



2. The Sound of Music

Part I

Evelyn Glennie Listens to Sound without Hearing It

BEFORE YOU READ

- “God may have taken her hearing but he has given her back something extraordinary. What we hear, she feels — far more deeply than any of us. That is why she expresses music so beautifully.”
- Read the following account of a person who fought against a physical disability and made her life a success story.

1. RUSH hour crowds jostle for position on the underground train platform. A slight girl, looking younger than her seventeen years, was nervous yet excited as she felt the vibrations of the approaching train. It was her first day at the prestigious Royal Academy of Music in London and daunting enough for any teenager fresh from a Scottish farm. But this aspiring musician faced a bigger challenge than most: she was profoundly deaf.
2. Evelyn Glennie’s loss of hearing had been gradual. Her mother remembers noticing something was wrong when the eight-year-old Evelyn was waiting to play the piano. “They called her name and she didn’t move. I suddenly realised she hadn’t heard,” says Isabel Glennie. For quite a while Evelyn managed to conceal her growing deafness from friends and teachers. But by the time she was eleven her marks had deteriorated and her headmistress urged her parents to take her to a

jostle: push roughly
slight: small and thin

daunting: frightening

aspiring musician: a person who wants to be a musician



specialist. It was then discovered that her hearing was severely impaired as a result of gradual nerve damage. They were advised that she should be fitted with hearing aids and sent to a school for the deaf. "Everything suddenly looked black," says Evelyn.

3. But Evelyn was not going to give up. She was determined to lead a normal life and pursue her interest in music. One day she noticed a girl playing a xylophone and decided that she wanted to play it too. Most of the teachers discouraged her but percussionist Ron Forbes spotted her potential. He began by tuning two large drums to different notes. "Don't listen through your ears," he would say, "try to sense it some other way." Says Evelyn, "Suddenly I realised I could feel the higher drum from the waist up and the lower one from the waist down." Forbes repeated the exercise, and soon Evelyn discovered that she could sense certain notes in different parts of her body. "I had learnt to open my mind and body to sounds and vibrations." The rest was sheer determination and hard work.
4. She never looked back from that point onwards. She toured the United Kingdom with a youth orchestra and by the time she was sixteen, she had decided to make music her life. She auditioned for the Royal Academy of Music and scored one of the highest marks in the history of the academy. She gradually moved from orchestral work to solo performances. At the end of her three-year course, she had captured most of the top awards.
5. And for all this, Evelyn won't accept any hint of heroic achievement. "If you work hard and know where you are going, you'll get there." And she got right to the top, the world's most sought-after multi-percussionist with a mastery of some thousand instruments, and hectic international schedule.
6. It is intriguing to watch Evelyn function so effortlessly without hearing. In our two-hour discussion she never missed a word. "Men with bushy beards give me trouble," she laughed. "It is

impaired: weakened



xylophone: a musical instrument with a row of wooden bars of different lengths

percussionist: a person who plays the drum, the *tabla*, etc.

potential: quality or ability that can be developed

auditioned: gave a short performance so that the director could decide whether she was good enough

intriguing: fascinating and curious



It is intriguing to watch Evelyn function so effortlessly without hearing

not just watching the lips, it's the whole face, especially the eyes." She speaks flawlessly with a Scottish lilt. "My speech is clear because I could hear till I was eleven," she says. But that doesn't explain how she managed to learn French and master basic Japanese.


flawlessly: without a fault or mistake

lilt: a way of speaking

7. As for music, she explains, "It pours in through every part of my body. It tingles in the skin, my cheekbones and even in my hair." When she plays the xylophone, she can sense the sound passing up the stick into her fingertips. By leaning against the drums, she can feel the resonances flowing into her body. On a wooden platform she removes her shoes so that the vibrations pass through her bare feet and up her legs.

tingles: causes a slight pricking or stinging sensation

resonances: echoes of sounds

- 
8. Not surprisingly, Evelyn delights her audiences. In 1991 she was presented with the Royal Philharmonic Society's prestigious Soloist of the Year Award. Says master percussionist James Blades, "God may have taken her hearing but he has given her back something extraordinary. What we hear, she feels — far more deeply than any of us. That is why she expresses music so beautifully."
9. Evelyn confesses that she is something of a workaholic. "I've just got to work ... often harder than classical musicians. But the rewards are enormous." Apart from the regular concerts, Evelyn also gives free concerts in prisons and hospitals. She also gives high priority to classes for young musicians. Ann Richlin of the Beethoven Fund for Deaf Children says, "She is a shining inspiration for deaf children. They see that there is nowhere that they cannot go."
10. Evelyn Glennie has already accomplished more than most people twice her age. She has brought percussion to the front of the orchestra, and demonstrated that it can be very moving. She has given inspiration to those who are handicapped, people who look to her and say, 'If she can do it, I can.' And, not the least, she has given enormous pleasure to millions.

workaholic (informal):
a person who finds it
difficult to stop
working

priority: great
importance

DEBORAH COWLEY



Thinking about the Text

- I. Answer these questions in a few words or a couple of sentences each.
1. How old was Evelyn when she went to the Royal Academy of Music?
 2. When was her deafness first noticed? When was it confirmed?
- II. Answer each of these questions in a short paragraph (30–40 words).
1. Who helped her to continue with music? What did he do and say?
 2. Name the various places and causes for which Evelyn performs.
- III. Answer the question in two or three paragraphs (100–150 words).
1. How does Evelyn hear music?