

Plugged In

by Angela Georgantas

"I will be FINE, Mom," I said in exasperation, sliding out of her hug and heading toward the double glass doors.

"I know, but it's a big decision. Make good choices," she quipped, reminding me of my younger days when I would leave her presence every time with these words ringing in my ears. I turned to smile, to share in her joke and give her what I hoped was a very grown-up look of confidence.

Grabbing the handle on the right, I gave one big yank and was simultaneously overwhelmed by both the sound and the whoosh of air conditioning. One more step, and I was enveloped by destiny. My day had finally arrived. I was no longer a child, and it was up to me to choose my path at my new school: Music Academy.

"May I help you?" the man at the front desk asked. At least, I think that is what he said. It was very hard to hear above the cacophony of so many musical instruments playing so many different pieces of music at one time in the background.

"Hello. I'm here for my tour. I will be starting school here soon, so I need to see the school and choose my instrument."

"Well, welcome!" he said with a big smile. "I'm Michael, one of the Maestro's assistants. I would be happy to show you around." The man nodded to the woman he was with, and she smiled at me.

"You will get used to the noise," she said, reassuringly. "Enjoy your tour!" I smiled back. I was happy to be there at last, making my own decisions without my parents standing over me, but what if I made the wrong choice? How would I know which program to pick?

"Right this way," Michael said, taking us around the corner and into a long hallway filled with doors. The rooms were all made of soundproof glass, so we could see inside the rooms without hearing the specific music being played inside. Each room down the hallway was filled to the brim with students and instruments. There were whole rooms just filled with pianos and rooms with violins, saxophones, and drums – you name it, there was a room filled with just that particular instrument and students lost in the joy of making them sing. As we traveled down the hallway, the noise was getting louder and louder, but it wasn't coming from the soundproof rooms. It was coming from the dark double doors at the end of the hallway. I hesitated just a step, but Michael noticed.

"Don't worry. It will be loud, but I think you will find the next room very interesting. We call it the "Choosing Room." It's a place where students come to try out the various instruments before they make their choice. Once the choice is made, the students will then split away from the group to practice their own special songs in those rooms you see in this hallway.

Michael opened the door, and the sheer force of the sound pushed me back on my heels. The room was cavernous. Almost the length of a football field, there were instruments and students everywhere I looked. Some were playing in small groups, some were off by themselves, everyone making music of some kind, but none of them actually playing in harmony.

"Wow!" I said, when I stepped inside. How in the world would I choose just one magnificent instrument? Should I play the instruments my parents play? Should I try to find out where my friends are going and choose one of those? Do I have any aptitude for any particular kind of instrument? Questions swirled in my mind as noise seemed to physically push at me from all sides. I looked up into what seemed to be a balcony, and there were even more students and instruments there. Just then, I saw a small black and white sign on the lowermost balcony: "Only guitars will play in the Big Show." I blinked. What did that mean?

I looked around for my tour guide, but he had stepped away to chat with a nearby tuba player. I started heading in his directions and caught sight of another sign. This one was a little larger, affixed prominently to the wall just inside the double doors, "Only guitars will play in the Big Show." I blinked again, but this time I looked around the giant room with purpose. Everywhere I looked, there were signs, some big, and some small, but all of them with the same message as clear as day.

"Have any questions," Michael asked, coming up beside me and noticing my confusion.

"What do all these signs mean?" I asked him, pointing to the nearest two or three. "What is the 'Big Show' and how come only the guitars get to play in it?"

"The Big Show is the performance held at the end of the program. Only those who are ready will play, and it is a great honor to be chosen. Although there are many choices of instruments throughout the school, there is only one kind of instrument that will get you invited to the Show, and that's guitar. The Maestro is in charge of the Big Show, and He personally oversees the guitars Himself"

"But why would any body pick an instrument other than guitar? What is the point of playing all this music if you don't have an audience to hear it?"

"Well, for one thing, not everyone sees or even believes the signs, so they don't know there is only one option for the show. They assume that there will be a show for whichever instrument they choose. For another, some people refuse to choose just one instrument and end up trying to juggle two or three. Some don't want to play an instrument at all, but when it comes right down to it, we were all born to play, so they do end up choosing something by default, but it is never the guitar. Finally, the rumor is that the Maestro is very tough on his little group of guitarists. Not everyone here wants to submit to the Maestro's directions." Michael paused to let this sink in. "All right. Would you like to try an instrument to see how you like it?"

"I don't need to. I've already made my choice," I said, squaring my shoulders. "I'm going to play the guitar."

When we got to the guitar room, I was at once struck by the lack of noise for once in my small time at the school. Instead of a jumbled mass of sounds and differing speeds and melodies, this room was comparatively perfect in tune. I was in there for a few minutes before I noticed even a hint of a discordance, and it seemed to be coming from a group of guitars off to the right. Unlike the others near the back who were all playing the same tune, this group's guitars were modified. Some had added other pieces to their guitars like additional necks, or more strings, and some had even added bells and drums to theirs. Others seem to have taken parts away, playing just the base with no neck or plucking away on just one or two strings.

These modified guitars barely even resembled the original instrument, and the song they were playing was a different tempo and sound than the main group. The second group that didn't seem to contribute to the song being played by the group in the back seemed to be the largest group. These people would play for a little bit, but then they would seem to wander out of the room. While they were playing, the sound was hollow and tinny, a fraction of the powerful sound coming from the group at the back.

