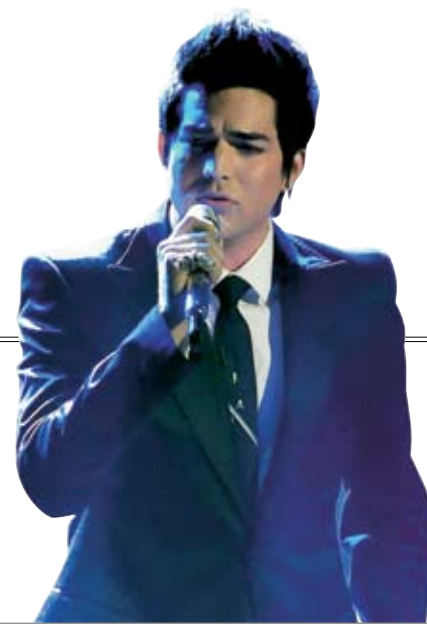


SCENE Sunday

TULSA WORLD **D1** Sunday | April 26, 2009 | tulsaworld.com



D2

Panicking at the disco

'AMERICAN IDOL' TRIMS ITS LIST TO FIVE. WE'RE STAYING TUNED.



D3

'Love' potion

TULSA OPERA DOES DONIZETTI.



D4

A diet of dance

'MEDITERRANEA' WHETS THE APPETITE.



D8

B & B, by day

TODAY IS BED & BREAKFAST DAY. MMM.

Hope to hear from you

Surgery brings joy, sound and 'a teaching film'

BY CARY ASPINWALL
World Scene Writer

Most of his life, Justin Garrett can remember his family complaining about noisy crickets on warm nights.

He always wondered what that sounded like.

Deafness starting at age 2 left him able to hear amplified sounds through hearing aids, but he had few sound memories. Crickets were a mystery.

A few years ago, Garrett faced a choice: Keep what little hearing he had, or opt for cochlear implants that could restore it.

If the surgery didn't work, he would never hear again — not even with hearing aids.

But his hearing had already rapidly deteriorated, so Garrett figured, "What the hell?"

"I decided to put all my faith in God and go for it."

His decision to have cochlear implants in both ears was chronicled in a documentary, "From Silence to Sound," by Los Angeles writer and filmmaker Chase Matthews.

"We were nervous," said Matthews, who grew up in Owasso and is a cousin of Garrett's wife. "There's about a 50 percent chance of (the implants) working in each ear, and we didn't know until they were turned on. It was scary."

"He's such a nice guy, you just want to root for him."

Crickets chirp now. Garrett's cochlear implant surgery in 2006 was a success.

Since then, he has been able to recover his speech skills, adopt a daughter from Kazakhstan and start a new job.

"It gave me the confidence to



Justin Garrett and his daughter Olivia, 2, play in the front yard of their Owasso home. Several years ago, Garrett opted for cochlear implants to restore the hearing he lost at the age of 2. MIKE SIMONS/Tulsa World



"I can be a good dad; that's the best thing about it," says Garrett of the surgery that restored his hearing.

face anything," he said. "I don't have to rely on anyone."

He can answer the telephone and doorbell at his home in Owasso, and hear his daughter Olivia, 2, crying (or getting into mischief).

"I can be a good dad; that's the best thing about it," he said.

And he loves the sound of crickets chirping.

Deaf in America

Garrett was Olivia's age when his hearing loss started. He read

lips, wore hearing aids and attended regular classes as a child, but his hearing got progressively worse as he aged, so he learned sign language and switched to classes for deaf students.

"It was very depressing," he said. His speech continued to get worse, too. It limited his job opportunities.

Because Garrett's hearing loss was so severe and started at such an early age, most of the sounds he heard throughout life were indis-

tinguishable noises — he understood people mostly by reading lips.

The hearing aids he wore for years simply made sounds louder for his ears, whereas cochlear implants bypass the outer and middle ear to present auditory signals directly to the inner ear.

People who opt for cochlear implants can no longer use hearing aids, and there's always a risk that a person's auditory neurons won't function properly, even after the devices are implanted. So the decision is irreversible, and results vary greatly from person to person.

For Garrett, he said, it was the right decision. Cochlear implants allowed him to join the hearing world. And letting Matthews and his crew film the journey may help more people learn about cochlear implants and the difference they can make.

Matthews said he hopes viewers gain an understanding of what it's really like for someone like Garrett to grow up deaf in America.

'A teaching film'

The documentary touches on some tough moments — Garrett recalling being made fun of as a child and teased by former co-workers, but the happier moments are Matthews' favorites.

Garrett hearing popcorn pop and water run for the first time. His wife playing a piano. Hearing

From Silence to Sound

To view a trailer or purchase a DVD of the documentary, go to tulsaworld.com/silencetosound.

Circle Cinema, 12 S. Lewis Ave., will host a screening of the documentary May 9 at 4 p.m. Tickets are \$8, and Justin Garrett will be available for a Q&A session after the show.

his father tell him, "I love you."

"When you realize this may be the first time in his life he's actually heard his father say that, it really gets you," Matthews said.

After Garrett's 2006 surgery in Oklahoma City, he spent several months in speech therapy to improve his speaking skills. Not being able to speak would have been an obstacle when he and his wife, Davina, traveled to Kazakhstan last year to adopt Olivia.

Everywhere they went in the country, people stared at the cochlear implant devices attached to his head (he has no hair to hide them). But the story of what those devices have done for him is one he doesn't mind sharing with the world.

"I want this to be a teaching film for other deaf people," he said. "I hope it will help inspire others."

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'It gave me the confidence to face anything. I don't have to rely on anyone.'

JUSTIN GARRETT
on his cochlear implants

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