



The 6th Sense Annual Lecture

'Two musical journeys'

Tuesday 13th November 2012

Speaker key

GM Gill Morbey

SA Samira Ahmed

OS Orla O'Sullivan

RP Russ Palmer

UM Unidentified male audience member

BA Brian Archbold

DS Dr. Spencer

PP Peter Palmer

TB Tony Best

KM Karen Morrison

PH Peter Hughes

OW Oliver Walder

MK Marilyn Kilsby

JC John Crabtree

GM Tonight we're exploring the two musical journeys and the staff that were organising this looked a bit nervous today and I thought a quote from Helen Keller was perhaps opportune. The quote is life is either a great adventure or nothing at all. So I have a feeling that tonight will be a great adventure.

I'm delighted to introduce Samira Ahmed. Samira has been a great supporter of the lectures and we were talking just before about the journey into some of this innovative practice and I think we're all intrigued and will be very entertained tonight. Samira's been a longstanding supporter of us and you'll know her from BBC and Radio Four, a writer for the Guardian and Spectator, and I'm delighted to introduce Samira who will be our host for the rest of the night. So, from Sense's point of view, welcome and I hope you enjoy the evening.

SA Thank you so much, Gill. I'm delighted to have been asked back. I think this is my third year and I was saying earlier, for me, it's like Christmas. Every year there's a surprise and the surprise is who will be speaking and every year the surprise gets bigger and better. So I'm delighted to be here. The structure of the evening is going to be, rather than just two talks, we have two performances and, after both, the musicians, the performers will take questions from you, as well as from me. I'm going to introduce them in detail as each performs. Russ Palmer will be performing second but, first, I want to tell you about Orla O'Sullivan. I was reading about Orla on a newspaper website today, the Belfast Telegraph, because she was recently honoured at the Hidden Hearing Heroes Awards in Dublin. There's a prize for alliteration there. She's a music teacher and a performer and I just think her story is amazing. She is a pianist, a teacher, she happens to be deafblind and says her greatest joy is in performing

in front of a live audience – that’s why you’re all here – where she can feel and share the music of the great composers.

Orla was only six weeks old when she became deafblind and she was taught nursery rhymes and songs by her mother. So her musical sense was stimulated from a very early age and her mother helped her play the piano by holding her fingers on the keys so that she could feel the vibrations and hear the sounds and Orla started formal lessons on the piano when she was six, continued throughout school, achieved very high scores in her music inter and leaving certificate exams and also learnt other instruments – violin, guitar, piano accordion, electronic keyboard and organ, which she studied at Saint Fin Barr’s Cathedral.

She has an associate diploma in performance for piano from Trinity College, London, diplomas in youth and community work and music performance, management and sound and a teachers’ certificate and, as I say, has recently won this award for her work as a teacher. I was struck that a lot of Orla’s work she uses memory to help where she needs. So I am intrigued to see how this works in performance and to ask about it too but I’d like you to join me in welcoming Orla to perform for us.

OS Good evening, everybody. I’m really happy and greatly honoured to be invited here to this wonderful London event. I especially want to thank Sense and, in particular, Stephen McCarthy for all the work and preparation in staging this very important event for the deafblind community.

My name is Orla O’Sullivan and I am both deaf and visually impaired. I’m a qualified music teacher. I teach piano and keyboard to both deaf and hearing pupils and I teach from beginners to diploma level. This includes aural, the theory, aria, sight reading, scales and practical skills. I am the first deafblind person to qualify as a music teacher at this level. I am the only deafblind person in Ireland to have been taught to this standard and my ambition is to pass on this knowledge to the deaf and

deafblind community, to make it possible for anyone to learn, play and enjoy piano and keyboard to the highest standard.

I'm now going to play a piece of music and I hope you enjoy it. It is about four minutes long and is called the Life and Times of David Lloyd George by the talented composer Ennio Morricone.

[Plays piano...]

Thank you. I am now going to continue by showing you a short news clip that played on national TV in Ireland. It features a guest student of mine, Alain Newstead, his mother and myself. The other star of the show is the music floor.

[Clip plays...]

Though I was happy to participate in the news item at the beginning, the final show was disappointing. The disappointment is in the way of the fact that the item was presented. Myself and Alain were made to look like people to be pitied, to feel sorry for. This upset me and the fact that the items were not subtitled or signed. We are not people to be pitied. Instead of pity, people like Alain Newstead should be celebrated for not allowing a disability to stop them from achieving a goal in life. Disability is not a barrier. It is just an obstacle to be overcome. Last September South Korean deafblind writer, Young Chan, brought a film crew to my home and to my aural school to make a documentary about my teaching learning methods.

