

“The Heartbeat of Patience”

The only thing bad that ever happens in Sonta Luca is car accidents, of which the little mountain town is most frequent in the world, proportional to both population density and number of motor vehicles owned within the given population.

Sonta Luca is also highest in bicycle deaths, many of which are head on collisions. These statistics seem alarming, until you actually visit Sonta Luca and see the reason for their frequency.

There’s something the locals say there, “Sonta Luca, dangerously beautiful,” this is an axiom rooted in consistent, concrete observation. It is *not* poetic abstraction. The mountains surround the little town in a panoramic prickled view; at sunset and sunrise, when the light plays across them, pours around them like lava flowing upon the earth, the beauty becomes so arresting that people are frequently distracted while driving or cycling.

“Stolen glances steal lives” is another local axiom.

There’s no such thing as a peak, a glance, a fleeting noticing of the mountains. They demand prolonged, steeped attention, and they get it.

Every time.

Stop signs are strategically placed on through streets with open views of the mountains to the East and West; those heading North or South have to rely on their own willpower, especially once they’ve craned their neck to the side and begun the enchantment.

Sonta Luca is nearly as infamous for the musicians who live there, who stumble upon it and stay like drivers at stop signs in the sunset. They each hold a firm belief that one night, with the right collection of sounds, the mountains will move, that they’ll dance.

Some even swear they’ve seen peaks wiggle, cliff walls sway and breath, mighty towers bop and bounce.

Most in town love the music, almost as much as the mountains, except for when it gets...eerie...too experimental.

“Let them try; who’s it hurting?”

But one group in particular, amidst the many planets of this sonic solar system takes to this task with the tact, tenacity and thoroughness of scientists, chemists, biologists, physicists and the alchemists of old.

They call themselves The Sillypuddy Diamonds. The Diamonds are comprised of Leslie Vershawn, she goes by the stage name Willow; Arnold Jennings, Spruce; Benjamin Worthling, Sycamore; Amanda Sheckler, Alder; and Jacob Hael, Aspen.

The Sillypuddy Dimaonds are heralded by the music community as the most “spiritual” of the groups; a distinction made pronounced by Aspen and Willow’s lyrical tendency.

As “spiritual” as their reputation has become, they are even more infamous for being the most pronouncedly experimental of all the bands that have set roots into Sonta Luca. None can miss this fact when in the presence of their collective sound. With Willow and Sycamore’s sound mixing styles weaving in and out of

Aspen's love for distilled, elongated, tonal ambience, an entire environment of moving, squirming, looping, beating things seem to sprout before the ears and out of the minds of anyone present in the room.

To add to this unique tapestry, Aspen also has the strongest and strangest palette for digitized texture and precise cacophony.

"Nah, I get you, but I think we need to let this one fall apart a little more," Aspen is saying as we zoom in, trying to convince Spruce, as they tend to tussle.

"I can see why, Asp, but it's already....squirmy enough...I'm afraid we'll lose it altogether..."

"I doubt it! And if we do, it's not gonna kill it..."

"It can't die if it hasn't stopped yet," Willow adds in, sending Aspen into a hand clap and a rock back and fourth.

"MAH GIRL! That's what I'm talkin' about!"

"Look, I know it's not a mistake unless we bail on it, but I think this one just needs a little more tightening,"

"I agree! After we let it slip a bit...then we can fade it back in and give it exponential tightening until it's spit shined, man. Let it break down, molecules back to the ocean, then let Life begin again, from a single cell up to present day..."

"And beyond..." Willow says waving her hands through the air to create a window into something none of them can see quite yet, though they can sense it."

Aspen squeals with pleasure at the idea. Spruce looks skeptical but laughs at the unspoken front man of the group, if one could be said to exist, and at Willow's patient theatrics.

"We got him on board! Good job Willow. Let's run it before we start unraveling again..." Aspen says as he moves back over to his loop station and effect board.

"See! It's not always a great feeling is it?" Spruce says.

"No no! That's it! This contentiousness, use it! Put it into the song man! Let's fuck with this. Falling apart is usually contentious, different sides tugging at one another as you slide or break down,"

"The fight of trying to stay together, even though it's too late" Willow adds. Aspen snaps and point in her direction without looking up, "What do you think Syc?"

The tall, quiet man in the corner, thumbing a violin looks up as if he's within the peace of an idea already arrived at, "I think as long as Aspen brings in a steady tone from underneath, anything we do will fit...or fall into place....and actually...I'd like to try and tear that cacophony apart with the strings, see how it reacts,"

"Well in the words of the Joker, Ledger version...here...we.....GO!"

Aspen immediately brings the microphone to his mouth with a deep bass tone, rocking on top slightly as a boat on slight waves. He clicks a button on the machine and a red light ignites, after another eight bar pass he clicks it again. He keeps the tone going, this time switching channels and hitting the half speed button, which drops the bass tone down to a splittingly deep bellowing. The result is a cavern creaking as roots of a mountain strain to move along, like an oil tanker moving through ice.

He repeats the process, recording the third tone at half speed so that once it's laid in, he switches it back to full speed, shooting the sound up several octaves.

