



Chords

In another life, I would understand music to the level where notes on the page transferred to keys on a piano at lightning speed, or better still, no sheet music was needed at all and the harmonies of the universe were fixed in my mind. In reality, that's not the case. Chords are academic ideas, knots to be untied and played slower than a snail on a day trip to the bottom of the garden.

I can see the logic of chord structures, how they fit into scales, and how you can play around with them to harmonise melodies and make sense of the most beautiful music. But to create them out of thin air, to hear them and know which fits where, which does what job and which is the one and only correct chord in the correct inversion for a specific phrase, that is magic.

Take the simplest triad, add a dominant seventh, flatten the fifth – no sharpen the fifth, add a ninth, add a sharp eleven, invert it, invert it again, let it flow into the tonic via a Neapolitan VI - if you think I know what that sounds like, you are wrong. You are also wrong if you think I understand it. I follow rules, repeat what I've heard and read, but I can't visualize it nor play it without a painstaking few minutes staring at a keyboard.

So much in life is parallel to this rule finding process, figuring out what fits where and making the right decisions at crucial moments. Take any piece by Chopin – a nocturn, for example. Change one note and it is no longer the same piece. Perfection is woven into the music. Somehow, Frederic knew exactly which chords to use, how to break them up and how to link them. Mozart, too. One of the stipulations of Amadeus, the original play then film, was not to alter a single note of the master, even if every scene and dialogue were total fabrications.

The rules for music composition are complex, but they are nothing compared to the rules for living the Life Fulfilled. Every single moment and every thought can seem arbitrary. Putting the moments of the day together into some semblance of order often seems like the definition of impossibility. There are no direction signs, no notation marks to tell us the correct words, nor indications signalling which actions lead to the best outcomes.

The result is a discordant world with baffling noises, harsh clashes, few rests, conflicting phrases and symphonies that have no pattern, no magic, no structure, no love, nothing but noise. I can play a single Chopin chord and there is more beauty in it than anything that seems to have filtered through the past twenty-four hours, twenty-four days, two hundred and forty years. Nothing of that resonance is reflected in the days of our lives or the lives of others suffering under the burden of this random disharmony.

I listen to a Schubert impromptu, a Mozart or Beethoven sonata, and I sense an inner truth built of rules, themselves built on experience and feeling. Very little that comes down to us during a typical day shows any indication of blessed harmony and a recognisable structure. I try to visualize life as a reflection of masterful music, but I can't. It is as if the wonder and beauty of a classical masterpiece is there to taunt us, to suggest that wonder and beauty exist, but only here, in this miniature marvel, not in the pulsating chaos of life.