

What is Silence?

Joe Lever

Isolating. Healing. Rare. Here.

Silence is scary. The silence of the night convinces us that something is lurking, waiting in the shadows; it is the frailest of protective veils at any moment to be pierced. In conversations silence hangs over us, drawn out second by excruciating second, as we wait for a response that does not come; wishing they would say something - anything - if only to break the suffocat- counteract the loudness of a world of people ing silence growing in between.

Silence is beautiful. A natural, peaceful silence which hangs over the hillside before dawn is a blanket drawn across a world at rest; it is tranquil, and safe, and right. The easy silence of two people comfortable in each other's company, where the words are felt without having to be said, makes the world feel simply good. The best

Scary. Beautiful. Needed. Hard to find. art speaks silently, wordlessly, an instantaneous Isolating Healing Page Healing. transmission of feeling; none of its energy is lost

> Silence is needed. We need it to think straight, to take stock, reflect. We need it to sleep, switch off, press pause on a world that always has something to say. We need it to focus in on just one thing, to pick out a single note buried within an orchestra of noise. We need it desperately to shouting over each other, shouting each other down, shouting because everyone else is already shouting. There is no room left for silence in these interactions, and so we need it all the

> Silence is hard to find. The streets are always rumbling, the buildings always whirring, even the trees are always whistling/rustling in the

wind. Headphones in, music blaring; on a phone call, heels hitting the pavement; in the pub, shouting to be heard over the throng of voices competing for airtime. Everything is noise nowadays, and noise is everywhere - the city breathing it in, expelling it out again in the lights and sirens and advertisements and cries and shouts and laughs, the noisiness of life itself. And even when you do draw the curtains on the world outside, the noise echoes on inside your

Silence is isolating. It separates us from the world, makes us outsider, other; it draws a bounding line around what and who is deemed to matter. To be silent is to be forgotten, to be met with silence is to be ignored, to experience silence is to be excluded from the conversation, left out, left behind

Silence is healing. It gives us time and space to process, time to feel and space to be. It slows time down, affords us moments of quiet contemplation, or quiet observation, or even quiet nothingness. Where we make time for silence, we make time for healing.

Silence is rare. It cannot be mined and refined, packaged and sold and stored, saved for later. There is no conversation, nor conservation effort which can restore its presence or preserve its place. All talk destroys it, all argument undoes

Silence is here. In the small moments, the side streets, the spaces between. Can vou hear it?

Silence is scary, and it is beautiful.

Silence is needed, but it is hard to find.

Silence can be isolating, and still it can be

Silence is rare to hear, but silence I swear is



White Text

Siddiq Islam

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I type with white text on white paper.
                I read with my eyes' empty holes,
The space takes up space so it is or it isn't?
The empty crevasses that emptiness fills.
              "I think in the gaps between thinking.
               escapes from my dry, hollow throat.
It's funny how how loudly the silences echo.
It's funny how much no idea can connote.
                I pray when there's nothing to pray for.
              ," God answers to such bold requests.
What would there be if I took away "
The cracks in the cracks where the nothingness rests.
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Cute Ideas to Spend Valentine's Day (In Silence)

Siddiq Islam

The most romantic day of the year has come around again. It's time to grab a partner and try something part Hara come. something new. Here are some romantic ideas for you to spend your Valentine's with your special one in utter silence.

Cute Ideas to Spend Valentine's Day (In Silence)

Silent disco Silent film Silent barbecue Study session in the library's silent section Silent trip to the zoo (make sure all the animals are asleep) Attend a concert (bring extra-large earmuffs) Cook a romantic meal together (chew with your mouths closed) Coffee shop date where you don't talk

Candlelit dinner where you don't talk Romantic walk in the park, watching a golden sunset as you hold hands but you don't talk

> Board games (in silence) Hugging (in silence)

Sit in a cold room and contemplate God

Cuddles (in silence)

Have a very awkward conversation about your relationship and let the silence that ensues take care of itself.

Fall asleep together <3

Sweeney Todd: A Review

Jerric Chong

of the many celebrated musicals penned by the late Stephen Sondheim (1930–2021), Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street doubtless stands out with its lurid and gritty depiction of 19th-century London. Inspired by Victorian 'penny dreadfuls', it tells the story of the convicted barber's return and thirst for vengeance against Judge Turpin, who unjustly transported Todd to Australia for 15 years, ravished his wife Lucy, and adopted his daughter Johanna. Descending into madness and misanthropy, Todd resolves to kill all his clients with a slit of his razor, disposing of the corpses in Mrs Lovett's meat pies sold downstairs.

