

Hearing – Feeling – Playing

Music and Movement with Hard-of-Hearing and Deaf Children

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Zu [Inhaltsverzeichnis](#)

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Foreword

Dame Evelyn Glennie

Time and time again I am drawn and inspired by the belief of the highly influential American musical figure Harry Partch, that the individual's path "cannot be retraced, because each of us is an original being". One cannot help but observe the extraordinary challenging task to present a practical and in-depth text on the subject of this book *Hearing – Feeling – Playing* in relation to children with hearing loss.

What does "participation" actually mean when dealing with this fluid art form? Is "sound" music or is "music" sound? How does one attempt to listen to something before hearing it and vice versa? Should we be developing the philosophy of the Italian language by having the same verb for both "to hear" and "to feel"? Surely the art of listening and feeling goes beyond the sound or implied sound, but instead to hearing our own orchestra of internal chatter, our subtle "handing over" and sharing of ideas through physical means such as facial expressions, speed and intensity of movement, depth, texture and dynamic of movement. These are all basic musical ingredients that we *all* participate in whether we realise it or not. The misconception that the only music that exists is what the human ear perceives and if one does not fall into this category of hearing then you hop into another box called the "deaf" box – those who cannot hear the music "conventionally".

When one looks at a notated piece of music it can often make little or no sense to many but as soon as the printed page is transferred to instruments we can virtually immediately create an emotional response. There is no difference in being deaf or hearing – one will always appreciate the subtleties of sound because of the ability to feel things in greater depth to what the ear alone will allow us to hear. We have a choice: either to open our whole body to act as a resonating chamber, or not. Of course, the "orchestra" that each of us creates with our internal chatter, and how that affects how we relate to the external "orchestra" of the world, is much harder for a teacher or guide to control, and indeed to venture into the world of autism may be an intriguing and worthwhile subject of exploration in relation to the complexity of the human mind.

There is no question in my mind that to experience music only through the ears is like eating your food without any indication of what it tastes like. You are satisfied in that it fills you up and keeps you alive, you experience the texture and temperature of the food, but under no circumstances can you say you have truly "experienced" the food and how that relates to your body and mind. Therefore, the admirable task to put into words the ever fluid observations and experience from

all contributors to this book must be seen as an ever growing journey of exploration and curiosity.

Our speech is a form of music which overflows with inflection, phrasing, dynamics, rhythm, punctuation, tempo, expression and emotion. Sign language is an even more enhanced form of music because the imagination plays a greater role in the process of direct observation, focus, and extreme concentration; one does not allow external distractions to “visit” the experience but instead the whole body vibrates with infectious exaggerated expression taking the dynamic of “silence” into the heaviest, the loudest, and certainly the most expressive dynamic of all. Silence is the ultimate music but I imagine it is only its experience in death which can enable it to be seen as the pinnacle of life.

Music is our everyday language – there is no such thing as being “unmusical”. To play an instrument is but one small aspect, albeit an important one, of what music really is. Each moment of the day presents for us a kaleidoscope of tempo, rhythm, pitch, texture and dynamics which connects everyday living and every living soul. The cross-fertilization of blurring the “boxes” between one activity and another allows us to appreciate the similarities and differences with a much less dismayed and often frightening approach. Perhaps this is why I am keen to say that music is our daily medicine – it is completely accessible to each and every one of us and how we choose to relate to it is something that only we ourselves can control.

For me personally, I have to open up every fibre of my being to be a giver and receiver of sound. This is reiterated in my observations with children through my myriad of percussion instruments. How can I explain the overwhelming physical change of the little deaf boy who was placed lying under the bass end of my marimba? For him to go from a hyper-active state to extreme stillness was something that no one around him had ever seen him do. How could I or his dedicated teachers follow this up? Was it the sound of the marimba, the piece of music being played, was his stillness a display of excitement or was he frightened? His alert face and eager eyes and my gut reaction was an indication that music is something that does not have a place in the exam room, but most definitely has a place as a living, breathing art form whereby we all must open ourselves up to share and learn from each other.

This little boy helped me to “listen” to the journey of the sound – the preparation of the sound, the process of its execution, the giving of the sound, the life of the sound throughout the space, and the death of the sound – he helped me understand the difference between interpretation and translation and, most of all, he helped me to understand that I am the sound. He openly expressed himself in receiving the sound which is something that can be a challenge in a concert hall. He made me realise that no one has possession of the sounds because they are out there for us

all to breathe. He was living for the moment which I found extremely infectious because again one can sense a breathing art form that is truly shared and celebrated without any spoken word creating a barrier.

Music Therapy or Sound Therapy (as I prefer to call it) is a recent and exciting field of medicine in development. It comes at a particularly opportune time, in so much as that the mushrooming options for delivery of all music forms and its extreme portability via technological advances allows an inexpensive yet high quality delivery of audio to individuals. Peripatetic and outreach teachers can deliver what might otherwise be financially restricted in these current times of financial cut-backs in curricular music in our schools. However, I am still wary of the fact that reliance on manufactured sound, even if “live” musicians have participated in the recording, causes our listening skills to become one-dimensional. We totally lose the experience of “feeling” the music throughout the body. The reliance is solely on our ears and so we are reverting back to eating without tasting.

This invites the observation that the explosion of audio delivery methods via the internet and technological means has led to a change in all our listening skills. Until possibly the 1960s when the Rock 'n' Roll explosion occurred accompanied by the review of stagecraft and the production of those events, people were content to purely listen. Nowadays, as well as listening they desire all their senses to be stimulated, hence my belief in ridding ourselves of the stifling “boxes” and encourage cross-observation whereby all our senses gel into making the grand sixth sense. It is through the sixth sense that all boundaries, bridges and boxes come tumbling down and we can at last experience a never ending horizon.

Through this book, observations, debates and discoveries will reveal themselves. It gives me hope and satisfaction to know that the sharing of these observations and experiences can only help to make the world a better place for all of us.