Let me teach you the spirit of music.

As it was Said in the book, as is said in every story, in th beginning, there was nothing.

Music is the child of silence. From when it comes, to where it returns. The silence is abiding and eternal.

Music begins in silence, then: contact. The Beat. A force meets a surface, makes contact, and fron the contact, vibrations, movement, energy unfolds, and it pulses out until it returns to zip and silence.

Boom. The waves rush out, and come to a rest. Boom. it always returns to silence. This is not all, this is only the beginning.

Boom...Boom… More than the sound shaped by silence, silence is home, it is a canvas.

Boom, boom, boom… Ba-boom boom, ba booooommmmmmm. Infinite possibility stretches before us. The essential craft. JOy on every level: joy in the realization of life as a pattern of abundance, rested on a foundation of equally endless peace. The ending of a musical story is only a returning, to a silence, that is there no matter tha activity we put upon it. THere’s nothing wrong with sitting in the eternal silence, forever, nothing wrong with creating an endless cacophony of noise--do you think you could really dare to conquer your mother silence? Of all endless impossibilities, the only true impossibility is the endlessness of silence.

There is no wrong. There is only bliss and freedom, to make and play upon the silence, to return to it and abide by it, and at any time, let spirit carry on and make everything out of silence. Through music, we understand the essential Bliss. Through Music, and the silence the bears it with endless love. For ever and ever with glory, Amen.

5/8/21

This is a story about what music means to me.

You often hear it said in many stories that in The Beginning there was Nothing. Then it’s god speaking on the surface of the waters, or the sound of Om. In any case, Silence. Then, contact.

Boom. Whatever the two things are, they touch, and then the waves ripple out into nothing, and eventually, it returns to zero. Boooooommmmm. Nothing. Boom. Nothing.

So the Silence remains, and everything returns back to it, back to the potential of a blank canvass. Boom.

Then Boom.

Boom.

Boom. Boom.

Boom, Boom, Boom, Boom.

Boom, baboom, bumboomaboomboom boo--

And Whatever it is, Spirit, we’ll call it, plays, and plays against a foundation, creates shapes and rhythms and inventions, discovers its potentials with each new idea based on the ones that came before. And of course Spirit could cease the playing on Silence, dwell in timeless silence. But it plays, and plays, and fills an infinite space with presence, presence, presence, and there is no limit to it.

Spirit plays so much, it ends up creating something like New York City, July 4th, 2016, and me in a hospital with my father receiving a cancer diagnosis, but he’s hard at hearing, and the doctor is mumbling and distracted, and there’s a family arguing behind a curtain next to us, and they have the window, so it’s dark on our side, because the fluorescents are ugly and harsh, and I’ve forgotten Silence.

More than forgotten, I’ve banished it. Because I don’t have time for it? No, that’s crap, I know why, but I won’t deal with it now, I have to raise my voice and tell my father, “It’s stage four Gallbladder Cancer.”

And he says, “It’s late for all ladder’s chances?”

How does that even make sense to him? NO doubt why he’s asking if that’s what I said. So I repeat, “cancer, *cancer!*” And it’s louder than it needed to be, but I feel like I’m fighting for space, for air in a world that is clouded in static, like a smoke that fills the room and kills you, so I feel entitled.

“Oh,” he says, and gets sheepish and small. He’s a small man by nature, literally five foot four, but made up for it with a massive magnanimity cultivated over a life well-lived, someone beloved by his students, his peers, all the communities he cultivated that surrounded my youth in a rich tapestry of connections and family. Seeing him out of his element, seeing anything out of the place it’s supposed to be, is heartbreaking. He processes his news, delivered cruelly by me, privately within himself, because he doesn’t know how to let others support him, and without my mom here, who was probably the only one who he felt he could be vulnerable with-- he can’t let his son know he has as little idea how to deal with this new reality as his son does.

But his son, that is me, *does* have an idea how to deal with this, in some way: we already went through it with mom, five years ago. Of course, it’s also far different this time.