[Clip plays...]

In regard to the South Korean crew, I noticed quickly how professional and courteous they were. There was no sign of pity from them, just curiosity and there to learn, and I know they came here as well. The film was shown in South Korea on November, the 5th.

[Clip plays...]

There was no sign of pity from them but just curiosity and there to learn. I know they came here as well. The film was shown in

South Korea on November, the 5th. So we can look forward to seeing that kind of film they made when it is shown in this side of the world.

Now, I want to introduce you to Anna. Anna is fully hearing and fully sighted. I've been teaching Anna for six years and she has already passed her grade four exams. As you will see and hear, she is very talented.

[Clip plays...]

What you see and hear is that I am deaf and vision impaired but capable of teaching at a high standard. I've been teaching music for 21 years and I've been teaching pupils, as beginners, and taking them all the way up to diploma level. The next clip you will see is of myself and my mother, Betty O'Sullivan. Without my mother's devotion and encouragement, I could never have been able to get to the professional level that I am at today. The video clip will explain this.

[Clip plays...]

Now I'm going to show you another video.

[Clip plays...]

Now I'm going to show you another video and this is about the Music Scholar. Until recently, there was no technical aid available for me to read the music score and play simultaneously. So it was a very long and tedious process for me to learn a piece of music. It meant I had to memorise thousands of notes and composition directions from the music scores. It is my love of music that gave me the patience and determination to do it but it was exhausting. That has all changed now with the Music Scholar. Now I can read easily and play while I read. It has saved me so much time and effort and it has improved my skills as a musician and as a music teacher.

[Clip plays...]

Finally, I want again to say thanks for allowing me to come here today and I would also like to thank Russ and Riitta for encouraging me and I would also like to thank my partner, Dan, for supporting me. I look forward to a future of more understanding of the deafblind community, a future where the deafblind can be celebrated, not pitied or patronised.

Any further information can be found on my website, www.orlaosullivan.ie, and my CD, Sound Senses, can be purchased or ordered here. The CD is a collection of some of my favourite pieces of classical and traditional music on the piano. I would like to play one more piece of music. It is a short piece I wrote myself. It was inspired by the birth of my son, John Amadeus on the 1st May this year. This will be the first time I have played this in front of an audience and I hope you like it. It is called A Lullaby for John Amadeus.

[Plays piano...]

SA Orla, thank you so much. As someone who spent many years learning the piano and probably not being a very good student, it's fascinating to see the teacher's point of view, as well as your point of view as a performer. I'm sure many of you noticed there was an image on the wall, which said without imagination no art, from Franz Liszt, and I thought that seemed a very apt message for both the presentations you're getting this evening.

Orla also, in her amazing presentation, mentioned Russ, who is our next performer tonight – Russ Palmer. He's the man who had the idea of the music floor and I think we'll hear much more about this. Russ had a ten year computing career before studying to qualify as a music therapist in Finland. He has Usher Syndrome. He is a deafblind man and in 2004 he had his first cochlear implant, which improved his hearing and his singing, and produced a CD, Warm Summer Days, in 2009. This was followed by a joint co-production with the Finnish Deaf Association, producing a DVD, titled Pulse, which looked at how deaf children, including those

with implants, are able to perceive and feel music. This was nominated for a best factual documentary award at the UK Deaf Festival.

Russ has had his second implant in 2011, which he was telling me earlier has really improved his musicality, and it's to a level where he's able to hear musical performances, instruments, vocals and new sounds and perform as a musician with a band but, also, Russ told me that how you hear through an implant is, of course, a very different experience. So I'll be interested to see if you talk about that.

Russ gives international presentations. He writes articles on his Feeling the Music philosophy and music and implants and social-haptic communication with his partner, Dr. Riitta Lahtinen, who is here tonight, and he's currently researching music and implant perception with Turku University.

He says his philosophy is to share his enthusiasm for music with people with sensory impairment and with those with multiple disabilities to help improve their own quality of life and, he says, to help improve the quality of ours too. Over to you, Russ. We'll need five minutes as well. Forgive me, you guys had a break. I'm so enthused by Orla's presentations! Five minute break and we'll also just set up the stage as well, if we need to get a guitar. Stay where you are. Don't move.

