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Something Sad in the Music

Michaela Oosthuizen

WINNER, THOMAS McGRATH AWARD FOR POETRY

Michaela Oosthuizen was born in Stellenbosch South Africa. She loves studying literature and running the 800m on the track and tries as best she can to balance the two passions.

Ever since childhood, she was fond of writing stories and poetry. At age 9, she used her favourite place—a farm in Nelspruit Mpumalanga—as her first muse to begin writing poetry. In high school, she shifted her focus to people and events and has explored them ever since. Her poetry attempts to capture some of the complexities and depths of the human experience through simple, yet compelling verse and imagery. She also likes to season her work by experimenting with different rhyme schemes, sounds, and form.

Michaela is currently completing a Masters degree in English at UND whilst competing in track and field for the university.

On Michaela's poetry, the Creative Writing Scholarship Committee observed: "Michaela Oosthuizen's 'Something Sad in the Music' brings to the page a candescent lyricism and a rhythmic melancholy. The slant rhyme and in-line rhyme of this poem prove especially moving—an eloquent and rhythmic counterpoint to the literal piano music of the poem."

There's something sad in the music,
I told her quietly
A tear dropped from my blue eyes
onto the piano key.
But her gentle hand soothed mine small,
Through childish ears I heard her say:
'Darling, it's the sound that counts.'

'Listen to the steps of the Alto-man,
dancing with his lady of the Dante-clan.
Listen closely, you can hear them breathe,
The music may be sad, but the magic doesn't leave.
Turn your ear as the melody mounts—
Oh darling, it's the sound that counts.'

Raven braids and faded dress,
the other girls only wore Sunday best.
At night we ate from yellowed plates,
And mommy always cried
'Cause daddy sang for someone else,
The woman of the night.
I spied them often, I told her then
There's something sad in their music.
Then sighing at her son's fall, her lips would this resound:
'Oh darling, it's the lesson that counts.'

'Listen to the falter of the Tenor-boy,
Falling for the notes of her soprano-ploy.
Listen closely, you can hear them spin,
The music may be sad, but the truth will win.
Turn your ear as the melody mounts—
Oh darling, it's the lesson that counts.'

Then childhood left like a faded dream,
My first love broke my heart at fifteen.
But more broken still was the sound of home—
Daddy moved out and mommy tried,
Before my eyes
To kill herself,
Twice.

I wanted to scream, I wanted to run,
There was something even sad in the rising of the sun.
And what could she say, to soothe my aching soul?
'Oh darling, it's the hope that counts.'

'Listen to the tread of the Bassto-man,
Dark and somber, but there is a plan.
Listen closely, you can hear it change,
The music may be sad, but the light's in range.
Turn your ear as the melody mounts—
Oh darling, it's the hope that counts.'

To this day, I can still hear,
Her voice resounding through the years.
It gave me refuge, she showed me hope,
Despite the sad music, I was able to cope.
And when again, I held her old hand
And kissed her forehead one last time,
A tear crept from my eye
She whispered, 'It's so sad to say goodbye—'
I said
'Darling, it's the love that counts.'

'Listen to the twinkle of the piano-notes,
Dancing like a girl in her faded coat.
Listen closely, almost hear her smile,
The music may be sad, but it's only for a while...
Turn your ear as the melody mounts—
Oh darling, it's the love that counts.'