The doctor wears the upturned triangle eyebrows wrinkling his forehead and the soft frown. He’s saying the immediate concern is to perform a surgery to place a stent in his digestive tract, so that he can keep digesting again, since his inability to digest food and the resulting jaundice was what sent him to the hospital in the first place. After, pancreatitis caused by the surgery is common, so he will need time to recover from that, with a regimen of antibiotics, but once that more easily treatable symptom is dealt with, then it will be time to discuss options, treatments, the capacities of his insurance, referrals, and so on.

Doctors give good news when they can, without promising things they can’t. This doctor offers no upside, and he speaks about moving forward like a formality, not a game with stakes and chances. Fuck him. A year later, I’ll know the doctor fulfilled his own unspoken prophecy by placing a plastic and temporary stent that was forgotten about in the rush of us fighting for his life. A year later, 8 months past that stent’s expiration, they will realize something is wrong, and it’s back into the hospital for another stent surgery, another round of pancreatitis, but this time with the cancer more advanced, and his legs filling with fluid--I don’t need to go there now, not ever, it’s not what really matters.

But our minds carry us away, don’t they? Over and over and over again, while life is happening all around you, within you, right in front of you, and the thoughts are the loudest over all of them, pulling you God knows where.

Maybe that’s my favorite part of being a musician, is the hypnosis, the absorption. You don’t need to be a musician, either, anyone who loves music knows what it’s like to listen to every detail and movement of a song, and you don’t even realize your thoughts are gone, you don’t realize you’re in Nirvana (the buddhist thing, not the band) because your Self is quiet when it’s really listening to a song, letting its vibrations move through you, to make you move, to take on an attitude, to live.

The Doctor leaves, and without that necessary distraction, you hear the wheezing breath machine behind the curtain, the beeps, and they are tired sounds, sounds as tired as the hospital workers numb by necessity to their noble occupation of easing suffering.

This should be a bigger moment than it is, receiving this news. It should be snapping to the present, a pounding in the chest, emotions running hot, fiery resolve to *beat this*. But it’s not. My uncle, dad’s younger brother, is here too, and he says he’s going to call Sloan Kettering and the school to inform them, because this is what he’s good at. And his other good friend, Mike is there, but he’s an old-fashioned guy who’s clamped up emotionally, and there’s no nurturing female presences here to help us, so I’m the next available candidate to do what’s called for in this moment, and hold my dad’s hand, and just ask him how he’s feeling.

And he’s still reeling obviously, but he’s making his little jokes about how it explains a lot of the throwing up and yellow face, and he’s so sweet and kind and always not wanting to be a burden on anyone and he’s such an old school guy that in his own psyche, I know he needs to be strong for his son, which means I can only help him by playing that role.

With my mother, I learned the easiest way to shut down my emotions was to pretend to be Zen, and act like I had fully accepted the facts of the situation--Her dying taught me this, not her living. Her living was composed of a powerful demand from herself most of all, and everyone else in her life, to be true to feelings, and communicate, communicate! Which is why I knew what sex was when I was 4, and the terrible history fo the N word when I was 5, and to watch out for rainbow parties where girls wore lipstick to give blowjobs (this, in anticipation of 7th grade.)

But to her dying, shock didn’t allow me to say how I felt, because I felt nothing for a long time, and often still do.

So there in the room, with the static of machines, and two unhappy families, and people keeping busy to themselves, and a whole city outside, all the noise. Think of the city and the noise it makes with it’s very presence. Even if there were no people in it, no electricity running, by extents dead, it’s physical presence still has a sound, every window and every building carves the air like a colossal ocarina. But then add all the other mayhem, and within the skulls of ten million people (on average) add to that the fuzz of them plugged into phones, shielded by airpods, and like a russian nest egg, still louder than all that around them, the thoughts.

I got up and left his room and walked around seeking quiet, because I thought I needed to hear myself think. I *thought* I needed to hear myself *think*, the tricky, self-serving bastards, those thoughts.

