

# HEAR THAT? IT'S MORE THAN JUST MUSIC TO THESE EARS.

FOR THOSE first days, when the doctors told Judi Godsey there would be an acclimation period to her new hearing aids, when the semis passing by on the highway caused her to flinch, every sound seemed painfully loud.

She had lost her hearing nearly overnight at age 40, and for more than 15 years she had regularly upgraded to new hearing aids when finances and insurance premiums allowed.

Her most recent pair, nearly eight years old, made it hard for her to chat on the phone or listen to music. In the car, the radio sounded distorted, like it was having trouble picking up a faraway station, and so for the past five years, she had given up. Music? Forget it.

But now, with the new hearing aids, she was growing used to the rhythms of life again. The improvement in technology was stunning, and Godsey was ready to return to her extroverted self. She had heard her 2-year-old grandson call her by name over the telephone, and she cried. There was so much out there to catch up on.

Where would she start? I am guilty of playing the hypotheticals as dinner conversation. Without an iPod for six months, what would be the first song you would listen to? In full embrace of hyperbole, debate the most beautiful sound ever. For me, these are pain-free games. For Godsey, this was her life.

She watched the Grammys in February with the sound off and closed-captioning on. That night, the Brit-pop singer Adele was the queen of the award show. Godsey had never heard Adele's music or her chart-topping album "21."

Godsey could only guess what Adele would sound like. She hadn't been exposed to a summer of non-stop "Rolling in the Deep." She had yet to sympathize with the broken-hearted narrator in "Someone Like You." She thought Adele

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might be just another pop singer, one who was shrill or with limited range.

But a few weeks later, in the silent hours of March 22, equipped with the new hearing aids and confident in her acclimation, she couldn't wait any longer.

It was 1:30 a.m.

"I went straight to YouTube and cranked up her music videos. I was so excited," Godsey wrote me in a series of email interviews.

When she heard the music, she was impressed by the richness of Adele's voice. She described it as "pure and easy."

And she was hooked.

She listened to more music, more acts, more soundtracks. Michael Jackson. Paul McCartney.

"At first, I just sat and stared at the computer screen, tears welling up in my eyes."

She posted her favorites to Facebook, not counting on her friends who were awake in other time zones.

Then her friends posted suggestions. She looked them up and listened.

Sometimes she would dance. Sometimes she would sing. Sometimes she would cry.

Everything sounded richer than she imagined,

even from five years earlier. Everything sounded fuller. The sound of one note was replaced by a symphony.

"I had absolutely no idea how much I had missed it," she wrote. "I missed the emotional part of it, the way music reaches inside and touches something nothing else can. The 'connectedness' you feel with everyone else who has ever heard it. The social aspect, the cultural aspect, the cerebral aspect. All of it. I missed all of it."

Bach. Jennifer Hall. Florence Welch. The night was over now. It was morning. "I was out of my mind giddy."

She found a list of 150 "happy" songs and started making her way through each track.

"I could not listen fast enough," she wrote. "I wanted to catch up."

The coming days would include more videos, more music, more discoveries and rediscoveries. B.B. King. Amy Winehouse. Duffy. Classic rock. Motown.

But first she gave in to exhaustion and climbed into bed.

It was early afternoon now, nearly 12 hours since that first song, since she had been re-acclimated to rock 'n' roll and jazz and pop, since she had been reminded that the best part of music is not how it sounds, but how it makes you feel.

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