

The sound of music

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.

- **Rush hour crowds:** Busy time when many people are traveling, often causing crowded conditions.
- **Jostle:** Push or bump into others, often in a crowded place.
- **Prestigious:** Highly respected and admired, often associated with excellence and importance.
- **Daunting enough:** Sufficiently intimidating/challenging/frightening.
- **Scottish farm:** A farm located in Scotland, a country in the United Kingdom.
- **Aspiring musician:** Someone who has the ambition or desire to become a musician.
- **Profoundly deaf:** Completely unable to hear or having a severe hearing impairment.

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 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.

- **Hearing:** The ability to perceive sounds.
- **Gradual:** Happening slowly over time, progressing in small increments.
- **Conceal:** To hide or keep something secret or hidden.
- **Deteriorated:** Became worse in quality or condition.
- **Urged:** Strongly advised.
- **Severely impaired:** Greatly affected or damaged.
- **Aids:** Devices or tools that assist or improve a person's ability to do something, in this case, hearing aids help with hearing.

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.

- **Give up:** To stop trying or cease efforts.
- **Determined:** Having a strong resolve or firm intention.
- **Pursue:** To actively follow or seek out, often in pursuit of a goal or interest.
- **Xylophone:** A musical instrument consisting of a series of wooden bars that are struck to produce sounds.
- **Percussionist:** A musician who plays percussion instruments, such as drums or cymbals.
- **Spotted:** Noticed or observed.
- **Potential:** The capacity or possibility for development, success, or achievement.
- **He began by tuning two large drums to different notes:** He adjusted the pitch or sound of two big drums to produce different musical tones.
- **Sheer determination and hard work:** A combination of commitment and dedicated effort.

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.

- **Looked back:** reflected on or revisited past experiences or decisions.
- **Toured:** Travelled and performed in various places, often as part of a musical group
- **Orchestra:** A large group of musicians playing different instruments together.
- **Auditioned:** Participated in a performance or talent assessment to be considered for a specific opportunity, such as joining a music school
- **Solo performances:** Musical performances done individually
- **Captured:** Achieved or won, often in a competitive context, by demonstrating exceptional skill or talent.

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 multipercussionist with a mastery of some thousand instruments, and hectic international schedule.

- **And for all this, Evelyn won't accept any hint of heroic achievement:** Though she made remarkable accomplishments, Evelyn doesn't consider herself a hero or someone deserving of special praise.
- **Most sought-after multipercussionist:** Refers to Evelyn being highly desired and in high demand as a musician who specializes in playing multiple percussion instruments.
- **Mastery:** The highest level of skill, expertise, or proficiency in a particular field
- **Hectic international schedule:** A busy and demanding timetable filled with numerous engagements, performances, and travel across different countries.

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 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.

- **Intriguing:** Fascinating, interesting, or captivating.
- **Men with bushy beards give me trouble:** Evelyn finds it challenging to understand or communicate with men who have thick or full beards, because she depends on visual clues, including lip-reading and facial expressions.
- **She speaks flawlessly with a Scottish lilt:** Evelyn speaks with excellent proficiency and accuracy, and her speech carries a gentle Scottish accent or inflection.

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.

- **It pours in through every part of my body. It tingles in the skin, my cheekbones and even in my hair:** When Evelyn plays music, she feels it deeply and intensely, with sensations spreading throughout her entire body, creating a tingling sensation on her skin, cheekbones, and even in her hair.
- **By leaning against the drums:** by pressing her body against the drums
- **Resonances:** Vibrations or sound waves
- **Bare feet:** When on a wooden platform, Evelyn removes her shoes so that her feet are exposed and in direct contact with the surface, allowing the vibrations and sensations to pass through her feet and up her legs.

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.”

- **Evelyn delights her audiences:** Evelyn brings joy and satisfaction to the people who watch and listen to her performances.

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.”

- **Evelyn confesses that she is something of a workaholic:** Evelyn admits that she tends to work excessively and is highly dedicated to her work.
- **Workaholic:** a person who works very hard

- **But the rewards are enormous:** Despite the demanding nature of her work, the outcomes and benefits she receives are significant and satisfying.
- **Apart from the regular concerts:** In addition to her usual performances, Evelyn engages in other activities or events.
- **She is a shining inspiration for deaf children:** Evelyn serves as a remarkable role model and source of inspiration for children who are deaf.
- **They see that there is nowhere that they cannot go:** Deaf children, after witnessing Evelyn's achievements, realize that there are no limitations or barriers in pursuing their dreams and achieving success in any field.

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.

- **She has brought percussion to the front of the orchestra:** Evelyn has elevated the role of percussion instruments within the orchestra, giving them more importance.
- **She demonstrated that it can be very moving:** Through her performances, Evelyn has shown that percussion music can evoke (=bring into mind) deep emotions and have a huge impact on listeners, touching them on an emotional level.

DAME EVELYN GLENNIE

Timpani and Percussion, 1985

Received the Leonie Sonning Music Prize, the first percussionist in the awards' six-decade history.



timpani/kettledrums