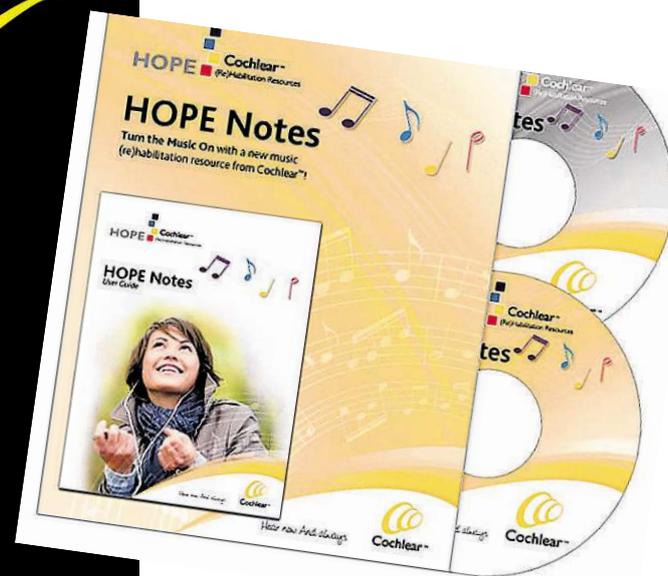


Richard Reed, a professional musician from the US who created Hope Notes (below)



with repeated listening, those things started to come through.”

Since starting to use my implant to listen to music, I'm now finding that I gravitate to songs with a distinct rhythm.

“We do almost as well as biologic-eared persons with rhythm,” says Reed. “Once we get a bit better at hearing in noise, which is a huge challenge in itself, we begin to do better hearing lyrics. It's all about neuroplasticity – the brain's ability to adapt.”

Indeed, Reed's programme, sponsored by implant maker Cochlear, is helping to underscore the growing focus on aural-rehabilitation programmes for CI users in order to make the most of the brain's proven ability to “rewire” itself to new sensory inputs.

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“When I started out in 2002, there were quite a few CI professionals who didn't believe in music rehabilitation,” he said. “In fact, some couldn't quite put faith in rehabilitation of any sort. I dare say they're still out there, but no longer anywhere near a majority.”

Music rehabilitation can still be a long and difficult road for many users, but Reed says the difficulties can be overcome with “patience, practice, persistence, knowing when to take a break, and keeping a sense of humour”.

When he first tried to listen to recorded music after getting his CI, Reed said it sounded at best like it was being played through his grandmother's old 78 RPM gramophone, but at its worst like a distorted wall of rhythmic noise that made

conversations impossible. “I couldn't identify instruments or lyrics for a long time.”

He says it took him a full two years for a song to sound good enough to give him the goosebumps, but he says music today still doesn't sound as good as he remembers.

“If I saw the glass as half-empty, I'd miss some jazz things more than the classical pieces I don't get. Big orchestral or symphonic numbers are hard because of the wide range of frequencies. Songs with complex harmonies seem the most difficult.”

“But rather than lament what's gone, it makes more sense for me to focus on the music my friends and I play live.”

Reed is the keyboardist in his band, playing mostly digital-sampled organs and pianos, plus the odd bit of accordion, and also does regular sessions in a recording studio.

As it happens, he knows a few other musicians with CIs, including a couple of pianists, a bassist and a guitarist. “All we need is a drummer.”