

PRZERWANA CISZA



SILENCE INTERRUPTED - THE HISTORY BEHIND THE SCRIPT

AUTHOR: PROF. HENRYK SKARZYŃSKI



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SUMMARY

The “Silence interrupted” is not an artistic slogan, motto or a catchy phrase. This is the meaning of my thirty years of research, clinical, didactic and organizational work. I had to face dozens of obstacles and adversities in each of these fields. Breaking the silence present in the lives of the deaf people was a great challenge for me.

There are many undertakings embodied in this conventional title. I refer to some of them at the same time summarizing my professional achievements, presented from the perspective of selected experiences and dilemmas of my own and thousands of my patients and their families - the people who trusted me. This way, I acknowledge them and appreciate their support.

The project titled “Silence Interrupted” is not only the text and music artistically blended to show the experience of people who were born



deaf or lost his hearing. It is the part of a great program that has been conducted under the title “Implant of hope” for 30 years. I had a dream, I wished that a person deaf since birth or who got deaf later would hear sounds, especially speech of another person. These people expected it, and I was convinced that such therapy is possible.

At first, I wanted the patient to hear simple sounds. I wished my patients would listen to and understand speech. I did not know that these patients would be able to develop not only speech or learn other languages, but also develop artistic skills, playing instruments, singing, and composing music. I was surprised by my patients and delighted.

The patients are the primary stimulus for me to take up challenges tailored to the needs of Poland, Europe and the world. I grew stronger

watching them and experiencing joyful and sometimes challenging moments in their lives. This experience helped me to find the courage to take up new challenges, including the artistic ones.

My first inspiration was the performance of one of my patients with a cochlear implant - Malgosia (a researcher and doctor of the Medical University of Lublin). During the opening of the Second International Conference "Selected Problems in the Treatment of Hearing Disorders" in 1994, she played several pieces by Fryderyk Chopin on piano. Before she got deaf, she attended a school of music, so she had basic music education. However, playing a piece by Fryderyk Chopin is not easy even for those who are trained in music and have good hearing. I understood that playing the piano helped Malgosia to undergo postoperative rehabilitation faster.

Malgosia's performance was an excellent motivation for me include music in the postoperative hearing rehabilitation, and if possible, applying various instruments in the process. In the following years, the music therapy program was not yet formalized, but we selected patients who developed musical skills. At that time I wrote one of the first pieces for the "Interrupted Silence" entitled "Ballad on hearing".

When I listened to Malgosia in 1994, I realized that humans have great power and that a single person may impact the whole society. The inspiration coming from her performance became almost my obsession. In my poem, I included the cheerful and beautiful the stories,

real human stories. Each year brings dozens of new "songs", hundreds of patients of all ages who have left the world of silence.

Every time, taking up new challenges or conducting pioneering surgery, I thought about the unique lives of the deaf overcoming the silence. The single poems, included in the current script of the "Silence interrupted" musical, were reflected in the performances of my patients, playing or reciting them in 2009 at the Teatr Wielki – Polish National Opera. They performed during the inauguration of the European scientific congress devoted to paediatric cochlear implantation. Again, the young patients showed their excellent artistic skills during the opening of the second part of the World Hearing Center (2012). The first artistically tailored project with patients from the world was the 1st International Music Festival "Beats of Cochlea". For the first time together with international artists, we were able to show the meaning and significance of the applied medical treatment, which results in returning to the world of sounds. We had the opportunity to observe the Polish and international patients-artists playing, singing and composing. My big dream came true. The further final concerts of the "Beats of Cochlea" festival took place respectively in concert hall studio of the Polish Radio (2015), at the Fryderyk Chopin University of Music (2016), in the World Hearing Center (2017), at the summer seat of Sinfonia Varsovia (2018) and the Palladium theatre. Every time the concerned was closed with the Institute's anthem "The World I Hear."

Selected poems from the script were presented during the gala of 25th anniversary of the initiation of a deafness treatment program in

Poland and 20th anniversary of the Institute of Physiology and Pathology of Hearing. The gala took place in the National Philharmonic in Warsaw in 2016. During the performance, poems-songs were musically arranged by an outstanding Polish composer who has been associated with the “Beats of Cochlea” Festival since the beginning – prof. Krzesimir Dębski. Together with Basia Kaczyńska, we have prepared the implanted patients who returned to the world of sounds to participate in this ceremony. These patients were accompanying us during subsequent speeches at scientific conferences in Poland and abroad, including the European Parliament in Brussels. The music abilities of our patients made us realize that music plays a vital role in human development. This resulted in the creation of a new clinical program - music therapy. As a result, we developed a new clinical program of rehabilitation – music therapy.

The second stimulus to work on the musical was the desire to commemorate our team’s most outstanding achievements in Polish science and medicine. We had such an opportunity and took advantage of it, showing the world the „Polish school of otology” and its contribution to the development of interpersonal communication and contemporary societies.

The third and the most critical impulse was a documentary film „My Moon Sonata” directed by Basia Kaczyńska. The film depicts the life story of one of the first finalists of the International Music Festival „Beats of Cochlea”, and my patient – Grzegorz. The film was granted a special prize at the NURT Documentary Festival in Kielce. For

Grzegorz, overcoming his disability meant not only a new life but also beginning of his career as a pianist and composer.

It was the signal for the medical world that next barriers in science had been broken down, and that the treatment of partial deafness started in 2002 became an opportunity to „avoid silence” by millions of people, especially seniors.

I got significant support for the undertaking from numerous conversations with an outstanding world-renowned tenor, academic teacher and a friend – prof. Ryszard Karczykowski. He much supported the idea to write the musical script, including the collection of my works in it. I remember our conversation in Krynica during the „Kieपुरa and what next?” Festival, organized under his supervision. What was most important in his support? Prof. Karczykowski knew many of my patients and their artistic potential as he was a member of the jury of the „Beats of Cochlea”, and a lecturer at music therapy conferences and music workshops taking place during the festival.

Today I am not able to remind myself all those meetings and talks, facts, incidents that contributed to the pages of the script of the musical „Broken Silence”. It is not a one-dimension event, because, in fact, it concerns the lives of about 8 000 patients treated for various profound hearing impairments.

As a doctor, I know how important hearing is for patients, especially musicians. When they lose it, they not only lose the desire to pursue

their passion but also they lose the essence of their existence. These considerations apply both to those who are born deaf and to those who lost their hearing. Overcoming the hearing loss is a great challenge for both groups. The progress and achievements of science and medicine show that almost everyone with hearing loss can be treated. I know, it is a pretty bold statement, but it is true. Breaking the silence and developing hearing, speech and language skills for many may be unbelievable.

Additionally, when it allows developing music passion and artistic skills, instrumental or vocal, it is inexplicable. In one of the songs for the musical, I wrote: "It's a miracle of skills and technology that pulled me out of silence – I hear." This is where medicine is closely related to the queen of arts - music. Everything that was included in the musical script, and previously appeared in over 3 000 publications, lectures, films and other reports, now constitutes the „Polish school of otology” and is an excellent contribution to science and world medicine. With the assistance of the heroes of my libretto and patients performing on stage, the „Polish school” will be brought closer to the public.