Sweeney Todd is indisputably a challenging musical to stage successfully, and even more so in the thick of a prevailing public-health crisis, which led to many cast and crew absences leading up to the performances as coronavirus cases climbed in Oxford. Nevertheless, the company rose admirably to the unprecedented occasion, accomplishing one of the most enjoyable student pro-

ductions I have had the pleasure of attending and certainly the finest since the advent of the pandemic – under the leadership of director (and Orielensis) Imogen Albert, with producer Harvey Dovell of 00Productions.

The characters of Sondheim's musical are irreducibly multifaceted and psychologically complex, but the cast delivered most exceptionally, with each role played with flair, musicality, and close attention to evolving relationships and character arcs. Daniel McNamee undeniably stood out for a dramatic portrayal of Sweeney Todd, exemplifying adroitly varying interactions with other characters on stage as he sinks into a demoniacal murder spree, while Maggie Moriarty was in her element playing Mrs Lovett both slatternly in the first act and kempt in the second. I was also struck by Gracie Oddie-James's frenzied Beggar Woman and Molly Jones's convincing Toby. Acting as a Greek chorus, the ensemble (including Oriel's Saskia Jamieson Bibb) fulfilled a variety of roles with great vigour. Additionally to be commended is Peter Todd, who midst of extraordinary obstacles, and moreover was not only an ensemble member but stepped to the recovery and renewal of the cultural secin as Anthony for one performance at short no- tor as we gradually make our way out of the pantice due to unforeseen circumstances.

Despite the serious themes that Sweeney Todd explores, Sondheim imbues needed humour into the musical; nowhere else was this more apparent than with McNamee and Moriarty's comedic interactions in 'By the Sea'. The band, directed by Isaac Adni, provided an impeccable accompaniment to the acting, underscoring every moment of a musical that is mostly sungthrough. The ravishing duet 'Kiss Me', sung by Cormac Diamond (Anthony) and Hannah O'Sullivan (Johanna), was another highlight. Dialogue was generally clear, and any deviations from Sondheim's original were thankfully slight.

Credit must also be due to the following Orielenses, in no particular order besides alphabetical: Harry Baigent (percussion), Della Darvill (welfare officer), Dowon Jung (marketing and set assistant), Max Penrose (co-choreographer), Katie Rennie (videography), and Tom Wild (trumpet). Their pivotal efforts, in concert with dozens of others', contributed to an especially successful production that overcame what must have been immense challenges to pull off a show that now stands as a testament to what a group of dedicated students can achieve even in the

demic; the show was played to a practically full house throughout its run and was rightly acclaimed with standing ovations. Rather than 'a hole in the world like a great black pit', then, the light at the end of the coronaviral tunnel is certainly bright.



Sweeney Todd ran from Wednesday 2 February to Saturday 5 February at the Oxford Playhouse.

UPCOMING ISSUES

Issue #75 – AFRAID Submissions by 13 February (Sunday, 5th week)

Issue #76 - SPRING

Submissions by 27 February (Sunday, 7th week)

You can read The Poor Print online at www.thepoorprint.com, where you can find all of our previous and future issues, as well as pieces not included in the print editions.

The Silence of the Tuck

Anonymous

There's silence from the Tuck Shop, And silence from the sod, Who promised food for Oriel. His name is Hamish Dodd.

He made a speech with candied words;
He smiled and won the crowd,
But then the silence settled in,
A monstrous, empty sound.

Oh fuck the tuck AND Hamish Dodd, You led us all astray. You promised sweets and tasty treats

And chocolate bars for days.

Instead we're left an empty fridge
And shelves that gather dust.
We hear no sound from Hamish Dodd.
There's silence from the tuck.

'Wait!' I shout, 'there's still some time!
And I would make the bet:
The bitter taste you left behind
May still be sweetened yet ...'



Editor's note: This poem has been published with the permission of Hamish Dodd.

The Silence Boy

Noah S. Adhikari

There is a boy called Jack, and he is called a silence boy.

He looks very smart, but he doesn't talk because he is scared.

I have no idea why he is scared It's just how he is!



Noah is part of the Oriel family (you can meet his dad, Puru, in the lodge). He is 7 years old, and we are very proud to be the first to publish his work!

