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A Faculty Music Concert

Students nicely dressed greeted patrons and held open the cavernous medieval doors at the entrance of the chapel. Four students, one male and one female on each side, were dressed in black, the men in tuxedos and black bow ties and the women in black knee length dresses and matching pumps. I took one of the programs and as I entered the chapel, I took a seat on the back row. As the crowd shuffled past and took seats on the oak pews, I noted that the majority of the patrons were students, signing roll sheets for extra credit, and I thought it sad that such a performance wasn't better attended by faculty, staff, and administrators. There were a few community supporters, all elderly, and I imagined free events like these were their life preservers, them clinging to their lives, and to their youth, through students. My own grandmother, taking what would be her last round of chemotherapy (the therapy part didn't seem to match the outcomes) had confided that her mind felt youthful, but her body was somehow incongruent with her mind. She felt like an imposter in her own skin. She'd said, "I look at my feet and don't think they're mine."

As the soprano came forward, she talked of lullabies, but with the lights down, I couldn't read the program. As the piano accompanist softly tapped the keys, the piano player hunched and raised his arms above the keys in dramatic gestures. The soprano's voice reverberated in the chapel, and I closed my eyes remembering lullabies I sang to my children to induce sleep when they were young and recalled the smell of baby powder, the overstuffed yellow rocking chair, and the music mobile playing the same lullaby that hung over the baby bed that seemed to soothe. As the soprano explained before she broke into the lullaby, the story behind the lullaby wasn't as pleasing; there was some indication the history of "The Little Horses" was sung by a slave to white children when she couldn't sing it to her own. I wonder how many songs and rhymes have origins or meanings beyond the surface that we never know or think about, and the first that entered my mind was: "Peter, Peter, pumpkin eater, had a wife and couldn't keep her; put her in a pumpkin shell, and there he kept her very well."

I watched the backs of the college students on the row in front of me, how they were attentive, how some of the males' hair styles were long and unkempt, and I imagined my own probably looked that way in college. I wondered if they enjoyed the faculty music concert, if they were paying attention, if they would ever attend another cultural event. Mostly, I fanned my face with the program. The chapel was hot and stuffy and I hoped no one passed out.

The crowd clapped, and a student brought a chair to the stage and a metal music stand, and once he exited, a saxophone player appeared next to a different piano accompanist, and music that nearly put me to sleep before now set me on edge. I assume the vibrations stirred up a wasp nest on an upper rafter of the triangular wood roof, and the wasps began to move from one side of inset lights in the arched ceiling to the other side. Occasionally, one of them would dip down to the crowd, and I imagined

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one of the students getting stung and yelling something obscene, stopping the performance cold in its tracks: "Holy shit, I've been stung!" I imagined the few community members calling the president to complain and the dean having to call them one by one to apologize.

The third and final performance was by a part time faculty member who played the Spanish guitar--Capricho Arabe by Francisco Tarrega and Jean-Baptiste Singelee's Fantaisie, Op. 50. While listening to the Spanish guitar is beautiful, I gazed at the triangular pattern in the green and yellow stained glass windows. I shifted from one cheek to another and tried to align my backbone with the pew to alleviate discomfort. I ate a mint and I thought about my day and the next day, and at the end of the Singelee piece, I realized I hadn't heard much at all; still, I clapped with the crowd and wondered if I would follow the crowd in a crime by doing nothing, not paying attention. I figured I might.

As I left the building, buttoning my coat from the freezing cold and wind, I thought about how nice it was for others to see a college employee at the event, but I also thought about how many hours, days, weeks, months pass by when I'm not present, when I'm in the past or the future, trying to grapple with life and all its complexity. I should stop and enjoy the moments because they don't return. I want to look at my feet and know them.