



EVELYN GLENNIE | **GENERAL QUESTIONS**

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Evelyn Glennie

Another question? Email it in to pr@evelyn.co.uk

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Evelyn Glennie General Questions	2
General.....	3
What is your full name?	3
When did you start going deaf?	3
Do you wear hearing aids?	3
Career.....	4
Why did Evelyn perform as a soloist and compose music?	4
What is your favourite percussion instrument? How would you describe it's 'character'?	6
How do you know the sound you choose is appropriate for the piece that you are playing?	7
Pieces of what composers do you like to perform at solo performances?	7
What is your process for composition and where does your inspiration come from?	8
What do you feel is the reason for composing new music and why do you do it? ...	8
What would you say is the biggest challenge when composing or arranging a new piece?	9
What advice would you give to young musicians who are interested in composing/arranging, but may feel shy or intimidated by the task?	9
How does it feel to know you are inspiring people with your music?	10

General

What is your full name?

Evelyn Elizabeth Ann Glennie. Evelyn is pronounced Ev-elyn as opposed to Eve-lyn.

When did you start going deaf?

I started losing my hearing from the age of 8. I began to complain about sore ears when I was riding on my bike in strong winds. I went to the doctors and was given some ear drops to help. However, it gradually grew to the point where I avoided going outside to avoid the wind. It became crucial when I was 11 and was told I needed to be fitted with hearing aids immediately. I was advised to go to the Aberdeen School of Deaf but I was determined to remain at a mainstream school.

Do you wear hearing aids?

From the age of 11 I wore hearing aids and used a Phonic Ear in the classrooms. However, I discovered that turning up the volume on hearing aids made the quality of sound not better but worse. At first, I thought that the only way to hear better was for everything to be louder. Off course, this is not the case at all. When things become louder, they actually became distorted and uncomfortable which then affects one's balance and sense of touch.. Everything was much more painful and confusing to decipher. I learnt that by taking off the hearing aids I heard less through the ears but much more through my body. My body acted like a resonating chamber.

Do you have your own mallets?

Yes, I collaborate with ProMark

ProMark Dame Evelyn Glennie EG1 Mallet: [here](#)

ProMark Dame Evelyn Glennie EG3 Mallet: [here](#)

ProMark Dame Evelyn Glennie EG5 Mallet: [here](#)

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Career

Why did you take up percussion?

The following are extracts adapted from Evelyn's book *Good Vibrations* in 1991:

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 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.

How do you know what music sounds like?

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 thought it was, and he'd ask me, 'How do you know?' So I'd tell him I could feel it maybe in the upper part of my hand, while I felt the other note all the way down to my wrist. Or we'd discuss what was happening in my feet and legs as I played the drums, or listened to a piece of music. Similarly, I always knew when a door banged or the phone rang, and my ability to sense sound developed as I became more and more dependent upon it.

Can anyone listen like this?

Anyone can experience these effects, of course; if you put your hands on both sides of a piece of paper when a radio is on, you can feel the vibrations coming through the paper, and most young people have experienced the vibrations that pour through the lower limbs at the strong bass beats of a 'high-powered' disco

Why did Evelyn perform as a soloist and compose music?

When I reached the age of 15 years old my aim was to be a solo percussionist. I had not realised that the career of a full-time solo percussionist did not exist at the time. So, it was crucial for me to create repertoire by commissioning pieces from composers from all over the world. I am passionate about performing and love the challenges of using sound as a means of communication through performance. I also love to give totally improvised concerts and this has led to my curiosity towards composing. I have a collection of about two thousand percussion instruments so I have a large sound palate to draw upon when I am composing.

What is your favourite percussion instrument? How would you describe it's 'character'?

I have the same attitude with instruments as I have with music – whichever instrument I'm playing is my favourite. They all have different characters and that's what I love about being a multi-percussionist. Having lots of instruments at my disposal means I have lots of 'characters' to play with. I have deliberately played a wide variety of music over my career, which I count as an essential part of my musical development. That journey would have been much less interesting to me if I had limited myself to one or two instruments. My instruments are like children – they're all my favourites!

