess, which instruments are being used; they can see it on the screen, which makes the task of listening so much easier.

The sound on this new DVD is excellent, and the obvious joy and enthusiasm of the performance by Springsteen and his musicians is infectious. I will be using this DVD in my work with adults, and I'm sure that Zack will use it, in part, as a model for his work.

One of the highlights of Zack's visit was the opportunity for him to play with a CI user who was a professional keyboard player prior to becoming deaf. He brought his keyboard to the office and he and Zack conducted a "musical interview" for several hours. They performed several pieces together, including extended jams around "Green Onions" and, one of my favorites, Willie Dixon's "Spoonful."



CHILDREN WITH CI'S

We scheduled the children's music workshop for the last week of Zack's visit, so that we would have enough time to prepare properly for it. We needed to prepare the songs and activities that we would use in the sessions, and we also needed to build up a collection of simple musical instruments for the children to play.

Instruments

We had access to quite a few musical instruments to use in the workshop – saxophone, guitar, keyboards, and a marching band xylophone. Percussive instruments included a hand drum, some tuned wooden blocks, and a variety of shakers.

Handmade instruments

We also made several instruments to use in the sessions.

- A number of empty plastic containers that served as hand drums.
- Barley inside an empty vitamin container made it into a shaker.
- We couldn't afford a guiro, but the serrated side of a can scraped by a plastic knife sounded quite good. I used pliers to turn over the sharp edge so that it was safe for the children to use.
- Two short wooden planks fitted with handles made wonderfully percussive "slapsticks."
- Pieces of dowel and wooden beads from a craft shop became simple, but very effective drumsticks.

In the next issue of "Listen, Hear!" I'll describe how to make the instruments in detail, so that other teachers and therapists can develop their own set.

Songs

Zack and I wrote three new songs for use in the sessions. Two of them are "activity songs," while the third is a "story song."

"Jump Just Like a Kangaroo."

The teacher/leader sings each line, and the children are encouraged to repeat it. Everyone should join in for "All around the room each day!" If you want to hear the tune, please go to the Hearing Rehabilitation Foundation's website—www.hearf.org. During the instrumental break between verses, the children perform the action. Zack played the break on the sax, but it could be a kazoo, humming, or any other musical "noise."

C
Here is what you've got to do (Repeat)

Jump just like a kangaroo (Repeat)
G7 C G7 C

All around the room each day

INSTRUMENTAL

C
Here is one to make you shake (Repeat)

Poke your tongue out like a snake (Repeat)

G7 C G7 C
All around the room each day

INSTRUMENTAL

C
Here is one that you should try (Repeat)

You're a bird and you can fly (Repeat)

G7 C G7 C
All around the room each day

INSTRUMENTAL

C
Here is one I'd like to see (Repeat)

Can you buzz just like a bee? (Repeat)

G7 C G7 C
All around the room each day

INSTRUMENTAL

C
Here is one to make you smile (Repeat)

Snap just like a crocodile (Repeat)

G7 C G7 C
All around the room each day

INSTRUMENTAL

C
Here is one to make you laugh (Repeat)

Stretch your neck like a giraffe (Repeat)

G7 C G7 C
All around the room each day

INSTRUMENTAL

C
Here is one to make you squeal (Repeat)

Clap your hands just like a seal (Repeat)

G7 C G7 C
All around the room each day

INSTRUMENTAL

C
Here is one for us to share (Repeat)

Can you growl just like a bear? (Repeat)

G7 C G7 C
All around the room each day

INSTRUMENTAL

C
Here is one to do right now (Repeat)

Can you moo just like a cow? (Repeat)

G7 C G7 C
All around the room each day

INSTRUMENTAL

C
One and two and three and four (Repeat)

Oops, I see a dinosaur! (Repeat)

G7 C
Coming to our room today

WATCH OUT!

“I Can Clap My Hands”

The children perform the action on the underlined words. It's a fairly difficult task, so take your time and model it for the children until they understand the pattern.

I can clap my hands.
 You can clap your hands.
 We can clap our hands.
Clap our hands together:

I can stamp my feet.
 You can stamp your feet.
 We can stamp our feet.
Stamp our feet together:

I can wave hell - o.
 You can wave hell - o.
 We can wave hell - o.
Wave hell - o together

I can blink my eyes.
 You can blink your eyes.
 We can blink our eyes.
Blink our eyes together

I can jump up high.
 You can jump up high.
 We can jump up high.
Jump up high together

I can crouch down low.
 You can crouch down low.
 We can crouch down low.
Crouch down low together:

I can bang the drum.
 You can bang the drum.
 We can bang the drum.
Bang the drum together.

I can shout “Good - bye!”
 You can shout “Good - bye!”
 We can shout “Good - bye!”
Shout “Good - bye!”

“School Bus Blues”

This song uses the tune of the folk song “Midnight Special.” I like songs that children can “mime” or “act out,” and this one can be used in this way.

Well I wake up in the morning
 And I hear Mom sing:
 “Hurry up and get ready
 Before the school bell rings.
 Hurry up and have your breakfast.
 You can't be late.
 School bus will be coming
 At half past eight.

CHORUS

Hurry up and get ready.
 You must not fool.
 If you don't hurry
 You'll be late for school.
 So I sit and have my breakfast,
 Then I brush my hair,
 Go up into my bedroom
 Kiss my teddy bear.
 Then I go back downstairs
 And I'm out the door:
 And wouldn't you know it?
 It starts to pour!

REPEAT CHORUS

Now, I'm standing at the bus stop,
 Getting soaked by rain.
 And I know what's going to happen –
 Bus be late again!
 All the kids are getting grumpy,
 Getting soaking wet.
 Got those school bus blues.
 Bus is late I bet.

REPEAT CHORUS

OTHER ACTIVITIES

We tried to provide the children with some simple rhythmic exercises in each session. Some were as basic as having the children clap out their names, while others such as the Nordoff and Robbins song, “Let's Beat the Drum,” were more difficult.

One that worked well was a clapping pattern – the same as for Queen's “We will rock you” – used with the simple rhyme:

1 2 3	1 2 3	1 & 2	1 & 2
Me and you		You and me	
You and me		Me and you	

We also set aside some time in each session for a story. These included Teri Sloat's “There Was an Old Woman Who Swallowed a Trout,” a version of “There Was an Old Woman Who Swallowed a Spider” set in the Pacific Northwest. In part, this was to give all of us a chance to catch our breath, but we also “orchestrated” the stories, providing each child with a simple instrument that s/he had to play at an appropriate point. This was a fun activity, especially at the end when everyone played together. A lot of noise, but also a lot of fun!

Thanks to the children and to their parents for giving us the opportunity to try out some of our songs and other musical activities. We learned a lot from the experience, and we hope to build on this work over the next few years.

Finally, as always, I would welcome any comments, feedback, or suggestions. Please contact me at hearf@aol.com. Zack can be contacted at zack@zackmoir.com.

Geoff Plant