

(Music activities for the Deaf)
by Hawke Robinson (2007)



“Touch the Sound” (“Listen” to music): Follow in the footsteps of deaf master percussionist Evelyn Glennie, learn to “listen” to music by “touching” the sound. This is a chance for deaf and hard of hearing to experience the wonder and joy of music.

“Be the Sound” (Play music): Walk in the historic footsteps of Beethoven, Evelyn Glennie, and other famous deaf musicians. Learn to play music, and “feel” it through your body.

“Groove to the Sound” (Deaf dance): Especially useful for those who have been through “Touch the Sound” but also for beginners, learn to “feel” the music through hand held balloons and bare feet, and enjoy dancing with others.

“Touch the Sound” (“Listen” to music for the Deaf): Follow in the footsteps of deaf master percussionist Evelyn Glennie, learn to “listen” to music by “touching” the sound. This is a chance for deaf and hard of hearing to experience the wonder and joy of music.

Appropriate Setting:

An indoor clean environment with minimal extraneous “vibrations” from outside the room, but that does not deaden vibrations inside, and also allows playing music (live instruments and recorded) at a loud level without disturbing those in the hearing community, for example a reasonably sound proof music room or theater. It is even better if there is a raised wooden floor, such as a stage or dance floor, for better transmission of music vibrations through the floor.

Goals:

Teach participants to “listen” to music by “touching” the sound. This is a chance for deaf and hard of hearing to experience the wonder and joy of music. Provide this instruction as a social activity (can also be performed one on one as well) to deaf and hard of hearing participants through a social recreational event to help reduce isolation and encourage interaction in a fun environment. The hope is to teach deaf and hard of hearing participants to feel the music vibrations with their body (hands, feet, etc.) in increasing levels of sensitivity to a point where they can enjoy “listening” to music through this alternate method of sound vibration reception (hands and feet instead of ears).

Population:

Deaf and hard of hearing. Any age groups, but primarily from 6 years old on up. Both male and female can equally participate.

Explanation of activity:

- Begin with two very large drums (or recording thereof) set at very wide intervals. Have

participants stand barefoot on resonating surface (i.e. wooden stage floor), and put hand on side of drum (or speaker) while playing the drums. Then ask them where they feel the vibrations on their body, and become more aware of the difference in vibration/feel between the two drums/intervals.

- Over time, make the intervals smaller increments, and/or add more drums or other instruments/recordings, to increase sensitivity awareness.
- As awareness increases, have participants remove hands from instrument/speakers, and instead provide air filled regular balloons to hold instead, and notice the vibrations on the balloon as the music is played.
- As an even more advanced step later on, have participants put hand on a wall instead of the balloon or instrument and notice just the vibrations there and through their feet, as well as any other parts of their body (nose, chest, etc.).
- Once sufficient awareness is illustrated by being able to tell which drum/instrument is played (while not being able to see the instrument), then “graduate” participant to the other two activities: “Be The Sound” (play music), and/or “Groove to the Sound” (Deaf dance).

Activity costs:

Costs can be very little to considerable depending on resources and/or donations/sponsors. The least expensive option would be to find a facility for free, and bring a “boom box” or stereo, or use the facility's sound system. Alternatively acquired drums (and/or other instruments of strong vibration) to borrow instead of using pre-recorded music. A minimum of two drums would be required, and they must be tuned to wide differences in tone.

Leadership necessary:

A single leader acts as an instructor, guiding the participants step by step through the process. The leader could potentially work with anywhere from 1 to a dozen participants quite easily. Beyond a dozen participants might become too difficult to provide help to individuals if needed, so an assistant who can also sign would be required. Any leadership personnel must be very proficient in signing in the locale appropriate sign language (ASL, SEE, etc.), for the group.

Equipment:

Required equipment:

- 2 Drums or else strong/loud music system with recorded drums
- Balloons

Optional additional equipment can include:

- Strong/loud music system with various recorded instruments
- Various loud instruments

Evaluation procedures:

Organizer keeps track of the number and ratio of deaf and hard of hearing, as well as the amount of time needed to be spent one on one in helping an individual participants, vs. being able to direct the group as a whole. Also can be noted how quickly individuals and the group are able to advance to each escalating level of vibrational touch awareness, in time, sessions, steps. Participants can fill out a form rating their experience on a scale of 1 to 5 in various areas.

Suggested sponsors:

WSODHH (Washington State Office of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing)

- Provide interpreters
- State-wide endorsement
- Advertising through their channels

EWU Music Department

- Provide stage
- Provide instruments

EWCDHH (Eastern Washington Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing)

- Provide facilities
- Local endorsement & advertising
- Provide prizes from their pool of donators