The Silence Four Pitches of Silence

Monim Wains



It had been a crazy day. We had heard news in the morning that the data centre had shut down. Four hours of our services completely blacking out, losing I don't know how many millions. Nothing like this had happened before, and none of us knew what to do. The boardroom was buzzing with panic. Hushed voices failing to hide the sharp notes of worry that all of us felt. We were already in a dangerous state, our profits far lower than expected last quarter. We couldn't afford this

I zoned out for a second, trying to remember what usually happens in a company facing disaster like this ...

Oh, it was layoffs. We would lose jobs, if we didn't fix things soon. How many? How soon? My bills were due next week, I needed the paycheque.

I don't think I was the only one thinking that. I looked around a sea of wrinkled faces, pulled taught with tension, eyes blank but running through the same scenario as me. Unthinkingly pulling faces of anxious anticipation.

Every few seconds, a new thought would appear to them, and they would suggest it to the person they sat next to, all of us trying to come up with some miracle to avoid this disaster.

Slowly, as no one voice piped up with the solution, the volume got louder and louder, more frantic as the dig for ideas became a graver concern. Finger tapping and pen clicking accompanied the hurried speech. My own feet refused to stay still. Usually that would work some stress out of me, but today, it felt like the spring was just getting tightened. I reached into my mind for anything I could suggest. Nothing echoed back.

Suddenly, the door swung open, and the CEO walked in. Her steps came with ease, as if it was any other day. We all got up off our chairs (it was an old-fashioned office) but she hushed the clamouring, and motioned for us all to sit. She walked all the way past each of us, to the seat at the end of the table, left empty and waiting. She gave us a quick look, before pulling it out and taking her place. She put the file in her hand in front of her, placed her pen on the right, exactly straight, exactly as always. Her hands turned through the pages, taking her time, until she laid it flat, open at the right place. She smoothed the pages with her hands before leaning back into her chair and looking up. Her face wasn't smiling, but neither was it strained. She was serious, business as usual.

Not a word was said, as she surveyed the room, exuding calm. Before she had said a word, we knew we would be fine.



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Boom, burst the air. A deep dull roar of flame floated into the clouds. A rumbling of the earth that shuddered through my bones. I was thrown, flung to the ground like the hand of God had swatted me down. My hands tried to hold onto something, but found only shards of glass that slipped through my fingers. The windows had shattered. What the hell was going on?

I dragged myself up, heaving with my arms despite the daze. It took me a while to get my footing, in my very own room as well. I looked out, past the bare grating, where there had once been a window. It was now no more than a portrait of terror.

The day had been bright in the morning, sunshine peeking through the clouds. Now, it seemed as if a curtain had been drawn across the sky. A dark shadow unfolded along the city. What was left of it, anyway. I could see it spreading downhill, dousing the houses in black. The colours I was used to, blue and bright and green, left twisted and smudged in a red-yellow hue. Pillars and shards punctuated the rubble, as the streets crumbled before my eyes.

All I could hear, all there was that rang in the air, was a wail. An incomprehensible cacophony of thousands in fear, confused and forlorn, despair upon despair. What the hell was going on?

The ground gave way again, bellowing an answer, as if I, mere mortal, could dare to question its will. The almightiest sound of the heavens bawled out from the mountain, and thunder clapped down from the sky. I crashed again, flat onto my back, a rag doll at the mercy of whoever had wrenched the planet in its grip. There was a flash of the brightest orange that pierced through the dust, before a film of bright grey light into the mist.

I understood. The mountain had erupted.

We were suspicious of the warnings. We had worried a little whether we were at risk. But we had not known. How I wish we had known. But it was too late now.

The earth rang, reverberated, sang with the deep bass of my doom. My eyes stared up at the column of fire that had risen over the sun. So the roof had given way. Three quick *thuds*, as the walls collapsed around me. A boulder to my left, a pillar to my right. And finally, one flat lid to enclose me in. I was in, entrapped, encoffined.

The thick brick muffled the racket outside. It was black, right on top of me. My eyes took a while to adjust, once I had wiped away the dust. There was nothing to adjust to. Just darkness lying on top of me. There was nothing I could hear any more.



 $\mathcal{A}_{1...}$

Friday. It had been a long week, but good. The work had been tough, but progress was good. I slipped off my headphones, and the soft kerfuffle of the office re-entered. It was about six o'clock, so everyone did the same. All logging off and packing away their gear. Quick smiles here and there and some small talk; all really just looking forward to going home. I stood up and stretched for the ceiling, as a wave of cricks and cracks broke out over my back. The GP had told me to get out of my seat every hour. It had been at least two. I was improving.