And where is my head? Lost in a tune. A melody I know deep within the treerings of my memory, closer to my center, probably by another ten to fifteen years. Back when I was taking piano lessons, and I wanted to learn it, and only got through the first iconic phase of it. Probably even earlier than that, so deep it’s buried in there, and like so many things, like most of our lives, it’s not remembered in the here and now,a nd it might as well have not happened. But then, out of nowhere, from some dark corner in me, there’s that melody, and I don’t know the name for it, but it has many names for me: being a child laying in bed. Night, darkness. It has the name of the special solitude that comes form laying in bed, waiting for sleep, at the edge of this world, and closer to yourself than you get to be during the day time, when there was school and family and friends and all the other moments of a childhood most of which feels like it’s gone, yet if my parents hadn’t done their job well--even if they had--each one of those forgotten moments lead me to here, I’d be dead otherwise.

Since Mom died, the only direction was forward, away, from that moment. Life before her passing fell behind a curtain. Again, it partially happened, and the rest I wanted it to. It felt powerful to agree with fate, allowed me to feel like I was somehow above feeling like someone in the middle of drowning. But then the things pop up.

And in this moment, wandering the hospital award, towards the elevator, not knowing where I was going, this melody from behind the veil has me ensnared, and I need to find it again, it needs me to find it. THe imperative is subconscious and unquestionable. My sanity is tied to rediscovering this melody.

I’m in a memory whether I like it or not. This one is of when Mom was here, getting her surgery, and we all waited in the area for families. It had a few amusements, and smart phones weren’t that smart enough to keep me totally numb yet, but maybe even then, I just knew I had ot get it out some other way. There’s a piano in a waiting room in this place.

It’s long ago enough that I don’t remember if this is actually the same building she was in, or another, or what floor, or anything, and I’m too locked up inside myself to feel like I can reach out and ask for help. I *must* wander my way where I need to go for some reason.

I have no place to go but to the past right now. I can’t go to the future, not now, because I know what’s there. Funny, usually the past is the safe place you stay in, and hte future holds the unknown mystery, but in my case right now, it’s reversed: based on the information i just received, my future is just a petition of my past, a thing I’ve already been through and know the terrain of. So the only place I can go, whether I like it or not, is behind the curtain I drew, where the melody is calling from the other side.

Getting out of hte elevator, there’s a wave of familiarity, a dreaded greeting of a place that feels too welcome to me. I know if I turn left, there the family room will be down the way, and if I go the other way, I’ll see the room where she died and I ran away.

I was a child. A child old enough to come and go as they pleased, so that when everyone told me these were the final hours, I kissed her goodbye and left, because she looked gone already. I hurt my family by being unable to stay with them through the end. I was a child. So I go left, to the room, and there’s just a man and a child, both on phones, and there’s the piano. I’m terrified to disturb them, because I know, they don’t need more noise, more than anyone else does, but I need this. So I sit down at the piano and I hear it in my head, and I take a few minutes to pluck it out. It feels horrible, when you’re trying ot not make a sound, and the more slowly you do the thing the louder it makes it, and here I am disturbing these two people who are having as bad a time as me with my childish plucking, and I cna’t evne play something pleasant for them, but they say nothing, and I proceed practicing it a few times, it’s f sharp and A, once more in the higher octave, then a D and F sharp in that same higher octave, then G and B. Then the man looks over at me and says, “I love that song.”

And I ask, “What’s it called?”

And he says, “Don’t know, but I love it, I’ve heard it all my life.”

And I apologise because that’s all I cna play of it, and he smiles and looks back at his phone, and Thank God for all of what just happened. I don’t need to play it anymore, or maybe I do, but I refuse to be that person playing the same part of a song over and over. At least with those notes I figured out, which i’m able to play just once more through, the memories and the feelings come back all at once. And the melody feels like my mom. The song feels like mother, like home.

I have to go now. I walk to the room, 620, and look it to find it empty, as if it’s been hallowed ground since she died in here. It’s been waiting for me to come back to it, to do what? To talk to her? I walk in, and for some reason, there’s no sound in this room. Nothing from the city behind the window, for some reason the sounds from the hall don’t carry in here either, even with the door open. So I sit at in the chair next to the bed where her body was, and it’s like I can still see her there, fel or imagine a presence laying on that bed, even if it’s invisible.

