

“He has a gift for using music to help children gain confidence.”

“I’m not surprised.”

“There’s a few he’s been following. At risk kids. It’s been four years for the longest. He’s in seventh grade now. He’s an honor student.”

“So Ted’s kind of like Mr. Holland.”

“Yeah, I guess he is,” Dave grinned at his friend who was still ignoring him. “In fact, just like Mr. Holland. It was after we saw that movie that he reached out to his first kid.”

“Oh? *Mr. Holland’s Opus* came out years ago. You must’ve been in high school.”

“We were getting ready to start our freshman year. I was that kid.”

“You were?” Shelly gave Dave her full attention.

“I was starting to have trouble in school because I had a bad attitude. One of my foster sisters had said something she didn’t really mean, but I took it to heart. I decided I’d lost my family because God didn’t love me. Ted showed me that the music of life assures us all that God does love us.”

“The music of life?”

“Life is God’s great opera,” Dave nodded. “What we do with these,” he tapped the guitar, “simply tells a part of the opera God’s already written. Like art, music is a language we can all understand because it’s all around us. It’s in the bird song, the wind in the trees, the rainbow.”

“The rainbow?”

“Yes,” Dave continued as the children trickled back in. Ted began to tune his bass. “True music gives voice to the flowers and the rainbow just like true art gives color to bird song and shows you the wind. The trick to both music and art is to know the Voice that brings it all together. If you follow the Voice, you can’t go wrong. Only in getting ahead of or above the Voice do you get out of tune or offbeat.

“Perfection and power aren’t what are important, joining the music is. We do that in song, dance and art, but we also do it on the football field, in the kitchen, in a classroom. Wherever we are, we listen for the Voice that brings all life together. Sometimes we even get to be a voice ourselves, but even then, what’s most important is the whole. We can’t demand that others join us, we

have to lure them, encourage and exhort them. If we're true to the melody God gives us, others will find it easy to follow once they surrender to the Composer's plan."

Ted nodded at Gavyn almost as if this had all been planned. Maybe the Composer *had* planned it.

The recorder's notes rang true and sweet. Shelly did indeed feel the pull.

After a few measures, Ted nodded at Joe. Soon everyone had joined the tune. It was beautiful. After a minute or two, Ted held up his hands for silence, then pointed to Joe.

"Take it Joe." Joe began to play the same tune. "That's good, but go ahead and embellish. Explore. You're the voice now. Listen to your Composer. See where he takes you."

Joe explored tentatively at first, but Ted encouraged him even when a note seemed off-key. Joe's exploration became more confident. Ted asked Gavyn to join him.

"Follow him Gav," Ted cautioned after a couple measures. "It's his voice now Ah yes. There you go. Dave, sing with them."

Soon everyone had joined. Shelly enjoyed the game. When Dave's turn came to be the voice, it was obvious he'd played before.

Finally Ted gave Shay the solo. She pounded that little drum for all it was worth, but it was just a drum. It had no melody or harmony, only rhythm. Shelly saw Shay begin to frown. Before she could decide if she should intercede, Ted knelt beside Shay, favoring his right side.

"Do you sense something different than when Gav and Joe and Dave played by themselves?" Shay nodded. "That's because some instruments aren't meant to be the voice that others follow. They're kind of like horses. They have great power but they're meant to run free or be under submission to another instrument. A single drum can call others, but it can't lead anything but other drums. It's powerful. Too powerful for other instruments to follow. It has to run under and uplift other instruments. The tambourine is kinda like that too, but it doesn't have the power as a drum. It can't lead or lift up. It runs alongside and encourages.

"This instrument that I'm playing, it looks like a guitar like Dave has, but it's called a bass. It also doesn't lead. It has way too much power. It has to be meek, submitted to the voice, but in its meekness, it gives power to make the entire song richer and truer."

"What about these drums, Uncle Teddy?" Lori asked, pointing to the set in the corner where Ted had gotten her drums and cymbals from.

"These are very special, like the bass, but even stronger. They can make music all by themselves. It's music that makes you want to dream, to soar, to do great things, but it doesn't show you what the dream is or how to get there. They call stronger than Shay's drum, but they also only call. Only other

percussion instruments follow the drums. Once the call is answered, the drums need to submit meekly to a voice that can tell the story God wants told.”

“Will you show us?” Lori innocently handed Ted the drumsticks.

He took them hesitantly. He hadn’t played since before Jason died.

Ted stood slowly and swallowed hard. He knew Dave and Shelly were watching him. He didn’t want to see the compassion in their eyes. They would support him if he explained to Lori that since he was hurt right now, in a very sensitive place, it would be difficult to sit behind the drums. He also didn’t know how well either his right arm or his right leg would hold out.

But if he really believed what he taught – that how well you played was not as important as listening for the Voice of the Master Composer to give you your song – he had to do this. There would always be reasons not to sing, some of them quite valid, like eight stitches in your backside. Regardless of his reasons to not sing, the Composer was giving him a song.

Ted put the cymbals and drums back in their proper place in the set. He sat carefully, tentatively on the stool. It hurt, but he’d played before when he was hurting worse.

He tapped out a few beats with both his hands and his feet. He was a little stiff, but he could do this. It wasn’t as if he was playing an entire concert with Country Riot.

Ted began to tap out a rhythm, listening for the lead of the Master. He closed his eyes and was soon pounding a vigorous cadence as if the gnomes had come to march. He punctuated the cadence with a lighter, higher dance of the elves. Suddenly he smiled. He heard the bells dancing too. The pixies had joined via the tambourine. A few measures later, he opened his eyes and nodded to Dave.

Suddenly the gnomes and elves and pixies weren’t just dancing, they were singing. The dance continued even while the song soared high, joined by the keyboard and the recorder. Using the same notes they had played earlier, Gav and Joe once again submitted to the voice of Dave’s guitar. The drums and the tambourine pushed them higher than they’d gone before.

It wasn’t perfect music, but it was beautiful. Players and listeners all knew they could go anywhere, following without knowing for sure the destination. They were not alone and the One they were following was true and faithful. Even when they stumbled, he seemed to weave that too into the music.