

The Myth of Perfection
By: Jordanna Matlock

My creation myth, the memory that “haunts and obsesses”¹ my being, forced me to into a role of an immigrant artist merely wandering and instinctually wetting my beak in the life sustaining necessity that is music. Music was never a metaphorical “clash of life and death” *until it was*. A girl that had just begun her musical discovery, a blossoming “storyteller[s] of the world”² and a man that had abruptly ended his. There was a time where music was something I had access to, a person, a father that understood the heartbreak and triumphs yet fell victim to the ideal of perfection.

My first memory of music was laying down in my bed, comfy under my covers, getting ready to sleep while my dad sat beside me and played the guitar.

My dad was a trained classical guitar player. He was a smart man, an educated one, good at pretty much everything and always got good grades in school. It was effortless for him. He was the type of student that would show up for the exam the last day after having missed every class throughout the semester and get an A. My dad received a master’s degree in classical guitar performance from the San Francisco Conservatory of Music. His dad was a musician, not a formal one by any means, but enjoyed playing the guitar, country music, to my dad when he was little. My mom however is not a musician. She is basically tone deaf but she has an incredible sense and love for music, probably from being a teenager in the 60’s.

¹ Danticat, Edwidge. *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.

² Danticat, Edwidge. *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work*.

My parents met at Orange Coast Community College and were together until they started studying at the prestigious UC Irvine. Mom tells me it was love at first sight. She fell for the long hair, handsome musician type that was my dad. She enjoyed watching him in the spotlight on stage, bearing his soul to the audience, hoping that one day he could be that open with her. The truth was, he would *never* be able to be that open with her, with me, or with anyone for that matter, as he was with his instrument.

I remember the day my dad told me he was going to sell his guitar. I was in high school and was officially what I called a 'real' musician. I knew I wanted to go on and study music and it was becoming an increasingly important part of my life. It was a hot day, and after a long volleying game of my dad trying to pass his guitar down to me and then taking it back, I knew this day was different when he called and asked to meet him. I came downstairs and saw his car out in front of my mom's apartment. There he was with his guitar. He pulled it out of his trunk almost as if to shelter his eyes from the pain of looking at it in his back seat as he drove to the pawn shop. My dad said to me with sad eyes, "I'm going to sell my guitar." He was hurt, scared and defeated. He said, "If I can't be the best, why play?"

In a moment, all the classical guitar etudes and exercises flooded back to me. I saw my dad sitting there on my bed when my parents were still together and before the tragedy of my brother passing away. I heard them in my ear and the sound shot through my chest like a bullet as I lost my breath and started to sweat. As a musician whose musical journey had just begun, it was the most painful thing for me to hear from him.

I went from somewhere of knowing to somewhere of uncertainty. My father turning away from being an ‘interpreter’ of the world forced me to interpret it for myself. It was a sort of “exile from paradise,”³ thrust into a sudden loss of innocence. I doubted my vision for music for the first time. It couldn’t last forever. Never had I felt so afraid. Not afraid of human tragedy but fear for the daunting *duty* of an immigrant artist forever wandering.

Yet that pounding in my chest and the sweat in my palms came also came with such an urgency as if it was “beyond the scope of my own life” to prevail. It was my music’s life or death. Almost as if his life song ending was so that “the rest of us [artists] could live.”⁴ I knew there was going to be self-doubt, “it’s a staple for most artists.”⁵ It pushes us farther as storytellers of the world. That day his music died, it breathed sustaining life into mine. My dad falling victim to the ideal of perfection made it clear it’s the fear of *not* existing that keeps me creating. The question has been asked “Can music save your mortal soul?”⁶ Yes, it transcends thoughts and as a communicating artist I must carry on. I have no other choice.

³ Danticat, Edwidge. *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work*.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ McLean, Don, writer. *American Pie*. Capitol, 2003, MP3.

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Danticat, Edwidge. *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work*. Princeton:

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