Transcript

Select language

English

I'm not quite sure whether I really want to see a snare drum at nine o'clock or so in the morning. But anyway, it's just great to see such a full theater, and really I must thank Herbie Hancock and his colleagues for such a great presentation. (Applause) One of the interesting things, of course, is the combination of that raw hand on the instrument and technology, and of course what he said about listening to our young people.

Of course, my job is all about listening, and my aim, really, is to teach the world to listen. That's my only real aim in life. And it sounds quite simple, but actually it's quite a big, big job. Because you know, when you look at a piece of music -- for example, if I just open my little motorbike bag -- we have here, hopefully, a piece of music that is full of little black dots on the page. And, you know, we open it up and I read the music. So technically, I can actually read this. I will follow the instructions, the tempo markings, the dynamics. I will do exactly as I'm told. And so therefore, because time is short, if I just play you literally the first maybe two lines or so. It's very straightforward. There's nothing too difficult about the piece. But here I'm being told that the piece of music is very quick. I'm being told where to play on the drum. I'm being told which part of the stick to use. And I'm being told the dynamic. And I'm also being told that the drum is without snares. Snares on, snares off. So therefore, if I translate this piece of music, we have this idea. (Music) And so on. My career would probably last about five years.

However, what I have to do as a musician is do everything that is not on the music. Everything that there isn't time to learn from a teacher, or to talk about, even, from a teacher. But it's the things that you notice when you're not actually with your instrument that in fact become so interesting, and that you want to explore through this tiny, tiny surface of a drum. So there, we experience the translation. Now we'll experience the interpretation. (Music) (Applause) Now my career may last a little longer!

But in a way, you know, it's the same if I look at you and I see a nice bright young lady with a pink top on. I see that you're clutching a teddy bear, etc., etc. So I get a basic idea as to what you might be about, what you might like, what you might do as a profession, etc., etc. However, that's just, you know, the initial idea I may have that we all get when we actually look, and we try to interpret, but actually it's so unbelievably shallow. In the same way, I look at the music; I get a basic idea; I wonder what technically might be hard, or, you know, what I want to do. Just the basic feeling.

However, that is simply not enough. And I think what Herbie said -- please listen, listen. We have to listen to ourselves, first of all. If I play, for example, holding the stick -- where literally I do not let go of the stick -- you'll experience quite a lot of shock coming up through the arm. And you feel really quite -- believe it or not -- detached from the instrument and from the stick, even though I'm actually holding the stick quite tightly. By holding it tightly, I feel strangely more detached. If I just simply let go and allow my hand, my arm, to be more of a support system, suddenly I have more dynamic with less effort. Much more. And I just feel, at last, one with the stick and one with the drum. And I'm doing far, far less.

So in the same way that I need time with this instrument, I need time with people in order to interpret them. Not just translate them, but interpret them. If, for example, I play just a few bars of a piece of music for which I think of myself as a technician -- that is, someone who is basically a percussion player ... (Music) And so on. If I think of myself as a musician ... (Music) And so on. There is a little bit of a difference there that is worth just -- (Applause) -- thinking about.

And I remember when I was 12 years old, and I started playing tympani and percussion, and my teacher said, "Well, how are we going to do this? You know, music is about listening." And I said, "Yes, I agree with that. So what's the problem?" And he said, "Well, how are you going to hear this? How are you going to hear that?" And I said, "Well, how do you hear it?" He said, "Well, I think I hear it through here." And I said, "Well, I think I do too -- but I also hear it through my hands, through my arms, cheekbones, my scalp, my tummy, my chest, my legs and so on."

And so we began our lessons every single time tuning drums -- in particular, the kettle drums, or tympani -- to such a narrow pitch interval, so something like ... that of a difference. Then gradually ... and gradually ... and it's amazing that when you do open your body up, and open your hand up to allow the vibration to come through, that in fact the tiny, tiny difference ... can be felt with just the tiniest part of your finger, there.

