

## The Tale of the Heavenly Music Room

By Stephen Weinstock

Two souls were walking down the Path of Heaven. They walked by an iridescent stream. They enjoyed each other's company and breathed in the fragrant air. And they looked for something -- an event, an activity, a destination.

The two souls were musicians, though not necessarily in their previous lifetimes, but deep down within their beings. Perhaps they were looking for fellow musicians, a band, or a concert. Their searching turned to yearning.

"Where are we going?" one soul asked as they walked by a tree with beautifully shaped branches. "It's all very pretty, but I want to be in Heaven, not just see it. I mean I'll take this, sure, but only for a short stint."

'Stint' continued walking, while the other soul stopped at a lush garden full of citrus trees and hanging vines. "Look at all this beauty," the other soul said. "Stop and smell the loquats."

'Loquat' hurried to catch up to Stint, who had started up the next hill on the Path of Heaven. "Slow down," Loquat said, "you've got to relax."

"I am," Stint answered. "I have. But is this it -- forever?"

They crested the hill. The road sloped back down into a small vale, and then climbed back up another hill out of sight. In the vale, at the bottom of the hill, stood a small building. It was simple in design, white adobe with red tile roof, and only had tiny windows. It appeared to be a large storage hut or other utilitarian building. When they approached it, Stint wanted to see what was inside.

The door was unlocked, but closed by itself after they entered. Inside they found one large room. The two musicians stood in awe for a few moments.

Finally, Loquat said, "Heaven must be getting whatever you want."

"I doubt it's exactly like that," Stint said. "But I am impressed."

All around them in the room was a great variety of beautiful musical instruments. There were instruments immediately familiar to them, wood, bronze, and bamboo mallet instruments, flutes and horns of various lengths and coiled shapes. There were instruments from the future that we might recognize: a majestic Bösendorfer grand piano, a set of pitched drums, violins, and cellos. And there were many other instruments from times and places long past or faraway. A triangular harp stood seductively in one corner. Shiny tubular devices with different coils, valves, and odd shapes hung on the walls. Every instrument looked brand new, with polished woods of dark and subtle hues, or brilliant metals that glistened even in a room with small windows.

The two musicians grinned childishly at each other and stumbled around the room in a daze. They lightly touched different surfaces and picked up the odd piece to examine it.

Approaching the Bösendorfer, Stint imagined the most scintillating sound. It was a passage from some virtuosic concerto, full of sparkling runs and arpeggios. The delighted soul had never before heard music quite like it, but Stint knew that it was the sound that could only be made by this instrument. Loquat fingered the strings on an elegantly decorated guitar, and heard wild and haunting music from a nomadic camp. Amazed by their fortune, the two souls pulled each other over to various instruments, excited for the other to hear what they were hearing.

“How matchless the sounds are that these instruments could play,” Loquat said.

“I am humbled,” Stint said. “It will be a blissful eternity to hear all these musics and learn how to play them. It will be difficult, it will stretch our minds and ears and fingers.”

“But we have all the time in the world,” Loquat said.

“Let’s get started!” Stint said, particularly anxious to try the piano. Stint pulled out the piano bench and tested it carefully before sitting down. As the soul quieted down, the music coming into Stint’s head ceased. Gingerly, Stint pressed one of the keys.

Nothing happened.

Stint tried it with more force. Still nothing. Fingers pressed different keys, new

combinations, up and down the keyboard, but no sound. Impatient, Stint looked under the keyboard, around the side of the instrument, and finally understood to lift the lid and look inside. Pressing a key again, Stint marveled at the action of the piano, how the hammers jugged up into the air when a key was struck. Why no sound?

“Look at this one,” Loquat said, standing across the room next to a smaller grand piano, a Japanese model. Loquat lifted the lid and looked under. Stint approached, also disappeared under the lid, and immediately recognized the problem.

“There are no strings in the other one,” Stint said.

“No strings?”

“No. When you press a key, it pushes up a hammer that then must strike a string. That makes the sound. Look, I’ll show you on this one.”

Stint saw that the keyboard lid on the smaller piano was closed, and opened it.

“There’s no keys on this one! What’s going on?”