How do you know the sound you choose is appropriate for the piece that you are playing?

I always treat each piece I play as though it's the first time I'm playing it so I don't become hostage to the "right" or "correct" sound. A lot of what I do is instinctive. I play in the moment, which is always dependent on various things such as acoustics, quality of instruments and audience presence. What makes one thing seem "appropriate" to one person may generate a different response from another person. That will always be the case so it's important that I view what I do as a player as something truly living. I don't think it's possible to digest every single sound generated by me or by others – there's simply too much going on and too many overlaps. It's only in rehearsals with others on the actual stage that I can decide what's most important to feel, to hear and to see. However, I'm quite content to let that mysterious 6th sense (bringing all the senses together) do its magic without analysing too much of how things happen because I know the next time it will be very different.

Pieces of what composers do you like to perform at solo performances?

The repertoire I play by other composers is so new. We do not have hundreds of years' worth of repertoire to draw upon! Therefore, I give each piece a good chance to be experimented with through performances. My motto is whichever piece is in front of me is my favourite piece. It is up to me to bring something honest and heartfelt to each piece I play. That does not mean that the audience has to "like" each piece but that I bring emotion and sincerity to what I do. A genuine performance will always shine through, thus the music is respected and cared for. This helps me perform at my

best and allows me to really get inside it. I like music that pushes the boundaries but yet has an emotional impact on an audience. The public is much more open to musical adventures than some people would believe!

What is your process for composition and where does your inspiration come from?

It depends on which medium I am writing for. If it's film music then the inspiration comes from the actual film subject and material as well as what the director may wish. If I'm writing library music I have to think about creating something that has immediate usability, that can be used with the speaking voice over the top, ideas that can be fragmented or shortened and so on. If it's a composition for the concert platform then I usually grab at an idea as and when it may pop into my head. I don't go out of my way to "find" inspiration because it can just appear at any moment. The trick is to grasp it when it does come your way!

What do you feel is the reason for composing new music and why do you do it?

The main reason is that it's a natural extension to who I am and what I do as a performer. I love to improvise and give totally improvised concerts, so writing music is, I suppose, a frozen moment in time – deciding on an idea and writing it down. I enjoy the fact that other people can take that idea (piece of music) and make it their own. One never knows the ideas that will emerge so part of the curiosity when writing is not

knowing where the ideas will eventually go. Writing music means we can connect with the emotions of our audiences, we can reanalyze how we negotiate our instruments. Our day to day sound world is constantly changing; imagine the days when horse and cart was the main mode of transport on our streets to how we are today with vehicles of all descriptions on land, underground and in the air! Our daily 'orchestra of life' reflects what we compose.

What would you say is the biggest challenge when composing or arranging a new piece?

The piece must sound completely natural to the instrument you are writing for and it must have emotional content. I don't always want to write "nice" pieces but pieces that evoke many different emotions. Arrangements are making sure that the arrangement works better on your instrument than it did on the original instrument. For example, one piece by Vivaldi which I play was originally written for the Piccolo Recorder but I feel it works better on the vibraphone. Therefore, I feel as though Vivaldi wrote it for the vibraphone!

What advice would you give to young musicians who are interested in composing/arranging, but may feel shy or intimidated by the task?

Just do it! Start writing one phrase depicting an emotion of your choice (anger, love, loneliness, happiness etc.). Get used to having a manuscript book in front of you so that you write down any little ideas so that you don't forget them. Look at a TV advert with the sound down and imagine what you would write to go with that advert. Try it

even in a skeletal way – just basic ideas. Once you start with bite sized steps like this it then becomes “normal” to do it as part of your overall growth as a musician.

How does it feel to know you are inspiring people with your music?

It is very rewarding to know that one can make a difference to another’s life. There is always an opportunity for us all to make a difference each day and I am very happy to be able to do this through music.

If you have any more questions, take a look at the range of student booklets we have available divided into topic sections. Still can’t find what you’re looking for? Email pr@evelyn.co.uk with your questions.

Where to find Evelyn?



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