

## Detail of the Harpsichord and Piano Keys

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The harpsichord music in *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* is the only background music in the entire two hour movie. It's the instrument the protagonist plays to her love interest. She watches intently as the protagonist narrates the storytelling that accompanies the music.

The music she plays is Vivaldi's "Summer" movement from his "Four Seasons". This piece depicts the blazing heat of the season. Along with the chirping of insects and birds, this turns into a warning of a storm coming.

The merciless storm does come. This is contrast.

The protagonist and love interest share a deep, silent, heavy love. Forbidden, of course. Secret. They are enthralled by each other.

They never see each other again. This is contrast.

I have been on both sides too, the sun and then the storm. When you are in each, you wonder how you ever reached or will ever reach the other.

I have lived in contrast.

But that is only the love interest's side. The protagonist does see her one more time.

The love interest is watching, for the first time, an orchestra performing the same "Summer" piece.

The protagonist watches her watching the orchestra, listening to the music she once played for her lover.

These beginning and end points of their relationship and of the movie are the only two points with the music.

Their union and detachment is contained within the same song.

I too have danced across and collapsed against the trebles and bass clefs of the same song. I too have allowed the orchestra to be the only background music in my life.

The piano was created because the inventor felt that the harpsichord had a lack of control over volume.

As a woman, you are often told to control your volume, that you are better seen and not heard.

But the harpsichord's purpose is to be heard, is it not? Is it too loud for you?

Am I too loud for you?

I have learned to quiet down, to let the piano music in the background be louder than me. My grandmother taught me how to play. She is proud of the ladylike nature of my playing.

I get my softness from her, she is only ever loud when she sings.

When the piano was invented and its use spread, it was more popular among women. Not career-wise, never career-wise. But in the safe, happy walls of a domestic space, they dominated the field. They were good with the keys.

Keys are made to unlock doors and to turn a wall into a room you haven't been inside before.

But they are also made to lock. To close.

Secrets are locked and closed. In drawers, in cupboards, in tiny rooms, in mansions,

In closets.

The love interest and the protagonist could not unlock themselves, together, and could not stop themselves from quieting down. The love interest was sent to be married in a safe, happy domestic space.

My lover has been locked before too, we both have been the secret and kept the secret.

Sometimes we were holding our own key, but mostly not.

A piano has both black and white keys. The white keys are also referred to as the "natural" keys.

I am then both natural and unnatural. I am the contrast.

Contrast in music is dissonance. The wrong notes played together create something beautiful. It depends on which notes you play, which keys you choose.

When you press down onto the key of a harpsichord or a piano, it affects the string it is connected to and produces a vibration. The keys are always connected to and always corresponding with the strings.

In the protagonist and love interest's case, there were definitely strings attached.

Don't press me down. There will always be strings attached.