“Don’t worry,” Loquat said, “there’s plenty more toys. Let it go.”

Stint was unconvinced, but Loquat went over to the alluring harp in the corner and plucked a string, but it pulled out from the frame. Other strings broke, some withered to dust.

Stint ran up and pulled a horn down from its peg on the wall. Examining it, the soul found the start of the tube and blew. The sound was a constricted breath. Stint looked at its companions on the wall, tried again, then reported to Loquat:

“No mouthpiece on this one. The others won’t fit it. That one’s melted shut at the end. This one’s full of cracks and holes.”

The two musician-souls eyed one another, peered suspiciously around the room, and then frenetically ran to each instrument to discover its unique, disturbing fault. Everyone was worthless, completely incapable of making a sound, or flawed beyond repair. Even if an instrument was reparable, there were no tools or materials to fix it.

Let’s go,” Stint said. “This is a Hell not a Heaven. I’ll go crazy in here.” Stint stomped over to the door and yanked on it, but it would not budge. Loquat tried it while Stint looked for

another way out, but the windows seemed too small and unbreakable.

“Trapped! Great!” Stint barked. “Here we think we’ve come across a nest of diamonds and there’s nothing to show for it. We’re stuck here with splinters and snapped strings.”

Loquat leaned up against the wall of horns. “Maybe we just enjoy the music we hear in our minds until someone else opens the door.”

Stint had enough of his buddy’s calm rationalizations. “You don’t know anything. Just shut up.” And with that, Stint picked up a mallet next to a marimba with burnt bars and hurled it at Loquat. Loquat ducked, and the mallet struck the bell of a silver horn, making a loud ‘sprong’ sound.

“Nice!” Loquat said. “Nice sound!”

Stint responded to this appreciation by hurling a second mallet at Loquat. This one glanced off a brass trombone and sounded a higher, piercing tone. Loquat picked up the two mallets and began testing other metal pieces. At first Stint was infuriated by Loquat’s noisome testing of the highs and lows of the horn wall’s scales. But as Loquat began playing patterns and rhythms, Stint relaxed and listened more closely. As familiar motifs emerged, Stint looked around the room, and then picked up a pair of violin bows missing most of their catgut hair. Stint strolled over to the smaller piano that had strings and tried tapping the bow tips on the strings. A delicate pinging texture floated out from beneath the piano lid, and joined Loquat’s mallet rhythms.

Stint continued playing inside the piano as Loquat grabbed a pair of cracked tortoise shells, no doubt from some ancient percussive device. Placing them together against pursed lips, Loquat moaned into the shells. An eerie, reedy song filled the room.

Stint stopped his bow work when he heard Loquat’s mournful song, and listened as his musician companion formed an ever-rising melody and then settled back down to a central tone. Soon Stint added a vocal counterpoint, employing a wiry mesh torn from a futuristic organ, and the duet spun out in harmony, in weaving lines, and then slowed to a graceful cadence. The two musicians smiled knowingly at each other.

By turns, the two tried out every instrument for its unexpected and unintended sound potential. They banged, plucked, sawed, blew on parts meant to be struck, struck on parts meant to be bowed. They supplemented these new sounds with their own voices and percussion made by their own bodies.

It was endless delight. Inevitably, they heard a pounding on the door, and being unable to open up, entreated their visitors to open the door themselves. They were greeted by curious souls who had heard the strange and ethereal music emanating from the little building. Their first audience. Soon others stopped at the music room to hear the newly invented sounds. Other souls sat in. Stint and Loquat found no end to their amusement in the music room.

No end.

The End

**Stephen Weinstock bio:** Stephen Weinstock's series, *1001, The Reincarnation Chronicles*, concerns a qaraq, a group of souls who discover they have shared 1001 past lives. Learn more on his site, [www.qaraqbooks.com](http://www.qaraqbooks.com). Besides creating fantastical worlds, Stephen has worked as a dance musician/teacher at Juilliard and the 'Fame' School, coordinated NYU's Musical Theater Writing Program, and composed the musical *Rock and Roy*, with Barry Jay Kaplan, about the double life of Rock Hudson.