RP You've got to be able to feel that rhythm through your body, otherwise you never get it. It's something that's very light and delicate and, if you don't get that rhythm, you get lost, believe you me. The trouble is it's so delicate, in fact, you can't hear it. So this is where the idea of feeling music really started. I used to take songs like – where's G, below middle C... Now, for those of you who are old enough, do you remember ONMD in the late sixties, Sleepy Shores? Now, it had a very nice melody line. What I want to demonstrate here is that the music was written like this [plays music], which is all right but it's a bit boring. Now, if you listen to

the actual record, a single at that time, when you listen to the music on the record, it goes something like this [plays music].

There are different aspects. I used to try and change the way we played and I know Nigel remembers this quite clearly. He used to say to me, that's lovely, the way you play it. Thanks. At the same time, if I had a piece of music, I couldn't hear the words because I was doing some singing. I needed to get my mother, bless her, to write the words for me because she's a very good shorthand typist. So she used to help me on songs like McArthur's Park. [Plays music and sings] I used to listen to this music and later I managed to get the actual sheet music and I was quite surprised how the chords were quite accurate. When you're doing this, you need to be able to develop your musicality, your listening skills.

You have to remember, I was born deaf. So my whole perception of the world is through what I learnt through the hearing aid, ever since the age of four, and that's quite a different perception to someone who had normal hearing from birth. Now, people say, well, you speak too well, you can't be deaf, and my intonation of voice, being able to sing as well. Don't ask me to explain it too much. I don't know why but I just enjoy it. I try to, I suppose, share this enthusiasm and music with other people.

Now, because I wanted to also explore orchestral music, the only way I could get into an orchestra is to play double bass. My father, again, managed to teach me double bass and gave me a few little tips and then away I went. Nigel had a youth orchestra and then I used to play the double bass in the orchestra and it was great fun. That went on to the bass guitar, playing in a jazz group when I moved to Aberdeen in Scotland. Any Scottish people here? I had a great time there. My musicality actually got more and more expanded, when I think about it, because they do a lot of music stuff up there and it's really great for kids to get this musical experience.

Of course, it depends where you live. Some different areas of the country do more music. Some don't do so much. Then I moved

back down south and I moved down to Bognor Regis area, in West Sussex, and I got involved with the Bognor Operatic Society, and I was doing mad things like [sings], playing the sailor. Then one time, as my father reminded me, I was playing on stage and I did this piano piece and I tripped over right into somebody, a rather large lady, right into her boobs. It was very soft, mind you, and I couldn't see a thing because I totally... Anyway, it's just one of those hazards of life, of being deafblind. There are some other stories too. I can't say that but anyway. It's true. We do have these different experiences.

What I'm trying to say is it's always important to try and explore. The musicality developed. I belonged to a local group and I was just playing keyboard and I was in the background and so on. I even became musical director for a local pantomime, for what used to be called The Spastic Society, part of Scope now. That was interesting because that allowed me to develop my directing of working with the people and doing different pantomimes.

Now, I took early retirement because I was in computers for about ten years and, because the Usher got worse, I had to take early retirement from local authorities. That was a very big step to take. Psychologically, you've got many changes going on in your life and I thought to myself what do I do now. Music's always been very much my interest, my hobby. I think you need to follow your dreams in some way. Sometimes you get those barriers and sometimes you've got to keep knocking on the door to get over these barriers. My journey took me to Norway where, I have to say, some wonderful people looked after me. One of these people, Dorothy, looked after me during the weekends and also young Russell who couldn't be here, who would've been here – I know he sends his best wishes – and he was a producer on my Warm Summer Days CD. I think the close cooperation of friends and families is very, very important.

To get to this musical journey, I then had to go back to studying again. So I went to Dartington College and that's where I met Steve Thornley who has very kindly come tonight, offering the services to support me. I said to Steve, Riitta wants to have some dinosaur music. He said, right. He looks very puzzled. Dinosaur music? Right. Well, let alone what dinosaurs look like, why do you want to have music? A bit of a brainstorming session came about and I said, well, if you can imagine that dinosaurs move like this – you've got two horns, dom, dom, dom, that sort of thing.

I must try not to move too much because I might fall off the stage. You might have a long neck and things like this. He did this beautiful music and it's still going today. I still get requests from people wanting to have this music. Thanks for Steve who did very, very great stuff there but, more importantly, the cooperation, because we needed to try it in schools. Two particular people I'd like to thank; Alex Forsythe, who was originally from Kent, and she did a lovely pilot study with the children, and another person from Finland, Siliba Ari, who also took the challenge to use this music as well. So I think it's cooperation with people. If you've got an idea, you want to explore these ideas, don't be afraid to try. You never know what happens.