And so what we would do is that I would put my hands on the wall of the music room, and together we would "listen" to the sounds of the instruments, and really try to connect with those sounds far, far more broadly than simply depending on the ear. Because of course, the ear is, I mean, subject to all sorts of things. The room we happen to be in, the amplification, the quality of the instrument, the type of sticks ... etc., etc. They're all different. Same amount of weight, but different sound colors. And that's basically what we are. We're just human beings, but we all have our own little sound colors, as it were, that make up these extraordinary personalities and characters and interests and things.

And as I grew older, I then auditioned for the Royal Academy of Music in London, and they said, "Well, no, we won't accept you, because we haven't a clue, you know, of the future of a so-called 'deaf' musician." And I just couldn't quite accept that. And so therefore, I said to them, "Well, look, if you refuse -- if you refuse me through those reasons, as opposed to the ability to perform and to understand and love the art of creating sound -- then we have to think very, very hard about the people you do actually accept." And as a result -- once we got over a little hurdle, and having to audition twice -- they accepted me. And not only that -- what had happened was that it changed the whole role of the music institutions throughout the United Kingdom.

Under no circumstances were they to refuse any application whatsoever on the basis of whether someone had no arms, no legs -- they could still perhaps play a wind instrument if it was supported on a stand. No circumstances at all were used to refuse any entry. And every single entry had to be listened to, experienced and then based on the musical ability -- then that person could either enter or not. So therefore, this in turn meant that there was an extremely interesting bunch of students who arrived in these various music institutions. And I have to say, many of them now in the professional orchestras throughout the world. The interesting thing about this as well, though -- (Applause) -- is quite simply that not only were people connected with sound -- which is basically all of us, and we well know that music really is our daily medicine.

I say "music," but actually I mean "sound." Because you know, some of the extraordinary things I've experienced as a musician, when you may have a 15-year-old lad who has got the most incredible challenges, who may not be able to control his movements, who may be deaf, who may be blind, etc., etc. -- suddenly, if that young lad sits close to this instrument, and perhaps even lies underneath the marimba, and you play something that's so incredibly organ-like, almost -- I don't really have the right sticks, perhaps -- but something like this. Let me change. (Music) Something that's so unbelievably simple -- but he would be experiencing something that I wouldn't be, because I'm on top of the sound. I have the sound coming this way. He would have the sound coming through the resonators. If there were no resonators on here, we would have ... (Music) So he would have a fullness of sound that those of you in the front few rows wouldn't experience, those of you in the back few rows wouldn't experience either. Every single one of us, depending on where we're sitting, will experience this sound quite, quite differently. And of course, being the participator of the sound, and that is starting from the idea of what type of sound I want to produce -- for example, this sound.

Can you hear anything? Exactly. Because I'm not even touching it. But yet, we get the sensation of something happening. In the same way that when I see tree moves, then I imagine that tree making a rustling sound. Do you see what I mean? Whatever the eye sees, then there's always sound happening. So there's always, always that huge -- I mean, just this kaleidoscope of things to draw from.

So to find an actual hall is incredible -- for which you can play exactly what you imagine, without it being cosmetically enhanced. And so therefore, acousticians are actually in conversation with people who are hearing impaired, and who are participators of sound. And this is quite interesting. I cannot, you know, give you any detail as far as what is actually happening with those halls, but it's just the fact that they are going to a group of people for whom so many years we've been saying, "Well, how on Earth can they experience music? You know, they're deaf." We just -- we go like that, and we imagine that that's what deafness is about. Or we go like that, and we imagine that's what blindness is about. If we see someone in a wheelchair, we assume they cannot walk. It may be that they can walk three, four, five steps. That, to them, means they can walk. In a year's time, it could be two extra steps. In another year's time, three extra steps.

Those are hugely important aspects to think about. So when we do listen to each other, it's unbelievably important for us to really test our listening skills, to really use our bodies as a resonating chamber, to stop the judgment. For me, as a musician who deals with 99 percent of new music, it's very easy for me to say, "Oh yes, I like that piece. Oh no, I don't like that piece." And so on. And you know, I just find that I have to give those pieces of music real time. It may be that the chemistry isn't quite right between myself and that particular piece of music, but that doesn't mean have the right to say it's a bad piece of music. And you know, it's just one of the great things about being a musician, is that it is so unbelievably fluid. So there are no rules, no right, no wrong, this way, that way.

