

MY 30 SECONDS OF FAME



I wiped my sweaty palms on my dress. My pulse was racing. It was almost our turn. I tried to transport my mind to a place where I was practising the music my sister and I had spent months playing, but it wasn't working. I couldn't even remember what note our piece of music started on.

We were standing on the side of the stage waiting our turn to perform. I tried to hide behind the thick velvet curtains while peeking at the audience. From

what I could see, the concert hall was full. The piano playing stopped and there was an enthusiastic applause as the competitors stood, moved to the front of the stage, bowed and then filed off stage. The line of competitors was now getting shorter and we were edging closer and closer to the stage. Some of the competitors had brought their music with them, but our teacher was keen for us to memorise the music. My throat was dry and I glanced at my sister, hoping she would help ease my nerves, but her wide eyes were staring at the next competitors who had begun to play their piece of music.

Each week, my sister went to our piano teacher's home for a piano lesson. Her piano was in her living room. We had been learning from Mrs Parsons for quite a few years. She always greeted us with a warm smile, but we both knew she had high expectations of her students and that there would be trouble if we didn't put in sufficient practice. We spent most of the year either preparing for piano exams or for the Eisteddfod, an annual competition for performing arts - from reciting poetry, singing, dancing or playing an instrument.

As we got older, more and more practice was expected of us during the week. So to ensure we could get sufficient practice in our day, we would get up early and practice before school and then practice again in the afternoon. Our teacher expected perfection and would stop us at every error, pointing out the slightest of errors, noting whether we were playing too slowly or not loudly enough. As the exams or Eisteddfod approached, those students who didn't know their music sufficiently well, were asked to come back for an additional lesson. This was shameful as nothing less than perfection was expected. Mrs Herbert was a piano teacher whose students always performed well in competitions. She was a stern teacher with a reputation for being strict. There was unspoken rivalry between Mrs Parson's students and Mrs Herbert's, each wanting to outperform the other.

Two more students had now completed their performance and there was yet another round of applause as we shuffled closer to the very edge of the stage. The

bright lights made it difficult to see the audience clearly, but perhaps that was just as well. We had performed our duet about a week ago, to a mostly empty concert hall, except for a few parents and the judges. We had won our event which is how we now found ourselves on the edge of the stage again. Winners from all the different sections had been invited to perform in the final concert of the Eisteddfod. It was an incredible honour to be one of the chosen few to perform at the grand finale. It was something that had never happened to my sister and I before.

The bell chimed and we walked out on the stage, our polished shoes tapping across the wooden stage. The bright lights shining on us meant it was impossible to see the audience, but this was probably just as well. We stood at the front of the stage and bowed in unison and then turned to sit on the piano stool. The piano was a shiny black grand piano. It was an honour to play such an instrument and to be part of such an auspicious occasion. On our teacher's instructions, we made sure the piano stool was positioned correctly for us. We placed our fingers on the sleek white keys. Despite not having the sheet music with us, somehow my fingers knew where they needed to be. When playing a duet, one person always has the responsibility of counting us in to set the speed and also ensure that both start in unison. Counting was my job. My heart was pounding, '1..2..3...4'. We both started playing. However, I instantly realised that there was a problem. With the adrenaline pumping through my veins, I had counted too fast and what was already a short, upbeat piece of music was now an utter musical frenzy. Our fingers raced across the pianos at a frightening pace that was so fast I wasn't sure that my fingers would be able to keep up, let alone keep in time with my sister's fingers that were also sliding across the keys.

In no time at all, we found ourselves at the front of the stage, bowing and then walking off stage. What was a result of months of practice and many lessons, was now over in under a minute. The audience was applauding. Despite the frantic pace at which I had set for us, we had played our piece flawlessly. My moment of fame was over in seconds and was never repeated, yet it created a memory that lasted a lifetime.