The three tones mix and undulate. Willow adds in some textural samples to suture them together with some sense of a scrambling, speckled transportation, a particle bilocating between waveforms. Spruce begins playing bass in jazzed-out, broken melodies, skipping sequences of notes in scales and jumping between scales, slapping the bass, muting strings and even pulling the strings off the fret to let them slap back down. He's squinting his eyes tightly trying to stay on the through-line, yet trying to let that idea die to his mind altogether.

Just play the emotion he reminds himself, don't listen, feel and trust.

Though he doesn't always enjoy the experimenting, Spruce does have to admit that he feels safe when he's pressed between Aspen and Willow. There's no such thing as a wrong move, or an off note, or an accident. Everything has purpose, everything its own space to fill that is acceptable, everything matters...it's all snow to a snowman.

Right now, though the walls of the room seem to be shaking apart, there's some cohesion underneath, a snaking movement through tall grasses; a cohesion that can be heard in the distance with bat-awareness that picks up something beyond the now and known, clicking around the bend in a cave to see what may be coming. It's something they're all latching on to, each of them leaning an ear in at it, tilting their fox heads hearing a mouse burrowing underneath the snow.

Sycamore pivots his body without realizing it towards Aspen as he turns the fretless neck of the violin into fragmented remnants of a body. He's producing tones and pinching them off, dragging them out and warbling them as they go so that they buckle from one octave to another.

A dying animal cries out.

The bow is catching a few strings at a time and his fingers are moving independently so that these buckled octaves are harmonizing and then pummeling each other.

Two hawks mate in a dive towards the earth where that mouse burrows under the snow, beneath the snake in the grasses.

One by one they all turn towards the center of the room, until their attention is focused on the middle point, the open, empty space, the "doorway anything can come through" Aspen calls it. "Us" he also calls it, or "I Am" interchangeably. This is the closest thing to the hole that the mouse will use to crawl out of and into the fangs or talons awaiting it, if they're ready and poised when it arrives.

Willow picks up the guitar and adds some coherent strums into the looped sampler to run in orbits throughout, the first indication of something tangible and repetitive to be stood on.

Alder on the keyboard is using a dial to fade the sound in and out quickly, as if it's breaking up in some atmosphere like a reentry unstable but potentially capable of making it. She's adding more black than white keys in and intentionally striving for the most texture through the rubbing and ricocheting of sound bubbles as possible. She's trying to blow the air apart with concussive blasts the same way that Sycamore is trying to lacerate it.

Spruce is still boiling on the bass, almost like geyser water or lava chambers underneath the groaning and creaking, a result of the tectonics released into the visible and audible spectrum.

Aspen puts his fingers on a delay dial, with the repeat dial already turned up over halfway, the effect is an echoing sustain on his voice. He hums and tones, bellows and creaks into the microphone, twisting the delay dial so that his voice is compressed into an exponentially escalating repetitive pitch rising and shooting out of the room in fireworks going off or volcanoes blasting their first bit of rubble and cover high into the atmosphere. Because he's turning the dial back and forth, in intervals, his voice is also being stretched out into oblong, warped deep tones that fall and gurgle like mud pots, like depressions and openings in the earth filling with liquid, then space, then liquid again.

Willow adds in more clean and celestial sounding tones, as if some starlight spiraling down, trickling in and alighting on the world that is shifting and rippling. Sycamore begins to play more coherently on the violin and Willow nods him over, he plugs into her sampler so that she can catch a piece of his articulation and augment it at will.

Like a quantum physicist, she zooms in on the waveform of sound until it's a brilliant matrix of tiny components. She splices pieces of it out, sticks them elsewhere, inverting others and adding these new variations, along with the ones before them, into the sample pads to be accessed with a simple press of a finger. She then starts to play the pads, resurrecting various notes and pitches and tones of the strings like little bits of light from the stars finding fissures in the ground and trickling in to meet Aspen, wherever he is at.

He feels it, opens his eyes and looks over at Willow, who meets his gaze and holds it. Their sounds begin to harmonize more and more as they keep eye contact. He brings the microphone back up to his lips.

“Subducted but not subtracted,
added to as aspens
grow slowly on slopes active-
-ly stretching up towards galaxies”

He turns the repeat dial and leaves it as this burst of lyrics ends, so that the final word rings out over a chasm repeating a ghostly stone dropped in a vast space echoing off into silence. Aspen slowly turns the dial back, fading the lyrics gradually like the voice of the Earth falling into the void of space, or the voice of the void bouncing off the Earth, ringing it like a singing bowl.

“I grow but you don't see me
moving on my deep feet
defiantly patient, creeping
on into mighty destiny”

The same ringing echo, this time underlined by a streaking of violin strings nearly like an F-22 screeching by, but more beautiful in the warmth of wood and wire.

“I blink and see these monuments

built around my bases
crumbled and resurrected
by countless generations”

The screaming strings hit a point where they stay a constant beam of light penetrating the fog of the previous cacophony. Sycamore is indicating that it's time to begin the coherence. Or perhaps he took the cue from the lyrics formulating out of the clutter and commotion. Spruce reels the base in more, creating a rhythm trying to bridge this gap between the lost notes, but fighting to not be sucked down by the two plates colliding, one rising up into a wall peaking, and one melting into a near-liquid as it plummets.