If I asked you to clap -- maybe I can do this. If I can just say, "Please clap and create the sound of thunder." I'm assuming we've all experienced thunder. Now, I don't mean just the sound; I mean really listen to that thunder within yourselves. And please try to create that through your clapping. Try. Just -- please try. (Applause)

Very good! Snow. Snow. Have you ever heard snow?

Audience: No.

Evelyn Glennie: Well then, stop clapping. (Laughter) Try again. Try again. Snow.

See, you're awake.

Rain. Not bad. Not bad.

You know, the interesting thing here, though, is that I asked a group of kids not so long ago exactly the same question. Now -- great imagination, thank you very much. However, not one of you got out of your seats to think, "Right! How can I clap? OK, maybe ... (Claps) Maybe I can use my jewelry to create extra sounds. Maybe I can use the other parts of my body to create extra sounds." Not a single one of you thought about clapping in a slightly different way other than sitting in your seats there and using two hands. In the same way that when we listen to music, we assume that it's all being fed through here. This is how we experience music. Of course it's not.

We experience thunder -- thunder, thunder. Think, think, think. Listen, listen, listen. Now -- what can we do with thunder? I remember my teacher. When I first started, my very first lesson, I was prepared with sticks, ready to go. And instead of him saying, "OK, Evelyn, please, feet slightly apart, arms at a more-or-less 90 degree angle, sticks in a more-or-less V shape, keep this amount space here, etc. Please keep your back straight, etc., etc., etc." -- where I was probably just going to end up absolutely rigid, frozen, and I would not be able to strike the drum, because I was thinking of so many other things -- he said, "Evelyn, take this drum away for seven days, and I'll see you next week."

So, heavens! What was I to do? I no longer required the sticks; I wasn't allowed to have these sticks. I had to basically look at this particular drum, see how it was made, what these little lugs did what the snares did. Turned it upside down, experimented with the shell, experimented with the head. Experimented with my body, experimented with jewelry, experimented with all sorts of things. And of course, I returned with all sorts of bruises and things like that -- but nevertheless, it was such an unbelievable experience, because then, where on Earth are you going to experience that in a piece of music? Where on Earth are you going to experience that in a study book? So we never, ever dealt with actual study books. So for example, one of the things that we learn when we are dealing with being a percussion player, as opposed to a musician, is basically straightforward single stroke rolls.

Like that. And then we get a little faster and a little faster and a little faster. And so on and so forth. What does this piece require? Single stroke rolls. So why can't I then do that whilst learning a piece of music? And that's exactly what he did. And interestingly, the older I became, and when I became a full-time student at a so called "music institution," all of that went out of the window. We had to study from study books. And constantly, the question, "Well, why? Why? What is this relating to? I need to play a piece of music." "Oh, well, this will help your control!" "Well, how? Why do I need to learn that? I need to relate it to a piece of music. You know. I need to say something.

"Why am I practicing paradiddles? Is it just literally for control, for hand-stick control? Why am I doing that? I need to have the reason, and the reason has to be by saying something through the music." And by saying something through music, which basically is sound, we then can reach all sorts of things to all sorts of people. But I don't want to take responsibility of your emotional baggage. That's up to you, when you walk through a hall. Because that then determines what and how we listen to certain things. I may feel sorrowful, or happy, or exhilarated, or angry when I play certain pieces of music, but I'm not necessarily wanting you to feel exactly the same thing. So please, the next time you go to a concert, just allow your body to open up, allow your body to be this resonating chamber. Be aware that you're not going to experience the same thing as the performer is.

The performer is in the worst possible position for the actual sound, because they're hearing the contact of the stick on the drum, or the mallet on the bit of wood, or the bow on the string, etc., the breath that's creating the sound from wind and brass. They're experiencing that rawness there. But yet they're experiencing something so unbelievably pure, which is before the sound is actually happening. Please take note of the life of the sound after the actual initial strike, or breath, is being pulled. Just experience the whole journey of that sound in the same way that I wished I'd experienced the whole journey of this particular conference, rather than just arriving last night. But I hope maybe we can share one or two things as the day progresses. But thank you very much for having me! (Applause)