Now, when I was in Norway, we had these wonderful music floors. It's a bit like sitting on your music centre, if you can imagine, and music comes straight through the floor and circulates around the room. In '93, I was involved in Sheffield University, as a team effort, and we did some portable music floors and that, in 2000 actually, was displayed in the Millennium Dome and it won an innovation award, which is a nice response.

I still get some deaf people who say, ooh, yes, I remember that floor and this sort of stuff. I know recently I went back to the same school, again where Siliba used to work, in Finland. That floor is still going strong. So it's nice to know that something has lasted so long. Now, Sibelius Academy, I met this wonderful woman here, Riitta, Dr. Riitta Lahtinen, and in '91 this was, the DBI Conference,

Deafblind International. So we blame DBI for putting us together. It's extraordinary to think that's how it all started.

I think going to Finland was really the sensible thing for me to do because I found it so difficult to do what I wanted to do in music therapy. So Riitta very kindly managed to get the possibility of ringing up Sibelius Academy, there's a deafblind guy coming to Finland, he speaks English but he doesn't speak any Finnish. Lo and behold, she gets me a course. So I did four years studying. I qualified in '99 and it was a wonderful learning curve because, at that time, I had two high powered hearing aids, my vision was changing, my communication was changing, so many things going on there.

My hearing was changing and, unfortunately, I got to a point where I got very fed-up because, when I was at Dartington, I was not able to sing so well, I have to say, and I found I couldn't hear my own singing voice anymore. So I stopped singing. Then there was a possibility of having a cochlear implant and I have to say that that was a really big turning point for me because I was scared about whether I'd still be able to continue with this music. In 2001, my friend in Norway, said, well, why don't we do a demo, and so we did a demo. I'd like to play a sample of that demo and it's called come back to me. I have to say I had to have a lot of Dutch courage and a couple of whiskies to get me through it.

[Sample plays...]

So that's a sample of what I was singing and, I have to say, when I listen to that, I still find that a wonderful arrangement because I was doing all the keyboards and all the sounds and stuff and Jon was doing the harmonies. He was standing there with a glass of whisky in his hand doing come back to me. He'll never forgive me for saying that, I know... That was one of my own songs. I wrote that song especially for Riitta. You'll be hearing that one later, by the way. So, yes, I thought I'd like to do a CD. So he said, okay, we'll do a CD. It was a challenge, a hell of a challenge, because when you can't hear your own voice and particularly when...

What's interesting, when I had the cochlear implant, I noticed how different my voice changed. So I had a cochlear implant in 2004 and I listened to my music and I thought, ooh dear, that sounds a bit off. Particularly one song, You and I. I used to sing it like this. Now I sing it... [Sings] So the emotional quality has actually become much clearer, much more delicate, much more in control.

But I only had one implant and one hearing aid and I still wasn't getting the right sort of balance. In 2009 I released the Warm Summer Days CD and that's all my own music. There are some copies upstairs if you want to order them. That was something that I wanted to do because I was so afraid that I would not be able to continue in music but the interesting thing was the cochlear implant gave me the new possibility.

In 2011 I found that it got better and better. I could hear new high pitched sounds. I even rung Jon. I said, Jon, what are these percussion sounds, I've never heard them before, and things like this. When I go to concerts now I'm getting much more stereophonic sound from both of the implants. I have to keep doing this because I can't see my script so I have to memorise this script and it's not easy trying to memorise everything, I tell you.

Anyway, so, Riitta's song, that's the song that Riitta asked for because she said to me, Darling, I'd like to have my own song. Lo and behold, a song came out, Riitta's Song, and that's on the CD. There's one line in that. It goes this is a song. My father also collaborated with the words, by the way. He said why don't we change that line. I said, no, we've got to keep it in. So this is a song. I'm trying to say this is a song. You've got to imagine I can't say those damn 'esses' sometimes, before the implant. It took me ten takes to do. This is a song with a radio microphone close, trying to hear that, but now I go [sings] and it's much more easier and I do that in one take. So that's the difference it made to me with the cochlear implant.

This year we had a concert because a friend of ours, who helped me with the Warm Summer Days CD, was taking early retirement

and she said, well, I'd like you to do a special present for me, a special concert. I said, okay, that would be very nice. She asked me, where would you like to have it and I said, well, Finlandia Hall sounds a good idea. Now, for those of you who don't know Finland, Finlandia Hall is a bit like the Royal Festival Hall in London – very big, one of the places to be. I said, well, we'll see what happens. She said, well, that sounds a good idea. I said, well, to do the job properly, Juha and I are playing as a duet and doing different performances and we were also working on a project called Pulse, where we wrote the Deafblind Blues Song.

