

The Dread Cordell Cummings

Music is an odd thing. It's the one medium that allows you to see inside the composer's emotions and logic without the use of your eyes. To see the music performed live, to use your ears and eyes to understand the song—it captures your heart, soul and breath. The performance enchants the listeners in such a way that nothing in real life seems to matter for that short duration. But what the crowd doesn't realize is that a predominant part of this energy originates from themselves. The crowd affects the musicians' performance as much as the performance affects the crowd. Along with the music, this exchange of energy is what makes the performance so artistic.

There we stood, in the Unicorn, as Shiftone, a quartet of musicians. With our instruments in hand and lights on our faces, we patiently awaited our cues to begin the first song as our singer/guitarist started playing. The crowd turnout was amazingly enormous; this was definitely my first significant gig. I was frightened, nervous, anxious and paranoid; all these negative emotions could be compiled into an imaginative dread. I glanced around the room, looking for some sort of cure for this disease known as *the dread* (an imaginary disease I stole from the play *Ghost* by Ibsen). But as I searched, the dread grew stronger. Seeing all these unrecognizable faces in the audience caused sweat to bleed all over my face. I hadn't even begun to play, and already I felt all eyes on my mistakes I had yet to create. The crowd had a hold on me; they were the source of the dread. As I played and allowed the music to take control of my soul, the dread slowly dissipated. I convinced myself it was all a hoax. I played contently, hiding in the background.

Halfway through our set, I grew tired and dehydrated. All my body's water supply dripped from my fingers, and I wasn't even jumping around. At least the dread had not returned. Naturally, as soon as I was comfortable with everything, our lead singer broke a string and cried out "Bass solo!" into the microphone. I stepped out to face the crowd and the dread hit me once more like two cars colliding at one-hundred kilometers per hour.

I continued to play the routine bass line, anticipating the moment to start the solo. Something was wrong because I couldn't begin soloing. My excuse was that the rhythm guitarist was still playing. I indicated to him that he shouldn't play during a rhythm section solo; he immediately halted. I took a deep breath and continued to play the riff. Fans screamed out whoops of encouragement, but it wasn't enough; I was too intimidated. But they weren't laughing; they awaited my musical release. I realized they were moved and hypnotized by our music, they wouldn't care if I foul up. This sudden understanding pushed me into the most moving solo I've ever played. This liberation of my true talents was caused by my prevalent fear, the crowd. I started off by playing the vocal melody line on the bass. Then I played double stops and arpeggios to woo the crowd. I then advanced into the crowd and wiggled my butt in a friend's face while continuing the solo. This later on went to be my signature solo move; it received quite a few laughs. I then finished my one-person act with a funk style slap technique running up and down a Dorian scale. The crowd cheered and screamed in amazement.

The dread was gone from that moment on for two reasons: I was so into the music that all my surroundings vanished, and I grasped that the crowd was equally bewitched by the music as we were. They were never the dread, the fear of error was the dread.

I erred three times the remainder of the set, and no one noticed. Even I barely noticed due to the fact that I was having so much fun. The crowd was making us excited by us getting them excited. This upward spiral of energy is one of the best parts of the show. The performance will always have a hold on the crowd; but in turn, the crowd will always have a hold on the performers. The best shows aren't the ones where we played our best, but where the crowd reaction was remarkable. I may not have had that dread if there was no one around, but I know I wouldn't have been enjoying myself as much as I did if the room was empty. The audience is as much a part of the show as are the performers.



*My lute lay there, bound with the small white buds
Which, laughing, this bright morn thou brought and wreathed
Around it as I sang; but with that wail
Dying across the vines and purple slopes,
And breaking on its strings, I did not care
To waken music—nor in truth could force
My voice or fingers to it. So I strayed
Where hangs thy best loved armour on the wall,
And pleased myself by filling it with thee.*

Isabella Valancy Crawford (Toronto), from "Curtius"