

## **The Chronicles of Music Majors: Questions for Reflection**

As the students of Belton University learn to navigate the world of music, they discover friendship, fortitude, and love in a variety of ways. Contact the author to sign up for her newsletter and receive an autographed postcard of *The Chronicles of Music Majors*.

### **A Change in the Winds**

Brandon, a sophomore bass player at Belton University, grows bored playing the same repetitive lines at the back of the orchestra. He rouses from his stupor when an attractive flutist plays a beautiful solo from the fourth movement of Dvorak's Symphony No. 8. How can Brandon attract her attention without raising the ire of the conductor? Maybe all he needs is a change in the winds.

1. Do you ever feel that your instrument is overlooked? What can you do to raise awareness for your instrument?
2. Francesca battled nerves regarding her flute solo. How do you handle nerves when you perform? Do you strive for perfection, or to do your best?
3. Were you familiar with the composer Antonin Dvorak? Have you listened to his Symphony No. 8? What do you think of the work?
4. Imagine your own ending to Brandon and Francesca's story. Feel free to post a copy to the Facebook Group Music and Fiction. (As long as you keep it clean.)

### **“Bach” from the Grave**

Freshman bassoonist Adam Heckel faces hazing in the music fraternity at Belton University while organist Miguel Guzmán struggles to overcome the pain of his past while preparing music for All Saints Day. When the two friends cross paths in an eerie locale Halloween night, will they finally find the brotherhood they both desperately need?

1. Have you ever encountered bullying? How did you respond?
2. How can you stand up for others when they're being bullied?
3. Adam and Miguel have both lost loved ones. Have you ever encountered loss? How did you work through your grief?
4. How do you celebrate October 31-November 1? How does the organ music in this story reflect these holidays?
5. Imagine your own ending to Adam and Miguel's story. Feel free to post a copy to the Facebook Group Music and Fiction. (As long as you keep it clean.)

### **Christmas Glee Club**

Sophia, the lead soprano of the Belton Glee Club, faces losing her celebrity date to the sorority formal due to a required concert for the university donors. When the lead tenor falls sick with laryngitis, Brett fills in for his role as Santa. Can Sophia and Brett pull off the concert together at the last minute?

1. This story features several Christmas classics. What is your favorite Christmas song?
2. Have you ever had to fill in for a solo at the last minute? How did it go?
3. Have you had to sacrifice social events for your music? Was it worth it?
4. Imagine your own ending to Sophia and Brett's story. Feel free to post a copy to the Facebook Group Music and Fiction. (As long as you keep it clean.)

### **No Strings Attached**

Alone on Valentine's Day with only his viola for a date, Vince decides to drown his sorrows at the university coffee shop. In a room full of love-struck couples, Gaby's alternative guitar music doesn't quite strike a romantic tone. Can she find anyone who appreciates her original style?

1. Gaby's music doesn't follow traditional musical norms. Do you enjoy alternative styles of music? Would you enjoy Gaby's style? Why or why not?
2. At the end of the story, Vince improvises on Gaby's song "Lizards of the Land." Have you tried improvisation? How can you incorporate it into your playing?
3. What do you think of the title? Does it have negative connotations regarding relationships? Could it be viewed in a positive light if you could literally grab coffee with someone with no strings attached, physically or emotionally? Consider the differences between the modern dating hookup culture, old-fashioned courtship, and traditional dating. Which do you think provides the most long-term relational satisfaction?
4. Imagine your own ending to Vince and Gaby's story. Feel free to post a copy to the Facebook Group Music and Fiction. (As long as you keep it clean.)

### **Brass at the Beach**

Etta, a tuba player for the Belton University Symphony, is forced to face her fears of the ocean when the orchestra travels to the Caribbean for a concert. French horn player Terrence makes it his mission to help Etta become more comfortable with the sea. Will Etta find a way to be noticed in spite of her position at the back of the orchestra? On their beach excursion, the two learn to view life through a different set of lenses.

1. Etta struggles with self confidence and self image. Have you ever battled these issues? How did you overcome them?
2. Terrence originally falls for the Etta's friend, but over the course of the story he realizes Etta's true beauty. Do you look for beauty on the inside of others, or simply the outside?
3. Were you familiar with the works by Debussy and ? Did you enjoy them? Why or why not?
4. Have you ever taken a trip to an exotic location? What was it like?
5. Imagine your own ending to Etta and Terrence's story. Feel free to post a copy to the Facebook Group Music and Fiction. (As long as you keep it clean.)