“All these beings rushing beneath me
look blurry to my centuries,
long breath that is exhaling
through monstrous seams colliding”

Sycamore rallies the strings into a triumphant climb of rock, crystal, gas and heat. Spruce bounces the bass like a trampoline giving buoyancy to this newly discovered life. Alder swirls around them with the keys, polishing and smoothing out the rigid excess and ends, chiseling them into puzzle pieces. Willow and Aspen still dance together, giving channels for the maxims at the top and bottom to merge, to wed and inform the environment being birthed between them.

“Strong and newly built, I reach up
my youth and vigor ancient
cragle and scree rejuvenated
this point of sky, I penetrate it”

Willow hits something on the sampler and the sky rips open, through which Sycamore screams a flood of rays, hydrogen and indentations of space time riding violin strings falling down the drain towards this mountain. Aspen sings into the microphone louder, verging on a scream, as these sounds fill the room. Every one of the Diamonds can feel this cascade pouring over them individually. They can feel it wrapping around their collective body, that all invisible, but palpable membrane they've made.

“As I breathe of the world beyond this
I rupture and share it's contents
Down to the lands like fountains
to inform the blurry's monuments.”

Again the words echo like memories through ages, recycling, resetting, on repeat with different hands working to the same beat. Somehow, much to Aspen's bewildered delight, the group is able to make sounds of building. Hammering, thudding, moving, gliding, voices, bodies; bits and pieces of a scene shining out and

dimming again. They all see it, a picture book of sacred sites and architectural wonders blurring by rapidly as this composition, like a great and invisible, timeless thumb, presses on the book like mountain while time keeps the pages fluttering underneath it, animating the images.

Aspen feels a shift occur, and a sadness mixed with excitement. It occurs when a song is about to leave him, when a space is about to shift out of a distilled, steeped loop. When a gymnast is about to land their aerial move on the beam. When the fox or hawk is about to snag the mouse or snake. He cocks his head to the side, his face trembles a bit with a bittersweet joy, and he reaches down into the caverns of the Earth, through the microphone like a rope.

“So still and inanimate
they see me, but don’t grasp that
I’m moving in my own way, yet
on a timeline long and patient.”

Aspen puts the repeat on full, the end half of the word patient plays on continuum “ient-ient-ient-ient” like a fragment of a comet caught in tight circle orbiting. Like the countless generations and civilizations that arise and fall and repeat their tendencies at the foot of the same mountain who is slowly growing taller or whittling away.

The others begin to fade out slowly.

Sycamore adds some more complexity on the strings; tracers of birds and sunlight dance out the last of their energy.

Alder takes the liberty of commanding the space now from the keyboard. Monstrous and delicate tones alike come from it as Willow adds in effects from the sample pad that present to all of their minds the sense of time rushing by in flashes and blips of noteworthy moments.

Like little caps of water rising up and flattening out.

Like a civilization’s heartbeat on an EKG.

The music fades slowly...so slowly...until it’s dipping over the horizon. Yet still, the “ient-ient-ient-ient” continues. They all fade out the last of the sounds except this repeating, steady patience striking gavel, a clock hand ticking, a heart beating.

Until suddenly Aspen stops it and a silence sets in over the room.

In this silence, as the room begins to speed back up from this dogged, drudging march of time...or slows back down from the blurring rush of a geologic clock whose seconds tick the swirling of centuries...The Sillypuddy Diamonds stay motionless with their eyes closed, feeling the air on their cheeks, the ground underneath their bare feet, the wind creeping through the window from the dark night outside.

A darkness where the sun set long ago, where the red and white lights of ambulances have already faded, where the subduction zone of an intersection bathed in the golden magma light and the cars mangled like tectonic plates rising up serrated, folding down crumpled and consumed, has returned to a rested peace underneath the stars coming out, raining their cool breath on the town.

Off under this glittering condensation, on the outskirts of the town, some say that night the summit of the tallest, sharpest, youngest mountain rose by three hundred feet. A few locals who had been out as the accident had been cleared from the road said, hand to god, they saw the tip of the mountain punch the night sky and out of it poured something like a glittering, cool torrent of stars...only it was one of those things your eyes couldn't see, but your brain's eyes could.

Those organs of vision that aren't tangible but allow you to picture oranges and the face of loved ones and never before written things in your head.

It was with those eyes a few of the elders in town watched the heavens pour down around the mountains, flooding through the town like a river. Not many ever believed them.

But they knew that something had happened, even if it wasn't what their brains tried to show them. Because right when that glittering-not-there-obviousness swept the town, as the sky exhaled its contents all over the mountains which took a titanic breath back in, revealing about three hundred feet worth of sky and sitting back down, resettling enormous, cavernous roots out underneath all their foundations, the sirens faded, the flashing lights blotted out, and all the different musicians and bands stopped their playing in one single moment.

Except for one group, in a little house a few blocks away, where a single repetitive sound kept ringing out softer and softer, like a heartbeat.