It's quite interesting how that development took place and then I decided it would be nice to have a bass player and a drummer. So Juha suggested two guys and we did the concert. Now, at the same time, I thought it would be a good opportunity to film the thing because there are many aspects of the process and I was having this over-toning problem when I had the second implant in 2011. I just could not get rid of it and I want to thank Stina and Daniel who actually helped me get round that over-toning problem. Thanks to you and also to Mark Chung or Sepp. Sepp was responsible for the switch-on in Addenbrookes because I was at Addenbrookes Hospital.

Then Mark Chung did the over-toning problem. So it was a team effort, coordinating with different people, trying to know what you want to ask for, and that's the tricky bit because not everybody can advise you. Everybody's different and it's important that you have that cooperation, otherwise it doesn't work. So we did the concert and it went very, very well, I have to say, and I'm very pleased with the result. As a result, we released a new DVD, that's just come out literally today, and it's called Musical Perceptions of a Deafblind Cochlear Implant User, for those of you who are interested. It's a bit of a long title but trying to incorporate some words in there – deafblindness, musical perception, cochlear implant.

As I say, life is very interesting. How do I accept my disability as a deafblind person? It's not always easy. One has to be able to use

different situations to try to learn how to get over different frustrations and stuff like that but, I have to say, when I met Riitta in 2001... Sorry, 1991. I'll never be forgiven now. In 1991 we met in Sweden and she's a wonderful, funny, shapely haptic lady. Seriously, we used social-haptic communication and that played a very important role in my own performance because we use musical haptices, which I'm now researching with Turku University.

That's something that's developing. Now, sometimes, when Juha and I do performances, we hold hands because it's the only way I can tell if he's changing his guitar because I can't see anything that side. So we have these different methods of communication and the social-haptic communication gives me a more environmental description about what's going on in the environment because the vision had changed enormously.

I think this is time to give a little performance. So we just need to hook up with the guitars. Having all this technology is not easy sometimes but it's necessary. I sometimes feel like 007. The good thing is I can switch off Riitta if she talks too much. That isn't in the script, by the way. Now, I should just mention, Riitta's agreed to do this Finnish Anglo signing for me on my song. So, for those of you who want to follow the signing, Riitta will be doing this. We also have the words on screen for those of you who are hearing impaired.

What I want to do is a medley of some of my songs because there's not time to do everything. The first one is called Let's Be Together. The second one is called Come Back to Me. The third one is called A Hunter's Cry. The last one is called Deafblind Blues.

[Performance...]

That's it. Did we finish on time?

SA Yes, you were dead on time. You were brilliant. Russ, thank you so much. We're going to take another five minute break. I was watching the signers do some very, very good Blues. I was

very impressed. So, five minutes, stay where you are and then we're going to take questions from both Orla and Russ. Thank you.

UM I'm sorry, I don't want to ask too many questions here but how meaningful was the cultural background that Orla was brought up in to her musical influence?

OS Yes, luckily we have the college where they gave me access to studying music in there and my mother and my father loved music as well. So there was like a musical culture in the City of Cork. Yes, that influenced me a lot.

RP I think, in my case, there are several aspects to this. Firstly, I know that I didn't have any pressure to learn music in the family at all. It's just something that we had a piano in the house and it's just something I wanted to do. My father, being very musical anyway, I had music on all the time. So I was introduced to this wonderful world of sound and music and he bought me little singles like My Boomerang Won't Come Back. That was my first single I used to have, by Charlie Drake, bless him. The funny thing, this is a very interesting point because, with that particular song, I didn't know what the words were until I had my implant, or the story was. Then I realised it was all about aborigines and I started to hear this.

I suppose the influence was more hearing culture based but, also, the way I write music is also influenced by the different styles of music in my case. I'm influenced by different artists, like Glen Campbell, John Denver and that sort of stuff, and country as well. Some of you have probably never even heard of some of these artists, I know, but that is a big influence and I think both of us probably shared our same sort of... It depends what music you're exposed to. Perhaps Orla had a more classical bias background. I had a wider background, ranging from maybe classical to popular song.

SA Thank you. Good question. The gentleman in the third row over here, in the suit, and then we'll take the one in front.

BA Question for Russ; Russ, it's Brian Archbold. I'm in the third row from the front, to your left. Russ, I'd like to ask you about the transforming from having one cochlear implant and one hearing aid to two cochlear implants. I remember a number of years ago, when you came to see us at the Ear Foundation, you waxed lyrical about how it was a big advantage, having a cochlear implant in one side and a hearing aid on the other side, because you got tonal differences between the two. Now, I know that your hearing deteriorated in your other ear so you ended up having two cochlear implants. What difference has it made, having two implants, rather than one implant and one hearing aid?

