

'The Silence at the End of The Storm Clouds Cantata'

by Chris Brake

Synopsis

A musician attends a memorial concert held for the orchestra's late cymbalist.

Age Range

18+

Gender

Neutral

Length

3-4 minutes

THE MUSICIAN:

Took an aisle seat on the stage-right side of row P last night.

Crept in just before curtains up, hoping to enter incognito.

But the classical music mob are a savvy bunch, so it took only seconds for Natty Allsopp's posse to clock me skulking in.

Didn't mouth a single word of hello though.

Persona non grata me, but rightly so.

Just sniffed to register their collective distaste and turned their backs en masse.

Then again, after all that's occurred it's a blessing their pitchforks weren't out.

My seat was suitably shit for the evening.

Cushion stained from a previous spill, and the floor underneath stuck fast to my pumps.

But I didn't relish drawing attention, so I sat very still, kept my feet on the floor, and popped in a Werther's flecked with lint to see me through the night.

The orchestra struck up at bang on half seven.

It was billed as an evening of eclectic selections in memory of Colton Jones.

Colton being the former cymbalist, and a much-loved amigo at that.

In truth, the selections were predictable fare, but we'd gathered to mourn, not offer critique, so I sheathed my tongue, settled in and shrunk down in my seat.

Most of it hailed from the Sondheim playbook, though peppered throughout with the odd Shostakovich, just to maintain that Soviet mood.

But the evening ended with one of my favourites, and evidently one of Colton's as well; Arthur Benjamin's 'Storm Clouds Cantata'.

It's the one from 'The Man Who Knew Too Much', the Hitchcock film, at the end.

That bit where Doris Day puts Fay Wray to shame with a scream that could blow the head off a Guinness.

You can see why Colton would simply adore it, what with the cymbals having their moment in the Sun.

Especially when it comes to that climax.

God, that big, bold crash that brings it to a close.

Glorious.

Usually.

They'd left an empty chair in his place; upstage, centre, where he would sit.

Empty, that is, save for his cymbals, which they set out in place of himself.

The moment they started playing that piece, we knew that it couldn't end as it should.

That Colton's cymbals wouldn't rise.

So when the crescendo finally came, the orchestra just downed their tools rather than play it through.

Stopped the music dead in its tracks.

Half-spoken like an unformed thought.

Then silence.

Just silence.

You could have heard an atom split, and no-one dared to breathe.

I heard the crash though.

I could hear it.

I've heard it every day since.

And I hear that godawful thud.

I can still see his body hitting the windshield, as it rolled off the bonnet and over the roof.

And I knew it was him as soon as I done it.

I'd offered him a ride home after rehearsal.

Silly beggar said he wanted fresh air.

But that country road's a fucker, you know?

Always dead foxes laid up on its banks, and now a cymbalist had joined their ilk.

Roadkill.

My very best friend.

There was no absent seat left on stage for me.

My section was silent, but drowned out with noise.

But Colton's silence...

That's loud.

God, it's so fucking loud.

And all I can hear is that crash.