

Award-Winning Cochlear Implant Film

- by John Quinan

Paul and Sally Taylor are 68 and 69 and were each not able to hear until they both became recipients of cochlear implants (CI) at the age of 65. Their independent filmmaker daughter Irene Taylor Brodsky has closely captured their entire embarkation and transition to try to welcome audio into their ears via CI surgery, and this documentary is named "Hear and Now." It clocks at 85 minutes, it won the Audience Award at the 2007 Sundance Film Festival, and there are currently 7 ensuing broadcasts scheduled through May 27 on HBO and HBO2.

Taylor Brodsky financed and shot the film over a year for under \$100,000 with the help of friends and fundraisers.

"I considered making it 5 minutes after my parents told me they were getting cochlear implants," she said. "But I didn't decide to go for it until three weeks later when enough colleagues and friends told me I was crazy not to."

A CI consists of an electronic device that provides a sense of sound to someone who is hearing-impaired. It is surgically implanted into one ear. The procedure began development in 1957, and it received FDA approval in 1984 for adults and in 1990 for children. Australia-based Cochlear Limited is the largest manufacturer of advanced hearing technologies, and it has produced almost 100,000 of the cochlear implant systems worldwide.

Taylor Brodsky craftily applied both her journalism and filmmaking skills to the overlapping subjects of sound and of family well enough to evoke scintillating senses of feeling from an audience that ends up almost involved themselves.

"I want people to feel a sense of intimacy when they watch Paul and Sally -- as if they're a fly on the wall," said Taylor Brodsky. "I wanted to bring people in as close as I am."

Struggle with Sound?

These two particular CI recipients are revealed to the

viewer enough to engender strong hope that the shared voyage could bring each one what he or she desires to hear. The dimension of sound is entirely new to both, and at an older age this can require a recipient to battle and adapt in order to accept. This issue is explored through this endearing and informative documentary.

Paul is a sometimes reserved and steadfast man who seems to be able to cope with annoyances in a detached way when helpful. It is exposed how Sally, though, can be flabbergasted by the overwhelmingly repetitive and potentially irritating noises that some of us are able to inherently drown out.

I am one who certainly does understand. There is a loud deli exhaust pipe about 50-feet behind my living room window. Its noise drones over a big area for about ten minutes every time it's active, and it is even 'inherently' bothering me right now while I'm writing. I wish I didn't have to hear it.

The Characters

So temperament is an ingredient in everyone, and it is shown on and shared through the screen to the viewer who is also benefited by plenty of the warm or comedic moments throughout the piece.

"It is compelling to watch," said viewer Adrian Marin. "Paul and Sally are like stars -- they are naturally magnetic people to observe."

We find out that Paul is a brilliant engineer professor who was involved in the development of telecommunications devices that enable deaf people to use telephones, and we notice via home videos from long ago how exuberantly pretty and playful and smart Sally's character has been her whole life.

We sit more steadfast ourselves while watching Paul satisfyingly disconnect his implant for some silence with a cocktail after a full day of noise, and we laugh with Sally as we watch her slowly bobbing her head and slightly grinning while driving deaf before the implant because she can feel some vibrations when she blasts heavy metal music on the car radio. We are within the car with Sally when she is doing that, and this is an example of how Taylor

Brodsky is able to engage the audience throughout the film.

"Hear and Now" is Taylor Brodsky's first feature-length film. She won an Emmy with CBS for her portrait of the late architect Samuel Mockbee and his legacy in the American South, and as a producer and cinematographer she has produced a range of stories and TV documentaries.

HBO expressed interest after she showed them about 25 minutes of it. They licensed it about six months later after she sent them a full rough cut.

"The most satisfying part of making this film wasn't the shooting, but the editing," says Taylor Brodsky. "This is where the story al came together. I would spend days at a time working on one small scene."

Prior to the surgery, Sally crackles twigs in her hand when her dogs are far ahead and they snap behind to see what they hear. From the directorial way Taylor Brodsky captures such occurrences, to the way she edits a lake's water to glisten in a sparkly-enough way to transcend the sense of sight in an analogous way to the sense of sound, she conveys enough to the audience on physical and factual and personal and artistic levels to constitute the film as terrific.

"This film honors my parents and their life together -- as a married couple and as two deaf people who came of age in a difficult time to be deaf," said Taylor Brodsky."

=====

NOTE of the currently scheduled broadcast dates/times:

- HBO: May 15 (9:30 a.m., midnight), May 19 (2:30 p.m., 10:15 p.m.), May 24 (12:30 p.m.), and May 27 (6:30 p.m.)
- HBO2: May 18 (11:00 a.m.)