

My Memoir Project

Back in 2019 (when we were still allowed to go outside, which seemed like ages ago), I would always visit this school called the Curtis Institute of Music to have piano lessons with one of the teachers there. It's one of the prestigious schools for musicians, only the best can get in. I mean, I have a piano teacher there, but that doesn't mean I'm "in". Nevertheless, though, I still feel like I'm a part of the community here, even though I'm not actually "in" the school. I have this piano teacher named Elena Jivaeva. She was one of the real faculty on sight, and every week we would have our lessons in one of the rooms at Curtis. Whenever we were finished (which consists of 1-2 hours), I would hang around in Curtis, always dreaming that I was an accepted student. The funny thing was, simply by looking at the students that ACTUALLY got the keys getting into Curtis, simply looking at them swiping their official cards at the door to get in, that would just put me in a bad mood the rest of the week. It's weird but true. Almost every weekend I would attend their recitals. I would always sit in a very specific spot to see the hands, too, that skilled musician's hands. Of course, I want to go there, but I still have to remember, it's pretty hard to get in. I became friends with many of the musicians that attended that school and I may even be friends with the security guard! Visiting that school was a very cool experience and it really made me feel like I belonged, even though seeing other students who attended that school was a little tough for me. There was one time when I got there, and after I finished a lesson, I hung around like I usually did. Also, did I mention I would almost every time *play* on the school's instruments? Almost all of their instruments are Steinways either Model B or D (which is either the best, newest, or the biggest pianos), and they're always so amazing to be played on. The keys are so light and tender. Anyway, I hung around, and at some point, I had this really dumb and weird idea to just go play the piano in a practice room next to a lot of people. I honestly don't know why, maybe I was thinking that I could blend in more and they think I'm a part of them? This is just like how Trevor Noah used his skills of languages to blend in with everyone. I kinda use music too. If people played Chopin next door, I played Chopin. If students play jazz, I'll pull out my Rhapsody in Blue. I always try to *sound* like them, but in the end, they go in their own friend group, and I'm still only an outsider. Anyway, I looked at different practice rooms, and right when I was about to enter one, this *opera singer* went in about the same time. He saw me and actually let me use the practice room (considering it has a piano in it). I hesitated, but he insisted. I don't know what he was thinking at the time. Maybe he thought I really was a part of Curtis? Or maybe he's just being nice (I'm pretty sure it's the second one). Anyway, I practiced for a whole hour, and when I was done I didn't see him anywhere anymore. That was just one of the nice gestures that students there had done to me. Many other stories have an end, but this doesn't really. I mean, with COVID, Curtis closed down but I still talked to many friends there. To be honest, I hope this story will never end. I will still be friends with many of

them over the years, and maybe actually getting into Curtis. Then, I could raise my head high and say to people:” I *belong* here”. Thank you.

Artist Statement:

I chose to write my memoir on the community in Curtis because I think it really relates to me the most. It just has this sense of community, and I use my music skills to try to blend in like how Noah did at his school. And also like Noah, at the end of the day, with the REAL students there walking in groups to go get a coffee, I am alone, and that’s where reality hit me that I’m not a student there yet. Nevertheless, Curtis’ community really gave me a lot, including knowledge and sometimes even friendship. On the outside, it may look like a world-class famous conservatory, but really, the students there despite being professional musicians are just human. We talked a lot there, and some students even gave me suggestions for my practicing. It’s just a really wonderful, close-knit thing that I’d really want to be a part of. Right now I guess I can say I’m an “outsider” to them, but maybe someday, I can really be officially a part of their community. For now, I’ll just enjoy the perks of being with them and being part of the “unofficial” community of music lovers there, just like how Noah enjoyed the perks of being with everybody.