

Micro Magic

by Angie

What passion cannot Music raise and quell?

- John Dryden

Vincent trudged wearily down the tunnels towards the brownstone, marvelling again how just doing record-keeping could be so very tiring. He needed a bath to relax.

He didn't do much heavy labour anymore, there being plenty of younger strength in the tunnels, but the paperwork was mostly his. Father had insisted he learn how to keep the records, and he updated them about once a month, writing little notes in between and keeping them in the record books.

He had managed to delegate many tasks to others. The work schedules were handled by Eric, who gave him update notes on the various work projects, and William maintained records of their food inventory, but it was *his* job to add all that to the main ledgers. He himself, following in their late patriarchs footsteps, maintained records of their community members, health and medicines. It was tedious and very seldom anything he didn't already know, but he understood the importance of recording it, even if no one ever needed to refer to it.

Of course, when people knew he was working on the records, inevitably they brought him their problems, which often required the patience of Solomon to resolve.

It was all deadly ... well, perhaps boring wasn't quite the word, but it was certainly not engaging.

He signed heavily.

As he neared the brownstone tunnel entrance he could hear music, and as he got to the hidden wall entry he stopped in astonishment, listening, all thought of that bath he wanted forgotten. He leaned against the wall, and let the music wash over him. It was very unusual.

All children learned music notation, some even went on to play instruments, but this was something no one had ever attempted. He realized quickly that what made it different was that it wasn't using just full and half tones, but quarter tones as well. The sound was almost discordant, until his ears accepted it as deliberate.

It was almost Middle Eastern in tone. *That* music didn't use an electric guitar and a set of drums and cymbals, though. He guessed that there were two players only, but so well-coordinated that they sounded like a single organism.

Now he was intrigued and gently opened the entry quietly. He entered through the wardrobe in the basement slowly and quietly, so as not to disturb whatever was being listened to. He wanted to see it for himself.

Catherine had set up two desktop computers and speakers for the use of the Tunnel community, much used by their teenagers, and he guessed that it was something being watched on one of those.

Inside, he found Catherine leaning against the wall not far away and she nodded at him. He looked at the two computer screens and realized they were both showing exactly the same thing – something he had to stare at to comprehend. What on earth?

There were indeed two players, but they were dressed in polka-dotted costumes. Both had large head pieces and one had a very long nose, while the other had a floppy one. After watching for a while, he realized the guitar player had dollar signs over his eyes holes, while the drummer was actually looking out of the mouth of his helmet-like head piece. He shook his head, unable to understand how either could see properly to play anything, much less the complicated pieces they obviously were. The guitar player was using a double-necked instrument, two guitars in one, and one obviously a bass guitar.

Vincent waited until the piece ended then quickly walked over to the computers, now very curious.

“Who are they?” he asked one of the listeners there.

One of the teens chuckled, while several said “*Angine de Poitrine*” in unison, which told Vincent nothing, except that the duo was apparently named after a heart condition. He decided not to pursue that.

His eyebrows raised as the music continued and he was about to demand more information, when the two teens sitting in the chairs paused what they were watching, and turned around. The others – the audience included four others – looked at Vincent, and then Catherine, who had come up beside him, equally curious.

“We don’t know much,” they were told. “They’re from Saguenay, Quebec, and claim to be aliens – Khn on guitar and Klek on drums. Their actual identities are secret, although some have guessed who they are.”

“They have two albums, both available on CD as well as vinyl,” another teen remarked.

“Vinyl?” Vincent queried, astonished. Were record players coming back into vogue? Whatever next? However, with computers and other devices, anyone could listen to whatever they wanted, without a record or CD, whenever they liked. The teens were no strangers to this advantage, obviously.

“It’s incredibly intricate,” another said. “Micro-tonal – and done in layers with a looper pedal.”

“Hold on.” Vincent held up a hand, before the explanation became more confusing. “What is a looper pedal?”

“That stuff down by the guitar player’s bare feet – he works them that way.”

Vincent leaned closer to look and indeed the guitar player had bare, polka-dotted feet. There were a number of electronic boards on the floor, some with buttons, some with pedals. Vincent was in awe that anyone could work so many - and play that unusual guitar as well.

“He layers elements of their music - records it, plays over it, mixes it in real time ... and .. this is the result.”

“Please turn it back on,” Vincent requested, and they both did, simultaneously.

The music came back to life along with the two players. The drummer was very energetic, and totally synchronized with the guitar player, to an extent that almost seemed impossible.

The music got faster and faster, both the guitar player and the drummer racing to keep up the momentum - and then the piece ended, abruptly. Vincent noticed that the guitar player had to hit several buttons to turn off his floor array. They both stood up, faced the camera, and made a triangle symbol with their hands.

The two teens paused the video again and waited.

Vincent realized he had been holding his breath and let it out in a whoosh.

"Astonishing," he rasped, when he could breathe again. Catherine chuckled.

"Where are they playing?" he asked, now very curious. Why even the backdrop to the two was polka-dotted, as was the guitar, and the drum set had a polka-dotted cloth over it.

"This is KEXP Seattle," one teen told him. "They've gone viral since this was recorded last year and are now playing concerts all over the world."

Vincent took a good look at the guitar player and realized his instrument was not just two-necked, which he was sure was unusual enough, but also had so many frets they were impossible to count. That accounted for the quarter tones.