RP I think it's a very interesting question because, when I had the hearing aid and the implant, I was still getting that sound I'd been used to, what we call the full sound. Probably best to illustrate that the sound you get is at a distance for the hearing aid. Now, for the implant, I was getting a closer sound and it's much clearer because, A, I was able to hear my voice better and, also, I was able to hear the 'esses' and the 'ts' and the vocal parts and the instruments, the higher pitched instruments, which I'd never heard before. Then, when I got the second implant I started to get this whole perception. My bass and treble change had become more treble orientated and I know somebody from Addenbrookes says I like high frequencies all the time. It's changed enormously but I also realise that I'm still getting a better quality of sound compared to before and, certainly, the vocal in the voice, in my own voice and singing voice has improved. So there is a big difference between those two changes, definitely.

SA Thank you. If the gentleman over here could just wait for the microphone, in the second row, on the left.

DS My name is Dr. Spencer. I've just come back from two weeks in Nashville, Tennessee. Now, I think Russell would go down terrifically there because it's the home of music and I never ever heard of country and western, because I'm a classical fan,

until I went there, and I was sold. There's a place there called the Grand Opry, which is like an opera house, and I think he'd be terrific there.

RP Maybe you can get them to give me an invite.

SA Thank you. Do we have another question? Take the gentleman with the glasses and then the gentleman behind. Oh, this is Russ's dad.

RP What have I done wrong?

PP My name is Peter Palmer and I am obviously the dad of him. What I wonder, Russ, is whether you've explained all your experiences in music and so on and you've indicated that you crossed the gap between classic and modern but I don't know whether it'd be worthwhile you pointing out to any youngster that may be wanting to take up music and so on and who may have some disability how possible it is to switch from classic to modern by the use of chord symbols.

RP Yes, I understand what you mean. This is why I tried to demonstrate on a piano, not very well, I may say so, on the Sleepy Shores number. Now, very often it's very difficult. Orla is better disciplined than I am on this and I know that, when you play classical music, you've got to play in a certain, particular way, as the music's written. I know I wasn't very popular with my music teachers because I used to keep changing them. I used to try and put my own interpretation and, also, I think, if you want to learn popular music, you can learn chord symbols, as I tried to explain. That's another quick shorthand method and that's something that helps to develop your musicality because you then have to improvise. Now, when we're doing music therapy, we have to do that all the time and I know some people who are classically trained find it incredibly difficult to change into this sort of mode. So, yes, it's a very valuable asset and it's something that could be incorporated in schools certainly.

SA I wanted to ask Orla what you thought about the difference between playing and teaching classical and modern music.

OS Yes, you see, I can play all kind of music but I know that classical is the most difficult part of music to learn because, for every line, it's very different. For example, if you have repetitions or in a different key, there are some changes. When you are learning some kind of modern folk music or whatever, you have the same verse then back to chorus, the same verse, the same chord. It's easier and faster to learn. So I've been teaching guitar for years as well but I just find it's easier to teach chords rather than classical. There is more work to do with classical music but I just find it more interesting to me to learn classical music because it moves along all the time. That's the big difference between them.

SA Interesting that you have the difference. We had another question.

TB Thank you very much. My name's Tony Best and I used to work for Sense and I'm sitting just behind your father. Russ, it was a question for you. I'd heard people with cochlear implants called the 'previously deafblind'. That kind of implies that, once you've got the implants, your hearing problem goes away – there is no more problem. I wonder if you agreed with that or whether you perhaps thought you still had deafblindness but it was of a very specific type?

RP Yes, that's a very tricky one that. You've got to look at it from two angles. It's a very practical question because I find I've changed my identity God knows how many times. I've gone from hearing impaired as a kid, then becoming hearing visually impaired as an after teenager and then, in adult life, I've become deaf and blind. Then, when I get an implant, I say, well, which way do I go. Now, you've got to understand that these are still useful tools. If I take them off, I'm still deaf and blind. That doesn't go away.

I think there's a very important point that people don't associate cochlear implant as a cure because it's not a cure. It's just a useful tool. It's a device that gives you access to better information but

it's certainly not a cure. I hate the word deafblindness, to be honest, but you have to live with it because that's the only way we can identify ourselves. Some people think you talk too well and you hear too well but I can't see anything so it's a combination of also interpreting services to support you, to give you your access to information. That's something else that people need to be aware of too.

