

Rachmaninoff Makes Me Cry

By Theresa Cocolin

If I had been driving toward the west into a brilliant winter sunset, or if it had been autumn with trees ablaze all around me, it might have turned out differently. But that evening I was heading east into a dusky, winter landscape, and everything looked as gray as my life seemed. The leafless trees did not appear as lace against the sky as they had in happier days, only skeletal and barren. I was coming home after working the week-end at my second part-time job. I had a full-time job also, trying to make ends meet, a woman past middle-age with no particular job skills to qualify for a position that would make only one job necessary.

The radio was turned to NPR and the program was one of beautiful classical music that I love. I suppose I was hoping it would soothe the savage breast, troubled breast, or lonely breast, whatever adjective I might have felt at the time. This was before the British invaded the station. Then the song began, Rachmaninoff's Rhapsody On A Theme of Paganini, 18th Variation, one that I will always remember as the song that opened the flood gates. The tears finally came, letting me feel again. The strings and piano played the music that my soul was feeling, but then could not name.

Years later, when I was telling a dear friend about how the music affected me, he questioned me about what emotions the song evoked.

"Was it about all you had missed, about how you life was not the way you wanted?"

"I don't know what it was," I told him. "I just know I could finally cry again."

After talking with him I found a CD with the beautiful song on it and played it again. What was it in the music that made me feel it so strongly? I listened, concentrated on each swell of the violins, each stroke of the piano keys and knew at last.

It was a song of yearning for all the dreams we have that never come true, for the loves we lost, for the wrong road taken with no chance to go back and walk the one we should have chosen.

In Robert Frost's poem, The Road Not Taken, the final verse begins, "I shall be telling this with a sigh," and most of us will recognize that emotion, and realize we have come to the diversion in the road more than one time. We wonder how our lives might have been if we had chosen the other path. But what would we have lost if we had? Our children? Someone we have dearly loved?

So we will have only fleeting thoughts of what might have been, vaporous scenes that soon disappear with the reality of our days and get on with life as it is.

Perhaps there are some for whom life has always been wonderful, their dreams have come true, and they have found more than just a contentment in their lives. But for the most of us, we take our joy in small increments, and yearn for more.

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