

Thunder

Located in Sidney, Maine, also known as the middle of nowhere, is a music camp. It sits in the midst of a forest located next to a large lake. Perhaps thirty, forty feet away from the lake is the Bowl, an amphitheatre that functions as an outdoor concert hall. The stage is round, as if a literal bowl had been taken and cut in half. When an orchestra plays in it, the conductor stands at the lowest point - the front center, while the musicians sit on incrementally higher terraces that radiate out from him. Three huge, white, rectangular sheets in front of the orchestra span the height of the building, designed to block out the sun, rain, and the occasional birds that are desperately in need of a sense of direction (or at least an eye check). From the audience's perspective, this setup is vaguely reminiscent of a 15th-century ship; its body formed by the curved brown wood of the stage, with three white sails above it flapping in the wind.

It was here that my orchestra learned Tchaikovsky's "Romeo and Juliet" overture. It is a hot, fiery, and violent piece, which was precisely why we, a group of middle- and high-schoolers, enjoyed it so much. Each day of camp, we rehearsed late into the night, playing the repertoire, learning our music, and struggling to fit all of our different parts together. During one of these rehearsals, a shower of rain began to fall upon us as we started running through the piece.

"Romeo and Juliet" begins with a foreboding, melancholy chorale. The sound of our wind instruments was accentuated by the sound of the wind outside, and the unlit 9PM darkness reflected the dark tone of the low strings. The symphonic overture slowly

builds into something more tense and dangerous, underlit by the nervous, tremulous excitement of musicians who know they are about to run through a piece with no stops, no rests, and no second chances. We may not have had an audience, but we all felt the same pressure to give our all, as if our peers, our conductor, and the forest itself were our judges that night.

I had prided myself on being a violinist, a soloist, one to carry the high, piercing notes and the melody of the piece. However, once the brass entered, with all the glory and majesty of the ocean, every ounce of that arrogance faded away. I was swept up in the wave of their sound, weightlessly riding on top of the swell like spray and sea foam, a mere drop adding its mass to the orchestra that it served. It owned me.

By then, the rain had grown and ripened into a storm. It whipped water at the exposed necks of trees and aged wood exterior of the Bowl. It flung itself at the three white sails of the stage that was our ship, causing them to shudder and convulse. Meanwhile, the Montagues and Capulets of Tchaikovsky's imagination were fighting a war. The irregular, jarring crash of cymbals depicted the clashing swords of the two families, while the strings played the war theme, leading into quick, agitated notes that chased each other through the streets of Verona. Intermittent flashes of lightning were likewise chased by explosions of thunder that were oddly on-beat, deafeningly close, and shook our instruments and our bodies to the very bone. We persevered in the heart of this fury, fifty or so children caught in the midst of the storm, and yet so much a part of it. We were raising up our own storm, Tchaikovsky's storm. Fifty bodies moved, breathed, and metabolized energy in unison. I was filled with a new, almost savage sense of pride,

not one of being anything outstanding or anyone special, but one where I let myself be swept away, carried by the rich tones of the tuba and celli, giving all of me up to become part of that power, to push that wave just a little further. For although I was small, even the tiniest droplet of water has the right to feel proud when it is part of a storm.

Metacognition:

I've had the idea for this essay floating around in my head for quite some time, and was pretty happy with getting a chance to use it as a topic. Expressing the sensation that I felt in orchestra that day, and many times afterwards, has been something I have always wanted to do, but never had enough confidence in my writing ability to attempt. I'm quite proud of what I created in this essay, but I believe that the written word can never do justice to that particular experience.

The hardest part of writing this was fitting in the part where it starts raining. I wanted to do this early in the essay, as the concept is heavily referred to throughout the piece. Initially, I had a single sentence that directly stated that "it was raining" right before the description of the orchestra beginning to play. However, this seemed a bit disjointed and awkward, as it wasn't directly related to the sections around it. Later I wrapped this idea in a bit more context (such as putting it with the statement that the orchestra started playing) to create more flow in my essay. I'm not fully satisfied with it, but it's definitely an improvement.