SA Interesting, thank you. There were questions on this side. The lady near the back first and then we'll take the one in front.

KM Hello, I'm Karen Morrison. I'm music therapist for Sense. I'm towards the back, on the left. I just wanted to ask Russ, in your music therapy work, whether you access your clients' sounds using your hearing or whether you work with an assistant with the haptic interpretations within the sessions, whether that's helpful for you?

RP Up until a couple of years ago, I felt it got so difficult. I remember going to do some sort of assessment for a child who had dual sensory impairment and I had an interpreter and then I had a second personal assistant to tell me where things were and the social-haptics and haptics were going on all the time. I was absolutely exhausted after that session, I have to say, and I thought this is impossible to achieve. So there is a limitation. I have to say there is a limitation now but 20 years ago my vision was better and my hearing was also better, in some respects.

Although, I have to say, what I'm hearing through the cochlear implants now, I'm hearing music and I'm hearing spoken language in a better way, that I'd never heard before. So there's a contradiction in some respects but, as a professional music therapist, I do think it depends on the quality of the access you have to your information. Some people can do it very well, some people can't. I think you just need to, certainly, work with what tools you have.

SA I want to just ask Orla something as well, following on from that. Orla, you have students with very different needs. How have you developed different methods for different students?

OS Most of my students are hearing and I treat them the same way. I use normal teaching methods, just the same as any other music teacher teaches. So I usually teach them one to one. If I was teaching in school, I would have maybe five people together and teach that group slowly. If I was teaching deaf, I'd use sign language. It's much easier to teach the deaf guitar. I find that deaf children learn better with deaf teachers, deafblind teachers as well. They are the best qualified, better than hearing teachers. Hearing teachers would be better off teaching hearing people. Deaf teachers or deafblind teachers can teach deaf and blind children because it's a different method. I find, in my experience and from research from other people, they just tell me that they understand better from deaf teachers. They miss a lot if they learn from hearing teachers.

For example, in Dublin, way back in the 40s and 50s, all the teachers were hearing in the school for the deaf. Now, a lot of them never did leaving certs but now there are more deaf teachers now and that has encouraged deaf students to do research and go to college and university and so on. For me, I find it easier to teach deaf children as well because it's sign language and they understand me better. Anyway, it's the same for hearing. It's all one to one and I just lip read all the time. So I memorise what's going on and I know what kind of question they're going to ask me. It's just simple. I've just used this the past 21 years.

SA Thank you. There was another question on the same side of the room. There's a gentleman here. If you could just tell us where you are in the room and your name, thank you?

PH I'm Peter Hughes and I'm centre left, rather like the Guardian. It's really a question for Orla and I wonder what her awareness of melody is and, more broadly, what does melody

mean to a profoundly deaf person or is their experience entirely through vibration and feeling?

OS Yes, I use the music floor so I can feel the vibrations by putting my legs on the floor. You see, every deaf person has different frequency hearing loss. Some deaf can hear high frequencies. Some deaf cannot hear that. They can hear the lower frequencies. For example, for me, I can hear the lower and middle pitch but high frequencies I cannot hear but I can notice. Say if you have Dame Evelyn Glennie, she can't hear the lower pitch but she can hear the high pitch. For every deaf person it's different. I teach every deaf person different. If they want to feel the vibration and they're happy with the lower pitch, let them play that. If they don't want to play the high pitch then they can leave it out. Melody, you can just turn the tone from the right hand and the left hand, increase the treble clef or the treble sound, the bass sound. There are different ways of how you can hear the music.

SA For example, in that lullaby you wrote for your son, how much of that was imagination and how much of that did you feel the vibrations?

OS Well, I tried to compose for many years but I never kind of pushed myself to start composing. Many people kept telling me, Orla, you should compose something. So, after the birth of my first son, I decided this is a great inspiration. I just go through it in my head, all the different notes. I went through all the pieces of Beethoven, Mozart too, and just went through all the different notes and just improvised pitches, notes and changing different keys. I use a mixture. It's not dependent on vibration only. It's about notes. I like the sounds. It just all comes together. That's how it works.

SA Interesting. Another question. I'll take this one and then the lady over there.

OW Oliver Walder. I am the front left. My question is a light-hearted one for Russ and Riitta. I noticed that Russ pronounces Riitta in the English way and I think I'm correct in saying that the

Finnish way is quite different. I'm asking how, in this loving relationship, she has become used to accepting the English pronunciation.