### Get a “Händel” on It

Violinist Karen dominates the music scene at Belton University until a transfer student usurps her position and forces Karen to play "second fiddle," much to her chagrin. When the unforeseen happens during their performance of Handel's *Messiah*, will Karen do what it takes to save the performance?

1. Have you ever lost your leadership position to someone else? How did you respond?
2. Sometimes it's difficult to play “second fiddle,” but all parts of the orchestra are critical to the music. How do you feel about the role you play in your ensemble?
3. Are you familiar with Handel's *Messiah*? Do you enjoy it?
4. Imagine your own ending to Karen's story. Feel free to post a copy to the Facebook Group Music and Fiction. (As long as you keep it clean.)

### The Ivory Touch

Pauline, a senior piano major at Belton University, nearly lives at the music school as she prepares for her capstone recital. Her boyfriend Trenton, a jazz trumpet player, convinces her to perform an insane duet with him for the final number. While they dedicate themselves to rehearsals, the Coronavirus sweeps the globe. The worldwide pandemic jeopardizes everything Pauline holds dear, including her recital, family, and romantic relationship. How will she adapt to this devastating twist her senior year?

1. Have you ever played for an important recital or concert? How did you prepare?
2. Were you familiar with the songs in this story? Which did you like best?
3. Trenton specializes in jazz music, whereas Pauline likes classical. What is your favorite musical genre? Do you enjoy a variety of music?
4. How did the pandemic affect your musical endeavors? What did you do to adapt?
5. Pauline's faith helps her navigate the uncertainty of the pandemic. Do you ascribe to a certain faith? If so, how has it helped you cope with the challenges of the pandemic in relation to both your physical and mental health?
6. Trenton believes that love will help carry them through this difficult period of time. Do you agree? Why or why not?
7. Imagine your own ending to Pauline and Trenton's story. Feel free to post a copy to the Facebook Group Music and Fiction. (As long as you keep it clean.)

### Return to Mozart

After graduating from Belton with a degree in harp performance, Lisandra begins her studies as a graduate composition student at Johann Conservatory in New York City under renowned composition teacher Amadeus Gruber, a descendant of Mozart. When the city is devastated by the pandemic, Lisandra must choose between returning to her family in Estonia, or continuing to work with Gruber in the city under quarantine. Does

Lisandra possess what it takes to finish Gruber's Symphony and continue Mozart's legacy?

1. Have you ever written a song? What was your experience?
2. Historically, women and minority composers have not received a lot of attention. Which ones are you familiar with? How can we encourage more women and minorities to compose?
3. Amadeus Gruber and Lisandra are fictional composers, but several of the others mentioned are not. Are you familiar with the Estonian composer Arvo Pärt? Who is your favorite composer?
4. How did the works and life of Mozart parallel some of the difficulties of the pandemic? Were you surprised by these connections?
5. Did you deal with loss as a result of the pandemic (or another crisis)? How did you work through it?
6. Imagine your own ending to Lisandra's story. Feel free to post a copy to the Facebook Group Music and Fiction. (As long as you keep it clean.)

#### **Questions about the book as a whole**

1. What was your favorite story? Why?
2. Which character did you most identify with?
3. What instrument do you play? Did you like the character who portrayed your instrument? (If your instrument wasn't portrayed, imagine the character who plays an instrument from the same musical family: winds, brass, strings, percussion.)
4. The characters throughout these stories come from a variety of backgrounds, both musically and other. How do these affect their styles and approach to music? How can you draw from your own background to enhance your music?
5. As an author, I created many of these fictional stories with elements of truth from my own musical experiences. For example, one of my friends really did drop his glasses in the ocean on an orchestra trip! Another friend performed a fabulous annual organ Halloween concert. And my Dad's band really did trade instruments to play a prank on their substitute teacher, not that I recommend it. How can you draw from your own musical experience to create a short story, fictional or real? Feel free to post a copy to the Facebook Group Music and Fiction. (As long as you keep it clean.)