

CF3

The Universe on the Walls

Hannah Krueger, BCHS 2022

The warmth of the building was a welcome reprieve from the brisk night air. Our shoes met carpeted floors and marble steps as we ascended to the Mezzanine, and my eyes met the universe on the walls. Golden suns, moons, and stars climbed up the pillars on either side of the vast theater. A piece of the night sky littered with constellations was tucked into the ceiling. I felt the imaginative possibilities housed within the walls. At that moment, I was a mere observer of the large universe around me. Lights dimmed, and the universe fell away. A spotlight illuminated two men on stage.

Yo-Yo Ma and the moderator fell into a comfortable conversation about his “Tiger parents” and the accidents of life. We were graced with a small sample of “Amazing Grace”, but it was hardly enough to satisfy the room’s desire to hear the renowned cellist play. All wished for him to place his bow against the strings again, but the conversation continued on, flowing from one topic to the next in a somewhat hard-to-follow fashion. Words floated around the room. “Music’s embrace... serendipities...” I tried to piece them together, but the puzzle in my brain was incomplete until he picked up his bow once more.

As the first trills of “Song of the Birds” rang out into the audience, the universe around me started to take form. The vibratos were ominous yet curious. Searching. It was as if I was lost in a thick forest: not in a terrifying way, but an inquisitive one. I had no idea what I was searching for, but as the last piercing note quietly permeated the otherwise silent room, I was granted clarity. The music found its way into the spaces between Yo-Yo Ma’s conversations. I felt the music’s embrace, the serendipities it shaped through the energy of the music and the passion he portrayed as he played.

Once again, the conversation picked back up, and now more than ever it was impossible to completely focus on what the two men were saying. I waited with bated breath to hear him play once more. At last, the universe on the walls found its shape. This time, it was a golden autumn day, leaves gently floating on lazy air currents. Bass and alto tones alternated as the wind slowly gained speed, eventually adopting a sense of urgency as a wind storm kicked up. The leaves swirled faster and faster, whipped into a frenzy by the cello’s melody. Suddenly, everything stopped. The bow paused above the strings. Then, slowly, the breeze returned to gently caressing the floating leaves, gaining energy and building until it was as if nothing had ever stopped in the first place. He asked us to sing the final note. To contribute an element to the harmony that he couldn’t provide.

Yo-Yo Ma made music bigger than what we heard. It became a state of mind, a tangible feeling that brought shape to the imaginative possibilities housed within the walls. The ebbs and flows of his melodies followed the swells and recesses of the universe, immersing the entire room in the sound echoing from the space between his bow and the strings. As he asked us to hum the final note with him, we were part of that universe. I was part of the universe on the walls.