

Heart Beat





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Introduction

Drums ... bells ... cymbals ...

Any instrument that you hit to create music is a percussion instrument: whether you shake it, tap it with bare hands or beat it with sticks.

Did you know that, apart from the human voice, percussion instruments are the oldest musical instruments in the world?

Since the earliest times, people have enjoyed the thumping, beating and drumming of percussion. This booklet will tell you something about that fun and the importance of percussion to people all over the world.





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Evelyn Glennie – a short biography

Evelyn Glennie is a well-known musician who plays many different percussion instruments. She is the first ever solo full-time percussionist. She has played all around the world with famous orchestras and musicians. On pages 6 and 7, you can read from her autobiography, *Good Vibrations*; but first, here is a short outline of her life so far.

Evelyn was born in 1965 and grew up with her two brothers on a farm in north-east Scotland. From an early age, when she started to learn the piano, recorder and clarinet, it was clear that Evelyn was unusually gifted in music.

While still at primary school, Evelyn started to lose her hearing. By the age of 12 she was almost completely deaf. At secondary school, she stopped playing most other instruments in order to put her effort into percussion. Here she began to excel as a talented musician, with support from family and teachers, especially Mr Forbes, her percussion teacher.

In those days, because of her deafness, it was difficult for Evelyn to be allowed to attend the local secondary school. Later on, in 1981, she had an even bigger struggle to get into the Royal Academy of Music in London, where she wanted to continue her studies in music. At first, the Royal Academy was unwilling even to interview her but she was finally accepted. She did better than anyone expected and completed her studies while still exceptionally young – before her 20th birthday.

In 1988 Evelyn won the *Young Musician of the Year* competition and since then her career has taken off. She has become an outstanding professional musician, winning countless prizes and awards, and has performed with many world-class musicians all over the globe. Evelyn appears on television frequently, presenting music programmes such as ‘Soundbites’. She has also written and performed music – not only for television, but also for film. She has even developed her own musical instrument – a new range of cymbals.

Some of Evelyn’s major achievements:

- gives around 110 concerts a year
- has recorded 18 albums
- has performed in over 40 countries
- has collected over 1800 instruments
- uses up to 60 instruments in a live performance
- was the first classical musician to have her own website.



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Evelyn Glennie – autobiography

Evelyn published her autobiography, *Good Vibrations*, in 1991. These are extracts, adapted from her book. Here, Evelyn describes how she first became inspired to take up percussion instruments and how she ‘hears’ music, even though she is deaf.

People often ask me why I decided to take up percussion. It’s difficult to say why exactly. I always knew that I wanted to be a musician, but my enthusiasm for percussion may have dated back to the time in my childhood when I went to a local competition and saw Isabel, a young girl, playing the xylophone. She was brilliant, just amazing, and I thought, ‘I didn’t realise a xylophone could do this.’ Once I went to secondary school I found there were many more percussion instruments to discover, which may be why I was so determined to try them.

I remember going through to the percussion room. It was tiny, with one window, and what I saw was a xylophone, a couple of hand-tuned timpani (often known as kettle drums), a drum kit, an upright piano, books and papers stacked in heaps, a great long cupboard for more papers, and bits of instruments everywhere; the room was so small and so crowded that I could hardly move. Mr Forbes, my teacher, told me to play some notes



xylophone

on the xylophone. You can usually tell when you test someone like this whether they have natural ability simply by the way they handle the sticks.

I’d never used sticks before but I picked them up and played with no stiffness or awkwardness.



timpani

I know how music sounds by what I feel. I can sense musical sound through my feet and lower body, and also through my hands. I can identify different notes according to which part of my foot feels the vibrations and for how long, and by how I experience the vibrations in my body.

Mr Forbes taught me how to develop my senses. He used to tell me to put my hands on the wall outside the music room and then he would play two notes on two drums and ask me, ‘Okay, which is the higher note?’ I’d tell him which I