"KEXP has really rad stuff," one teen stated.

"Rad?"

"Um, radical'," said another.

Catherine chuckled and Vincent had to join her. He was learning a lot!

"I would like to hear more of this," Vincent admitted. "I like it."

One of the teens reached into a small box on the desk and extracted a little blue square thing in a blister pack. He extracted it and showed it to Vincent.

"I can put it all on this for you. It's an mp3 player. All you need are earbuds."

He reached into another box and extracted another package, that obviously contained the earplugs.

"Where did you get those?" Catherine asked, curious now.

"Uncle Tony gave them to us," she was told.

"Tony Ramos?"

"Yeah. He told us he picks up stuff at auctions. These are old tech because everyone puts stuff on their phones now."

Well, there were some advantages to being out of the loop, Catherine thought. Needless to say, none of the tunnel residents had phones. She had a regular phone in her office, of course, out of necessity. She didn't have a cellphone, because there was no one she would call, and anyhow, she rarely left their house.

"He also told us about AdP. He said they sound like gypsy music from Mars."

Vincent laughed. He was glad to hear their friend kept in touch. If anyone wanted anything, he was sure their gypsy friend could find it. It seemed he found electronic gizmos too.

"Thank you, I'd like that," Vincent said in response to the offer, and right away one of the teens called up the relevant files on YouTube and downloaded them into the player. There were more than Vincent expected, but it was done in a few minutes. The teen handed Vincent the player and earplugs.

"How does it work?" Vincent asked, looking at the thing, which looked too small to do anything, but did have a minuscule screen. Files, after all, were not like CDs. He knew that much.

"Just press that big button in the middle, then let it load, then when you see the menu, choose the musical note. They it'll say 'Music' so push the button again, and it'll start playing." The teen handed over the tiny instruction brochure from the package, and Vincent accepted it with thanks. He would have to read it ... sometime.

"Enjoy", said one of the teens.

"I shall," Vincent promised, looked at the tiny thing in his hairy hand, not really believing what it did – but determined to try it.

"We should have our dinner," Catherine reminded him, before the discussion got any more complicated.

They left the teens to their music and went upstairs, where Catherine had a stew in the oven which she removed, and with a loaf of William's bread to hand and plenty of butter, they were soon eating. Vincent was hungry, having eaten quickly at lunch to get back to his task.

"I need a bath," Vincent told his love when they were finished and had stuffed themselves with the delicious bread. He was feeling tired again, and the thought of soaking in hot water and listening to music was very attractive.

"Don't drop it in the water," Catherine advised, although she had no idea if it would be affected.

"I won't," Vincent promised, planting a kiss on her forehead. "Wonderful stew, Catherine."

Some time later, he returned downstairs, refreshed and more than ever fascinated by what he had been listening to.

"Did you know about these two?" he asked Catherine, waving the blue player as he went into the den and sat down on his favourite chair.

She put down her book and smiled at him. "Not really, although I've read newspaper articles about them. It was Tony who said we should listen to them. I forgot, but our computer geeks down there have played almost nothing else for days. I think they're watching videos of their concerts too."

"Amazing!" was all Vincent could think of to say.

"Yes, they're certainly unique," Catherine agreed.

"And were it not for modern technology, we likely wouldn't even know about them," Vincent continued. "Something good has come out of it after all."

"Oh, I think there's much that's good. I find good recipes and even crochet and knitting patterns," Catherine revealed. "I'm not interested in much, but our teens are learning about the world in a way that prepares them, without putting them in danger up here in my world."

"I hope they are learning discernment too," Vincent remarked. He had read newspapers too and was not enamoured of what he read.

"They are. Our teens are much more intelligent than most, Vincent. They learn to think and reason, both sadly lacking in my world, from what I've read."

"Then they get the best of both worlds?"

"Yes, and they have you too, Vincent. That gives them an even greater advantage."

"What? Why?"

"Because you ask questions most adults would not even bother to. Your curiosity and acceptance of new things does trickle down. The teens notice. You're a wonderful role model."

"Thank you, my love. I had never thought of myself that way."

"I know, Vincent. Can I borrow the player? I have to do some paperwork in my office tomorrow morning and I think I need a reason."

"Of course, Catherine. Let me know if it helps. The next time I do the ledgers, I may try that."

"It has a good beat," she replied. "Might even be good for crocheting too. I'll ask the gang to give us another player. They seem to have plenty of spares. That way we both have one."

"Good idea, Catherine."

It was too late today, of course, but the teens would be back tomorrow, he had no doubt.

Now that he had listened to the duo, he did want to hear them again. They were very addictive. He would also like to watch them in action again.

He would have to learn how to use the computer, something he had been avoiding. He knew Catherine had a laptop, so perhaps she could help him find concerts, so he could watch them ... sometime.

That stopped him, momentarily. He had very little spare time, despite the easier work load, except at meals. He would just have to make the time. Some things demanded it.

He must remember to thank Tony for his generosity and 'heads up' too. He could not remember ever being so interested in something from Catherine's world. It almost made him wonder what else he was missing ... but on second thought, he decided not to worry about it. That way lay madness.

The END



Angine de Poitrine - Full Performance (Live on KEXP)

END