

# Clive Wearing

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**Clive Wearing** (11 May 1938) is a British musicologist, conductor, tenor and keyboardist who suffers from chronic anterograde and retrograde amnesia. He lacks the ability to form new memories, and also cannot recall aspects of his past memories, frequently believing that he has only recently awoken from a coma.

## Musical career

Clive Wearing is an accomplished musician, and is known for editing the works of Orlande de Lassus. Wearing sang at Westminster Cathedral as a tenor lay clerk for many years and also had a successful career as a chorus master and worked as such at Covent Garden and with the London Sinfonietta Chorus.

In 1968 he founded the Europa Singers of London, an amateur choir specialising in music of the 17th, 18th, and 20th centuries. It won critical approval especially for performances of the Monteverdi Vespers. In 1977 it gave the first performance in the Russian Cathedral of Sir John Tavener's setting of the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom with Roderick Earle as bass soloist, and subsequently made a recording (Ikon Records No. 9007). The Europa Singers also competed in the XXXII Concorso Polifonico Internazionale in Arezzo in 1984, and provided choruses for operas staged by the London Opera Centre, including Lully's Alceste and Mozart's Marriage of Figaro, which was performed at Sadler's Wells.

Wearing also organised The London Lassus Ensemble, designing and staging the 1982 London Lassus Festival to commemorate the composer's 450th Anniversary.

Whilst working at the BBC, Wearing was made responsible for the musical content of Radio 3 for much of 29 July 1981, the day of the royal wedding of Prince Charles and Diana Spencer. For that occasion, he chose to recreate, with authentic instruments and meticulously researched scores, the Bavarian royal wedding which took place in Munich on 22 February 1568. The music by Lassus, Padovano, de'Bardi, Palestrina, Gabrieli, Tallis, etc., was performed by the Taverner Consort, Choir and Players, and the Natural Trumpet Ensemble of the Schola Cantorum Basiliensis, conducted by Andrew Parrott. This was arguably the high point of his career as a musical researcher.

## Amnesia

On 27 March 1985, Wearing, then an acknowledged expert in early music at the height of his career with BBC Radio 3, contracted Herpesviral encephalitis, a Herpes simplex virus that attacked his central nervous system.<sup>[1]</sup> Since this point, he has been unable to store new memories. He has also been unable to control emotions (stable mood) and to associate memories effectively.

Wearing developed a profound case of total amnesia as a result of his illness. Because of damage to the hippocampus, an area required to transfer memories from short-term to long-term memory, he is completely unable to form lasting new memories – his memory only lasts between 7 and 30 seconds.<sup>[2]</sup> He spends every day 'waking up' every 20 seconds, 'restarting' his consciousness once the time span of his short term memory elapses (about 30 seconds). During this time, he repeatedly questions why he has not seen a doctor, as he constantly believes he has only recently awoken from a comatose state. If engaged in discussion, Clive is able to provide answers to questions, but cannot stay in the flow of conversation for longer than a few sentences. If asked about his current situation, he becomes very angry and upset, as he cannot obtain an explanation for his condition and thus feels interrogated. He remembers little of his life before 1985; he knows, for example, that he has children from an earlier marriage, but cannot remember their names. His love for his second wife Deborah, whom he married the year prior to his illness, is undiminished. He greets her joyously every time they meet, either believing he has not seen her in years or that they have never met before, even though she may have just left the room to fetch a glass of water. When he goes out dining with his wife, he can remember the name of the food (e.g. chicken); however he cannot link it with taste, as he forgets what food he is eating by the time it has reached his mouth.<sup>[3]</sup>

Despite having retrograde as well as anterograde amnesia, and thus only a moment-to-moment consciousness, Wearing still recalls how to play the piano and conduct a choir – all this despite having no recollection of having received a musical education. This is because his procedural memory was not damaged by the virus. As soon as the music stops, however, Wearing forgets that he has just played and starts shaking spasmodically. These jerkings are physical signs of an inability to control his emotions, stemming from the damage to his inferior frontal lobe.<sup>[citation needed]</sup> His brain is still trying to send information in the form of action potentials to neurostructures that no longer exist. The resulting encephalic electrical disturbance leads to fits.

In a diary provided by his caretakers, Wearing was encouraged to record his thoughts. Page after page is filled with entries similar to the following:

9:34 AM: Now I am superlatively, actually awake.

Earlier entries are usually crossed out, since he forgets having made an entry within minutes and dismisses the writings—he does not know how the entries were made or by whom, although he does recognise his own writing.<sup>[4]</sup> Wishing to record "waking up for the first time", he still wrote diary entries in 2007, more than two decades after he started them.

Wearing can learn new practices and even a very few facts—not from episodic memory or encoding, but by acquiring new procedural memories through repetition. For example, having watched a certain video recording multiple times on successive days, he never had

any memory of ever seeing the video or knowing the contents, but he was able to anticipate certain parts of the content without remembering how he learned them.<sup>[5]</sup>

## Reports

Wearing's wife Deborah has written a book about her husband's case entitled *Forever Today*.<sup>[6]</sup>

His story was told in a 1986 documentary entitled *Equinox: Prisoner of Consciousness*, in which he was interviewed by Jonathan Miller. An updated story was told in the 2005 ITV documentary *The Man with the 7 Second Memory* (although Wearing's short term memory span can be up to 30 seconds).

He was also featured in the 1988 PBS series, *The Mind*, in Episode 1, *In Search of the Mind*.

He also appears in the 2006 documentary series *Time*, where his case is used to illustrate the effect of losing one's perception of time.

His story was also told in episode No. 304 – "Memory and Forgetting" on the show *Radio Lab* on New York Public Radio, WNYC. The show is available on-line at WNYC – Radio Lab and via podcast through iTunes.

He appears in Dr. Eric Kandel's holiday lectures on the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, which can be found here.

Oliver Sacks wrote about Wearing in a chapter in his 2007 book, *Musicophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain*, and an article in *The New Yorker* titled "The Abyss".

Sam Kean also discussed Wearing's life in the twelfth chapter of his 2014 book, *The Tale of the Dueling Neurosurgeons*.

Wearing's story was also featured on an episode of the TLC series *Medical Incredible*.