

Staten Island

Sound is the most accurate mnemonic device.

Before me, there was myself. I was given a rather dull name, educated modestly and taught never to command attention to myself. Early on I got the impression that not much was expected of me. Just another pigtailed, doe-eyed child expected to be quiet and well behaved. There were two other memorable namesakes; the heavily freckled girl that bagged groceries at the local store and the elderly Vietnamese woman running the neighborhood laundromat. Their fates were tragic; the young girl caught a stray bullet in The Bronx and the laundromat was set alight during the late 70's Asian movement. I remember my childhood being one never-ending pandemonium. From the minute of my premature birth, everything that followed is etched in my memory for the waves of sound they produced. Their noises still echo from my core and haunt me to my core. The earliest memory I have of this is the smashing of a wine glass behind my head on the kitchen wall after my father hurled it at my mother. The wee buzz it made the moment it flew past my ear alerted me to cower down, saving my life. I was incredibly surprised at how my six year old body could act on its own just because of a certain threatening sound. Nothing had quite literally moved me before.

There was just one other place where noise turned to melody. The house of my paternal grandparents, Pa and Ma, as I adorably called them. The two elder Tarrs sailed to Staten Island from post war Poland and settled on a two story shab on Canon Avenue. Much of their families and friends perished in the Holocaust. Pa and Ma had found each other after the Allied liberation at a restoring camp in Lublin. Both were severely exhausted but flattered enough by each other's deformed bodies to fall in love. However, the scars of war never disappeared. Pa's skin was the dullest White I've ever seen with bumps of burnt skin on his hands and back. Ma had four moles on her face; two above her right eyebrow, one next to her left nostril and the last, on the end of her right cheekbone. The couple were hard to miss, always sitting by themselves and applauding quietly whenever I looked down at the compact audience during my recitals.

I would race to their house seeking solace from my parents, school bullies and at times, my bipolar brother, Tony. Ma would be there, awaiting Pa's arrival from work at Fresh Kills glued to her favorite recliner, knitting and listening to music on a thrifted Garrard 301 turntable. Music was the duo's only source of entertainment. They were too illiterate for the American papers and too cultured for American television. I'd curl up next to her on the springy couch and *listen* to music. It never felt like a physical activity, rather it was a tantric experience. Amongst other reasons, I found classical music intellectually seductive. My young mind was intrigued by the vulnerability, the humility and the ferocity emoted by the notes. I was always left yearning for more and couldn't wait to return to Pa's house. In fact, I am convinced that I had my first climax at nine listening to a von Karajan recording of Dvořák's fourth movement from his electrifying '*From the New World*' Symphony. The cathartic momentum of the fourth movement is centered around E minor, but Dvořák shifts between major and minor tonalities with ease adding a new layer of voracious intensity at every key. At the outset, you are greeted by a speedy bed of strings vibrating rapturously wooing every tilt and crevice of your devilish interiors but recedes momentarily, only to be brought up again by the dizzying vigor of the woodwind and the brass concurrently. The piece teases at frequent climaxes, each one more carnal than the last only to be left with delayed releases. The conclusion catches you off guard with the movement reaching its peak when the brass blares fervently supported by the full orchestra where the last chords are laced with soft crescendos that tremble you like waves, beginning the end to a tender, passionate, languid run. I've never felt nor sought similar gratification elsewhere.