



# ABC CLARION

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## Essay Competition First Place

### This piano B<sup>b</sup>, It's in Treble!

by Adam Deng

"Yes...for his Grade 8 exam, Adam got an 85..."

When I heard that telephone call from my piano teacher... "No!"

How did I only get an 85? The last two years, I had distinction... Now, only merit? That morning I was hopeful; the same evening wrought pain, indignation, apprehension, nuisances, and overstraining (piano)!

Sometime later, the nightmare supervened. I was in the examination room, smashing wrong notes, and sitting languidly on a diseased bench. Perhaps my unimpressive playing made it look atrophied.

All the pixels of the dream were buzzing in my head, a sea of black and white. When I came downstairs, I saw the piano

wide open, crying with its suddenly dilapidated white teeth.

This Kawai Piano would've enjoyed me practicing on it daily two years ago. At that time, I learned my pieces extensively, squeezing lemons of delight into musical juice. Notes became dancers. Together, they converged into a beautiful manuscript filled with music. In the months before the exam, I didn't practice much -- a meager minute seemingly an hour.

In the transient time I played piano, I ramed my way through the pieces. It was frustration whenever I hit the wrong note. "I'm leaving!" I would scream. Then I would jump onto the couch, too.

There was neither feeling nor rhythm, but a crass killing of grace. All patience had decrescended into rest. Piano wasn't

my hobby. It was merely an accolade, something that would get me recognition. I played minimally, and at piano lessons I was oblivious to what the teachers had to mention about the piece.

My mom cried, "Adam, you have no feeling for the music! You've got to savor it, not wait for the piece to be over!" for the nth time.

From that point on, I started listening to other pianists show their understanding of the pieces. They found the piano entertaining, joyous. I looked at how stationery could produce such an effect. In 8 years of toil, the meaning of the myriad lessons I took with my piano teacher became convergent. It was the feeling that I missed all along -- to get a proper sense for the selection! I was elated. I never wanted to stop exploring fraises!

Whenever there was a dilemma, I delved into improvement of dynamics, tempo, or interpretation. Eventually, I began savoring the music wholly, from Bach and his

religious themes to Khachaturian with his Armenian schemes. From deciphering the work to playing it, I thought each style as a specialty. I have a famous tenet: "Expression is greater than playing the right notes."

When there was a problem, I ardently went back to fix it. Piano's wasn't a job though, it was expressing feeling through musical eloquence. Come time for the next exam, I wasn't nervous or happy-go-lucky. I had the performance in my grip, knowing that each piece was a life to me.

When the results came, I wasn't surprised: It was a 100.

I can enjoy the evenings now.

### Judges' Comment:

The writer took compositional risks -- risks that, for the most part, succeeded.

The essay showed that the pianist had to love the music, not the competition, did a wonderful job of meeting the assignment on learning from failure. It was a good narrative and a good lesson.

### Break Even

by Nicole Cheng

No, I'm not excited. No, not even a little bit. No, I don't miss it at all. No, no, no.

Each year, it seems that you undergo the same exact ritual. Your mind begins to pick up on the fact that liberation is coming to an end, but your consciousness suppresses these horrid thoughts, because it's just too painful to process. So you don't. You don't understand just how close the storm is until every crevasse of your being is flooded. The wave of realization approaches, but you are so captivated by your own world that you don't even acknowledge reality until it's too late and you are utterly drenched.

And you can't seem to figure out why this process is so painstakingly difficult to undergo. We literally go through it every single year. Every. Single. Year. Still, with so much practice, it never gets any easier. If you've felt this sensation of dreading the arrival of something with every inch of your being, you already know what I'm talking about. Yeah, that's it: school.

All right, so it's pretty obvious that you're not actually against school. You just don't always enjoy getting up at ridiculously early hours, making annoying morning commutes, and having to somehow learn while you're half-asleep. But no, you don't feel an ounce of resent for this government-sanctioned learning facility, because you understand the value of education. Still, this reluctant acceptance of school as a part of your life does not change the fact that going back after a blissful summer is probably one of the most

ominous, dreadful experiences of your life.

That's not all. It goes on. In fact, it has been going on for about a decade of your life, and chances are, you still have a long journey ahead of you. And yeah, it kind of sucks sometimes. Sometimes you get so tired that even the halls of your school begin to seem as good of a place as any to set up camp and take a ten hour nap. Sometimes your brain just doesn't work after being overwhelmed, and you confidently decide that  $5 + 7$  is equal to 13. Sometimes the material is convoluted to the point that your head begins to physically hurt. Sometimes you write so much that your hand cramps up and cannot move for a good few minutes. Sometimes you wonder if the torment is worth it, because it can be hard to believe that these arduous burdens you have right now will amount to anything. Sometimes you decide to give up.

But sometimes you learn a fun fact in class that makes you smile uncontrollably. And sometimes you have a hilarious class clown who makes clever comments that you could only dream of coming up with. Sometimes you get a teacher who's just so passionate and in love with teaching that you can't help but to emulate that fervor yourself. Sometimes you catch your curiosity getting the best of you, and you realize that you have, once again, fallen in love with knowledge. So you decide that it's not time to give up -- not yet, because maybe, just maybe, you're actually gaining something from school, and you'll eventually break even.

### K-pop to American Pop

by Tanya Wang

Chaelin Lee, better known as CL by her fans, is a very famous South Korean singer-songwriter, rapper, and model. She was born in Seoul, but she was lucky enough to spend much of her early life in Japan and France. She trained with JYP Entertainment before becoming an artist under YG Entertainment and a member of the girl group 2NE1. What's so special about her? Well, she has gone from a popular singer in Korea to an American pop star now.

Although CL is still working to gain the attention of most of the American audience, she is doing quite well. On October 15, 2014, she announced that she had a plan to debut as a solo artist the following year in the United States, teaming up with Scooter Braun as her manager. On November 21, 2015, she premiered her first single "Hello Bi+ches" through a music video launch on the Noisey website. This song was a teaser for her first upcoming EP "Lifted" and the first solo song that's not part of a 2NE1 album. So far the songs that have been announced for the upcoming EP are "Birthday", "Fallin'", "Lifted", and "One". The title song from her EP was released on August 19, 2016. CL has had

much success in the US, even performing on the Late Late Show with James Corden!

Before CL came to the US to expand her audience, she was in the girl group 2NE1, originally 21. Her band mates include Bom, Sandara Park, and Minzy. The group collaborated with label-mates Big Bang for the song "Lollipop" before officially debuting on May 17, 2009. They have won many awards from their two studio albums: To Anyone (2010) and Crush (2014). Their second EP delighted many fans with the song "I Am the Best", which won them their 2nd "Artist of the Year" award and is widely considered to be their signature and most popular song. That same song even debuted at #1 on Billboard's World Digital Songs chart.

Around 2014, CL started doing solo projects, co-composing the music for the tracks "Crush", "If I Were You", and "Baby I Miss You". She also started composing solo songs and wrote the lyrics for "MTBD", as well as the track "Scream".

Overall, CL has had an amazing history in the music industry, whether in Korea or in the US. All her fans can't wait to see what else she has for us this year.

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