And, I know this is the time to talk to her. I talk to her because I never have before. Because I thought it was stupid and there was nothign to talk to, and I’m telling her this, out loud, to the room.

I’m telling her, “I don’t believe you’re here. I don’t believe there’s anything left of you, but I feel right now like I need to talk to you anyway. I need to tell you how much I miss you, and that it’s fucked up that I feel like I miss someone who was never real. You feel more and more like a dream to me every passing day, farther and farther away. Keeping your memory alive feels meaningless, trivial, a stupid and petty compromise because nothign takes away from the fact that you’re not here. And yet, I still relate to you. I relate to your absence, the presence of your absence. If I ignore you, that relationship still exists, a relationship of me ignoring something that isn’t there. It’s impossible not to relate to. But relating to an absence feels just as stupid, so I either ignore it and pretend it’s not there, or I pretend it’s there, this relationship with nothing. And Dad’s about to join you, and become nothing.

Then he’ll slip away, and you’ll both slip further and further away, and it’ll feel like you never existed, and Instead of having flesh and blood parents, I’ll have an absence as my foster parents. Emptiness will cheer on my successes in life, absence will console me through break ups, absence will smoke cigars with me when I’m married, or when I have my first child, absence will scold me on my poor life choices.

And I’ve exhausted the wound that is me, and squeezed out what makes sense, even as random little thoughts wander their way out of the nothing that thoughts come from. My words sink into the Silence of the room.

And then, how can I tell you? That in that Silence, the Silence which was you, Mom and Dad, I felt you. I felt the Silence at the core of every person, the cup, the receiver, the well, the negative space that abides and receives all. I felt you, and no one else will ever understand that, but I’m trying to, here.

Then I remember the song was called Clair De Lune by Claude Debussy, and Debussy is famous for saying that music is the space between notes.

And I want to tell you that Silence is all of our mother. Silence is eternal, indestructible, outside of time and the very fabric with which time itself is woven. That my parents, who I still ache for with every breath I draw, they are that Silence, and even when they bod bodies to love me with, even then it was Silence that gave birth to me and raised me and took me to football practice and dance and music lessons and cancelled our snowboarding trip when I skipped school. So when I miss you, Mom and Dad, the best way to hear you is listen to Silence and remember.

I’ll go back to the room, and the next year will play out until dad dies, though I stick around for hte end this time. And my life moves on, and yes, I move further na further away from you both, and yet, when I remember Silence, I remember also that I come closer to you, the more deeply I listen. And I’ll forget the silence again and get caught up in the cacophony of this city and this mad planet I love with my own fierce madness. But then I’ll remember, not out of my own device, but because Silence finds us when we need it, always.

5/9/21 -- This is a very concise form of the story, and it felt good to just write about it, even if I could feel myself posturing a bit to be wordyin a good way, but it did also feel natural to express myself in a way like that. But there are definitely a few things I want to execute more concretely. I think I was hammering the main point a little too much on the head and didn’t create enough of a musical journey. I think the basic premise of me myself writing as someone finding out his dad has cancer, endingup in the room mom died, praying and talking, I think that basic idea is good. But I’m missing the musicality, the fugue state, a dash of the fantasy and the stile, and the cohesion. This most certainly is a ramble, and not the kind of ramble that takes its time getting there. There are things form the first story I like even more, a lot to do with the sense of structuring and pacing, and revealing things at an appropriate time, making my parents more real. The revelation of silence didn’t feel as revelatory as when I was saying it the last time. But I did feel good about letting myself just talk, as if I’m telling this tory to someone out loud at a bar, and I’m trying to talk about the concept of silence, and noise and music, as metaphors for the forces of life and death

\*And here’s an important note. It’s maybe not uncommon to refer to death in terms of silence, but there’s nuance to my experience of it, my experience of it as perhaps to me the ultimate metaphor of the divine. Anyway, I’m exhausted. Good job showing up to write tonight ethan!