

There's No Shame in Crying

As my friends prepared for college (and I, my farewells), we decided to throw a party in their honor. Under the guise of a worship service, my church group eagerly organized this summer's-end celebration – I brought blankets and pillows, Pastor Lim the home-cooked barbecue, and everyone else the popcorn and chips we never actually ate.

It was a Thursday - August 13th.

I feel it's important to mention that, since I'm training as a classical pianist, I'm constantly looking for performance opportunities – a recital is to a musician what a match is to athletes – and it was always gratifying to perform at church. Every performance astounded them, no matter how I played!

This past June, I suggested an end-of-the-summer performance to my pastor.

Lim assumed that my intentions were honest – that I wanted to perform for my graduating friends, Sam and Josh, as their send-off. *Oh, um...sure! Of course.* Every week following, Pastor Lim gushed about it cheerfully and, every week, I felt a gaping pit in my stomach deepen.

The day came quickly – summer was a blur of heat and car rides that left little room for me to think on my mistake. But, the week of, I recognized the conceit of performing only for myself...and even then, selflessness wouldn't come! It took me the five days leading up to the lock-in to think of *anything* passably modest and heartfelt. When Pastor Lim asked me how things were going, I looked at him with a vapid smile. *GREAT, JUST GREAT!* Only three hours before I had to leave, my ear was tickled by a soft melody, Chopin's Nocturne in E-flat Major. *Ohh...oh, thank God, yes.* The sweet, nostalgic beauty was perfect for a goodbye.

Hours later, after a gloriously amateur game of badminton and a *lot* of Korean BBQ, my youth group and I sat down in the chapel together, sprawled across the two first pews. I tugged the piano into place, Sam helping me lift the lid and cover. I laughed and sat at the keys. Nerves gripped my stiff arms. I tapped the pedal, raised the bench. Then – with an opening gentle as rain, the waltz of the

Nocturne drew the room in, forgiving my regrets. The music was familiar; though I felt a trembling cold, Chopin's story was warm, wordless, and knowing. Still, the tears, the guilt wound tight in my chest...and with a final, golden breath, I sighed my relief. Drawing back from the keys, my face screwed up in a bashful grimace and I turned slowly to Sam, who sat nearest. In the dim red-and-yellow lighting, we locked eyes - mine, suddenly shot wide, met his, red and wet. Sam's jaw twitched, then he mumbled incoherently...which was more than I could say - my throat clenched, with empathy and with deep, burning shame.

I both do and don't know what made him cry, but I don't think that's the point, because, in that moment, I felt honestly human.