



Take Note!

A couple of weeks ago we entered September, and society around me began to make the switch to autumn patterns: the convenience store where I buy my dinner salad most days set up a large display of fresh 'oden' (one of the most popular cold-weather foods), the insect sounds from our gardens changed from cicadas to crickets (much easier on the ears!), and - the most visible change - the kids went back to school after their summer vacation.

This latter event is the one that I was waiting for all the way through August. Don't misunderstand - it's not that the local kids bother me while they are on vacation; honestly speaking, we never see them playing outside at all these days anyway. It's just that *one* kid in particular has been 'bothering me' steadily all summer long, day in and day out.

(I perhaps should be careful what I write here, but as it seems quite unlikely that the young lady in question will ever read this, I think I can safely tell you this story without causing undue embarrassment to anybody concerned ...)

It's the girl who lives next door. She is currently in middle school, and seems to be involved in any number of extra-curricular activities, including sports clubs, evening cram classes, and ... weekly piano lessons.

Her sports activities don't concern me at all, nor do her cram studies. But the piano training is of a more public nature. All through this long and hot summer, everybody in this area has been keeping doors and windows wide open in an attempt to keep a bit cooler. One downside to that is that we all lose a bit of privacy, as I wrote in a previous story a few weeks ago. Even the most casual conversations between family members are unavoidably overheard by the neighbours on each side, and when it comes to something like piano practice, well, everybody on the whole street is forced to listen, like it or not!

Now in general, I have no problem with this; I understand that it 'comes with the territory'. I have chosen to live in a Japanese city, so I must accept the consequences. But what has been driving me crazy over the past month or so are the wrong notes!

It seems that in her final lesson of the previous term, the young lady was given an assignment for her summer holidays - to learn the first movement of a simple Mozart piano sonata (in C Major, K 545). I listened as she began work on this very popular piece, stepping through it slowly as she first learned the notes. But at one point - at a place where the two hands pass a simple pattern back and forth - she misread her sheet music, and played a few wrong notes. And to my horror, she seemed not to notice this, and continued to play it incorrectly every time she came to that spot.



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And so it has continued, all summer long, day after day. She practiced in the early morning. She practiced again in the afternoon, and she practiced again in the evening. And every single time she approached that passage, I tensed up in 'anticipation' of what was coming, and then winced as her fingers landed on the wrong keys. Each and every time.

I thought about perhaps going over there and giving her a mini-lesson, but decided against it, as it would just cause her (and her family) embarrassment. I also considered taping a copy of the sheet music - with those notes circled in red - to their front door one night, but thought that this would just be too anti-social. There was nothing to do but to wait it out - to wait for September, and the resumption of her lessons.

And the other day - finally! - she must have gone for her first lesson of the fall and been corrected by her teacher, because she has now begun playing that passage perfectly. The ordeal is over!

I suspect though, that this is going to take quite a long time to flush from my 'music memory', and any time I happen to hear that piece in the future, I'll be feeling tension as that passage approaches. It makes me wonder just what 'pain' I inflicted on my own family, back when I myself was a beginner musician!

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