There were polite nods all around, and a few semi-genuine 'have a good weekend!'s. I followed along the social cues.

My flat was about twenty minutes away, by bike. Good exercise, and the weather was pleasant. The office rush was in full slow swing, as the traffic crawled away. At least I could weave through that quite nicely.

I was home before too long, a little breathless from the hill. I opened the door and stepped inside. Chilled. No more stress for a couple of days at least, though I had filled my time where I could. I was thinking of the walk I was going to go on, and the film I wanted to watch in the cinema tomorrow. My stomach rudely interrupted though, with a cry for dinner.

No, first order of business was always getting changed. I always jumped into a T-shirt as soon as I got the chance, just to switch my headspace. It was almost like a uniform to wear something with a collar. That was not welcome by the time I got home! My bedroom was a bit of a mess — as usual. But really, if I scowl at myself for leaving my bed undone, it's on me to learn to do it in the morning. Ah well, scowling's easier.

My stomach called out again. Fair enough. I walked back down the stairs to the kitchen and broke out a bit of frozen pasta sauce. The hob clicked on with a pan on top, and a pot of spaghetti on the boil just next to it. There was a little stirring to do, but I took the time when cooking to just switch off. The bubbling of the water was meditative, almost.

Ten minutes later and my dinner was done. The best thing about pasta is how quick it is! — Well, if you've made the sauce beforehand at least. I'm not old enough for a TV, so it was just my laptop on the table. YouTube fired up in about 30 sec-

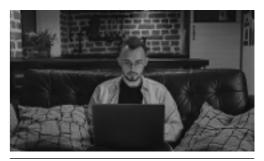
onds with all the muscle memory I had built up. New uploads from people I had been watching for years at this point. Episodes of series that kept on growing with new ideas. And I had grown up with some of them, pretty much.

So I settled in, watching what new shenanigans would unfold. Anyway, no need to work things out. I settled in, dinner ready, playing along, letting the week's tension unwind, losing track of time a bit as the story on the screen played out. Loud upbeat music played to pace the video and keep me engaged. I bobbed along at the intro, as always.

The shenanigans ensued, with a bunch of people being stupid on screen. Except one moment, when the screen froze for a bit. 'Connection interrupted', it said. The bright colours gave way to black. with a little wheel spinning in the middle, and my reflection staring back. Staring at myself, pasta halfway up to my next bite. There was just the quiet whirring of the laptop fans, no music

I could see the whole room behind me – that was most of the flat, to be honest. Sitting, just me, eating dinner between empty walls. Two more days to go.

I wish my distractions didn't do that.



Peace

Breathe in ... and out ... breathe in ... and out ...

It had been a long day. A school day, for me, and for her. Lucky at least that we were at the same school. I don't know how she felt about being a student when I was a teacher, though I had asked her about it before. I was trying to remember something she'd said in the car this morning. Was that another trip I'd have to pay for?

Focus ... on my voice ... let the thoughts drift away ...

I concentrated. Frowned a bit. The boys had been drifting in the yard again, with their bikes. They're not allowed to do that, but we can't really stop them in the morning. At least I'm not going to turn up early to parent them! Still, I shouted at them when I saw, so at least they knew it was wrong. Not that they cared.

Let the thoughts arrive, and let them go. Watch them flow away ...

They went away, and the memory of their din went with it ...

...

I don't know how she manages this, the woman on the app. She sounds so serene, like I could poke her with a stick again and again and she would still just 'let the feelings drift away ... and breathe ... and breathe ...' – immune to being annoyed. I wish I could manage that, like water off a duck's back, except it was the fucking Year 9s flicking bits of paper at me.

Breathe in ... and out ... Scan down, top to bottom. Ease your body ...

Okay, relax. Slowly, working down, I let go. My cheeks settled, after a while. The frown dissolved away. The muscles in my neck untensed, like a weight had been lifted from them. I rolled my shoulders a bit, untying the knot they had wound up. Mentally, I could feel my arms all the way down to my fingertips, resting gently on my knees. There was no weight now, except my own. My body fully aware, feeling gravity, down to my criss-crossed legs, and the carpet beneath that.

And stay, as you are, all calm ... just breathing ...

I was empty.

No noise anymore.

In bliss. ■