RP Yes, I still can't pronounce it correctly. You should try our address in Finland. That's even worse. I think Riitta accepts it. I used to say Ritha originally. They pronounce their Rs differently. So I just wiggle my bit at the back of the throat.

SA It's a love that has crossed the borders is the main thing. There was one other question and it will have to be our last one.

MK I'm Marilyn Kilsby, used to work for Sense, front row to your right. I'm profoundly deaf and a clarinet player. Now, do you have problems, either of you, if you play with other instruments because I find that it's difficult to fine-tune my clarinet to another instrument? I know, in Orla's case, her piano is tuned but she would still have to fit in musically with other instruments. I just wonder because I think that could be a problem.

RP In regards to tuning, this is something that takes a long time to develop and get your sense of pitch. Now, I've found that the implant allows me to do some things but I still need to use my chin on the guitar to get it feeling... I can't see the tuning fork anymore but I still do it by touch and by feeling, a combination of touch and also listening. But it's something you've got to work with and it's not easy. When you're playing with other instruments, yes, it does also cause a problem with the feedback you get through the hearing aids or the implants. This is the over-toning problem we have. I'm actually looking into this more and more in Finland now, to try and find out if there is something connected to certain frequencies we're hearing and how we can get over that problem.

OS I would never know how to play with an orchestra but I'd love to someday play with an orchestra. I used to play every year for the primary school, for the communions and Christmas concerts. For example, I would play the keyboard or the piano at the background. Somebody else would play the flute or the violin and we'd use that as a solo. I do that every year. It's just easy to play

because the piano only needs to be tuned. I don't have to tune the piano. Somebody has to tune the piano and, once it's tuned, it's done perfect. So I have no problem playing as an accompaniment with other instruments. I used to play in bands 15 years ago, when I was studying music, and played in pubs. We'd have a bass and drums so I have no problem with that.

SA Thank you. I'm really sorry that we have to leave it there because of the time. I just wanted to say I've been struck by how both of you combine creative... I was going to say looseness but that doesn't sound right but just creative spirit but also discipline and hard work. It's a lesson I'm going to take home for my children, when I try and get them to practise, and for myself. I would like to thank you so much and for your questions and I wanted to hand over to John Crabtree for some closing remarks.

JC Ladies and gentlemen, I realised probably within 30 seconds of the first musical journey, Orla's journey, that I have been, as usual, completely outmanoeuvred by Gill, our chief executive, because when I got here she said to me, I'll do the intro, John, you do the outro. Once I'd translated the Glaswegian into English and understood what she meant, I thought that sounds pretty fair but, of course, within a minute of Orla's presentation, I realised that following that would just be absolutely impossible. She knew what was ahead of us. Of course, I didn't.

So often I find myself introducing myself John Crabtree, chair of Sense, but every now and again I find myself saying something like I have the great, good fortune to be the chair of Sense. It's just such a privilege. I know that if I say that tonight everybody in this packed room will understand exactly what I mean. It's such a great privilege to be here. It's such a great privilege to have any involvement in this evening at all. It's been wonderful.

Every year we come here. I thought it probably was the sixth time and it was so I think, well, they won't be able to beat that next year but they do and tonight has been absolutely phenomenal. I feel sorry for my kids tomorrow. When I wake them up at about seven

o'clock, I shall be singing the Deafblind Blues. They can really look forward to that. I hope all of you will do exactly the same, please and Gill will do it for us officially and we'll put it on the intranet, on the extranet, and on YouTube and we'll all be able to hit it a million times. I can't wait.

We've got some thank-yous from all of you. Somehow, I'm going to try and navigate around the floor. Shall I start with Mark? First of all, Mark. I hope you all heard Mark at the reception, playing for us. That was fantastic, Mark. Russ, again, phenomenal, thank you so much. One of the things, actually, you would've noticed, is that both Orla and Russ thanked us. Did you notice that? They thanked Sense. Thank you so much for allowing us to come here and do this. It's quite extraordinary. It's completely the reverse, isn't it? Orla, thank you so much. Finally, Samira.

SA I haven't done anything. I haven't played or anything.

JC How do you think I feel? You've done more than I have. I've just sat there and thought thank you Gill Morbey for this. Bless you. Thank you so much. It's been absolutely fantastic.

SA Thank you so much. That's so kind. It's been entirely my pleasure.

JC So, ladies and gentlemen, that's it. Thank you very much. Have a safe journey home. I suspect we might be somewhere else next year. This is a great venue but we're just packed and we wanted more people to come as well. So, until the seventh annual lecture, singing the Deafblind Blues, have a safe journey home. Thanks very much.