

2022-07-17 Fugue in G minor

Lisa never knew his name, only that he was learning Bach's Organ Fugue in G minor (BWV 578). She couldn't help hearing what everyone was practicing, with how thin their old church walls were. When someone really got going with that finale, you'd think the local seismometers would be in on the concert too, with how it sets your bones shaking.

But Lisa didn't remember what anyone else was playing, only that fugue, and the lanky, scrunched-up energy that poured out into it from his lanky, stretched-out frame. Even that description was mostly imagination, since she'd only seen him playing twice. The rest, just felt through the walls rattling off their dust in the face of his performance.

She was rattled too. Not by his playing, but somehow by his being. There wasn't any reason behind that tremor just below her diaphragm. No flow of melody-on-melody that made those fugues so clean and understandable.

She simply felt. No pattern emerged, no matter how she pored over the score of her life, the accents, the striking chords, the rests with their small breaths between onslaughts of tone. The small moments and the dragged-out runs of notes were all in place except, somehow, that fugue would wash away every other note, and Lisa fell completely into its minor, yet triumphant, flow. A happy-dizzy sort of melancholy, so full of promise of a joyful ending that could never come.

Here was something amazing, and somehow no one else knew.

She marked the time by when he'd practice, careful not to appear too careful. This unrequited, uncommunicated, whatever-it-was sufficed. To do more than listen furtively, to know that each Wednesday at 2pm, he'd be running through a particularly tricky passage, and she could listen all to herself, through the poorly-patched floorboards of the choir dressing room, while she ostensibly reviewed her own practice list.

One day, when the fugue finally resonated out complete, clear and smooth, Lisa was at peace. She knew the practice was over, the piece mastered. And once mastered, that it wouldn't sound again. She smiled.