

Describe a place or environment where you are perfectly content. What do you do or experience there, and why is it meaningful to you?

Only two components are necessary: the bench and the 88s. I escape to it in times of sadness, anger, or nervousness, for no matter how I feel before, I know that sitting at the piano will transform any such feelings. I could be in front of hundreds of people, or I may be the only one present. I might be in a large auditorium or in a practice room the size of a smart car. While I sit and play, it is as if the notes dispel any negative emotions. It clears my mind, and I focus not on what is around me but on what comes from the hammers and wires as I press on the keys. So long as I may conjure whatever notes come to mind, I am content.

But I do not always go to the piano to relieve stress. I might bring my backpack because I have found that playing not only clears my mind but also amplifies my studying. Often during lunch at my school, while everyone is eating or playing soccer, I flee to a practice room in the band hall and lock the door. I take out my notes for the next test or quiz, place them on the piano, and study. While I read, I run my fingers over the keys and play the notes that help me retain more information. I am able to focus as I play, and I need not look at my fingers to assure myself of their dance. I have tremendous confidence in my playing, and invoking different chords and notes while I study seems to transfer into confidence for the test.

I am unsure how I began this habit, but it seems to work. I suppose that because music comes to me easily, I turn my studying into music as well. If I am reading a book for a quiz, I play diminished chords if the characters struggle in a predicament, or I play Holst's Jupiter if the characters triumph. In repeating the conjugations of Latin verbs for a vocabulary quiz aloud, I may repeat the same four chords in a progression over and over, as if playing something repetitious will help my memorization. Even while studying theorems for calculus, I cycle through the circle of fifths with arpeggios. I find a melodious relation between the two: just as calculus builds on and compliments itself, so too does the circle of fifths seem to fulfill itself and sound inherently right.

What excites you intellectually, really?

Ancient languages. For example, how Ancient Greek can create a word for anything, like apocolocytosis, the process of transforming into a pumpkin. I wonder what the Ancient Greek word is for eating a pumpkin that was once a man?