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MET SQUARED:

I went to the Met Museum, Jongro, and then the Met Opera to watch Romeo and Juliet by Charles Gounod today. Maybe I’ll talk about the Met Museum and Jongro some other time (all you need to know is that they were amazing) but let’s focus on the Met Opera today.

I finally understand why my piano teacher, Gilles, has been pushing me to go to the Met for so long, and why my old piano teacher, Heidi, always pushed me to go to the Opera House. There is definitely something magical about the opera house. Everyone’s in their best attire, and it’s just a much more elegant affair than even the NY Phil or Carnegie Hall performance.

Lets start with little analysis on the opera itself. Juliette was played by Pretty Yende, Romeo by Stephen Costello, Mercutio by Yunpeng Wang. Costello and Wang were incredible from the start. Wang especially was strong – his saucy acting was extremely convincing, and I kept hoping that the opera would end differently than the book, and that Mercutio would live… but of course that didn’t happen. Yende was, I thought, a little eh in the beginning. She often came off of her long notes and rests just a split second earlier than I wanted her to, so I was left unsatisfied. This completely changed in the second half, where she completely opened up. I definitely think that Gounod could have done a better job on the Romeo and Juliet duets. Basically all of htem were just Romeo and Juliet singing the same lyrics in harmony. Very pretty, but I wish there were more conversation. The thing I found worked really well, though, was that the only time that Romeo and Juliet were singing in unison (octaves) was during their split second of happiness and hope for the future, when they are both locked in the tomb and thinking that they can run away together forever, before they realize that Romeo’s poison will kick in and kill him. It takes that long for them to get in unison, and makes it so powerful when they are finally together, not just in harmony but in person too. A second part that I really loved: the part where they talk about the nightingale and the lark. The song about the nightingale and lark comes up first when Romeo is about to be exiled, and he tries to convince Juliet that the lark is singing and that it is morning, aka time for him to depart. Juliet argues that he should stay and that it is the nightingale singing, not the lark, and that it is still night. Romeo then responds that the extra few minutes that they will have together if he stays is worth death, and switches his tune and agrees that it is in fact the nightingale. However, Juliet, realizing that this means death for Romeo, convinces him to leave. In the play, it ends here. But Gounod brings it back in the end, when Romeo and Juliet are both about to die. Romeo sings the song again, and expresses that it is in fact the nightingale singing. Night has become a sort of cover for the two of them. The night is their safe haven. Although both Romeo and Juliet are dying, which usually would be associated with negativity and the lark, it is instead associated with the nightingale. Maybe they are really happier together.

My heart was pounding throughout the entire second half of the opera. It wasn’t until the curtains closed, though, that I really started sobbing. When Romeo and Juliet took their final bow, the happiness that radiated out of them was so pure and genuine that it couldn’t have come out unless they had worked their hardest for it. I don’t know when the last time I’ve felt that genuinely happy was. I’ve had an incredible time since coming to college, but I haven’t been working hard enough in anything to be able to feel that genuinely happy about anything. My piano is just good – after our concert, I was happy, but that was about it. After getting my internship, I was happy – but I know it was all thanks to luck and because I happened to be in the right place at the right time, not because I actually worked hard for it. I know a lot of what we get comes down to timing. Without it, there is nothing, like how when Yende sang in the first half, even though her voice was incredible, it was unsatisfying to listen to becauser her timing wasn’t perfect. The minute that was fixed, it was so much more powerful. But still, there is something about putting in all of your heart into something. I hope – no, I will make sure – that I will start putting my heart into everything that I do. I can kind of get away with in music without putting my heart into it. I can kind of get away with school without putting my heart into it. I can kind of get away with work without really putting my heart into it. I can kind of go out without really thinking about it. Or, I can put my heart into everything I do, and even though that will cut back on the free time I have, I think I will become a happier person.

I had a pretty long talk with some friends yesterday about the work culture at Columbia, and about how everyone tends to mindlessly do work and act like “hoop-jumping sheep”. I think there’s a balance. It’s definitely not the best to be mindless sheep trying to win awards, but I also truly believe that you can only be extremely happy if you put your entire heart into it.

I’ll definitely be stopping by the Met Opera again, hopefully soon.

A LOOK BACK ON LIQUIDATY

As many of you know, I interned at Liquidaty, a data analytics startup in NYC, this spring. The company consists of the two co founders, Matt and Lisa, and three interns from Columbia, including myself.

This was everything that I could have asked for and more.