"Michael," I asked, leaning over to whisper in his ear so as not to disturb the practice session. "Why aren't all the guitars playing the same way? Some seem like they are playing a different song, and some barely seem to care if they play at all. The only group that is really in tune is that group in the back." I moved a little closer to get a better look, and Michael followed with a knowing smile. I gasped. "Why, all those guitars at the back are plugged in! The power from the back guitars was palpable, and as I moved closer and closer, I felt the thump deep down in my heart. Every note was synchronized.

Every sound had purpose, and even though some of them still made little mistakes, nothing harmed the integrity of the beautiful song they were all playing together. It was then I noticed the Man directing the group: the Maestro. He was a tall man wearing a tuxedo, the coat tails flapping behind as he directed the guitars with his baton. He was facing only those guitars at the very back, focusing his attention on them. He was wearing a head set, and as he spoke into the set, the guitarists would all move with purpose, in unison.

As I headed that way, I passed another group of guitarists who were trying to keep up with those at the back, but no matter how hard they tried, they never seemed to be in step. Some appeared to be frustrated and ended up getting up, laying their guitars on the seats, and walking out of the guitar room, presumably to try another instrument. Others would try for a while, leave, and then come back to try some more. "Why aren't these guitarists plugged in? Don't they see how much power they will have if they do? Don't they know they will get a headset, and the Maestro will be able to direct them perfectly? Where do they keep going?" "These, I'm afraid, are only part-time players. They chose the guitar, but they haven't given up playing other instruments. In order for the Maestro to plug you in, you have to commit your whole career to guitar, and you have to give him the ultimate ability to direct your moves. He knows what will make for a good show, and even though some of His methods might seem a bit...unorthodox, He is the one who runs the Show, and He is the one who ultimately chooses who gets to play there."

"So it is the Maestro that plugs you in; you don't do it yourself?"

"You make the decision to play only the guitar. When He sees you are willing to give him control, He gives you the headset and plugs you in. Until then, you can play all you want, but you don't have the amp's power, you don't have the Maestro's directions, and ultimately, you won't be playing in the Big Show." I gasped as this last part sunk in. "You mean, of all these people here who THINK they are going to the show, only those who are plugged in will make it?"

"I'm afraid so," Michael said with sadness, looking at the rows upon rows of guitarists in varying stages of strumming. "Only those who are led by His voice and are known by Him will be in the show."

I looked over at the rows upon rows of guitar players who had chosen the right instrument but hadn't made the commitment necessary for the Maestro to plug them in. They saw the signs and knew that the guitar was the only way, but they still wanted to do things their own way. They didn't want to give the Maestro the full control He needed to make them into a masterpiece.

"Here's your guitar," Michael said, handing me my very own instrument. Why don't you sit down and give it a try." I grabbed the cool, shiny new guitar by the base and placed the strap over my neck. I tested a strum or two, allowing the sounds around me to help me know when to move my fingers. As soon as I did that, I knew that there would never be another instrument for me. I was born to play the guitar, and I would be a very good student to the Maestro. Whatever He wanted me to play would be my song, and however He wanted me to practice, I would follow His lead. Just then, I heard a tiny static whine and felt a vibrations on my guitar. A soft, strong voice was coming through my newly added head set, and it hit me: I was plugged in!

This story was about choices. The fine arts academy represents life, and the choice of instrument represents our choice of who or what we worship. All the students were grouped by which instrument they chose, and all the instruments played different songs. The instruments represent the different religions on earth, and the songs represent the ways these religions choose to worship.

The "Choosing Room" represents the world as people go about the process of trying out different ways of worship. Some think they don't have to make a choice (atheists), but since we are all wired to worship, ultimately they do end up choosing to worship something whether it be money, power, or some other creation of man. Some don't want to choose one particular way to worship and seem to try to play multiple instruments, wandering in and out of practice rooms (religions), and coming back to the choosing room again and again. None of those other instruments matter, however, as our main character notices the signs, "Only guitars will play in the Big Show."

Only one religion leads to eternal life, and that is Christianity. The signs are all right there for us to see plainly, but some don't want to see the signs, and some don't believe them even when they see them. Some, however, do believe the signs and choose to play the guitar, the instrument that leads to the Big Show. In life, some choose Christianity, but even that group is by no means homogenous.

When our main character chooses the instrument that leads to the Big Show, she is surprised to find three distinct groups in the guitar room. One group has guitars that have been modified. Some added parts, and some took parts away. This represents those false religions, those "other gospels" that start with the basic idea of Christianity but have them modified it so that it no longer resembles the true gospel of Jesus Christ. It doesn't look like the same instrument, and it doesn't play the exact same song. It's not Christianity any more and will not lead to eternal life.

The second, largest group is the saddest group. This is the group of people who have made the one choice that leads to the Big Show, but they have not committed themselves to it or stopped playing other instruments. This is the very large group of CHINOs, Christians in Name Only. These are part-time Christians who give Christ some of their thoughts, some of their time, and some of their lives, but they also worship other things as well. Some dabble in other religions, like New Age or Occultism, but many just worship the world. They play guitar for a little bit of time but then wander out of the guitar room for long periods. In life, these Christians visit Christ for an hour on Sundays or say prayers here and there, but then they wander away to focus on other things.

The song these guitarists were playing during their short time in the guitar room was tinny and soft, and they made many mistakes because they were playing under their own power. Some got frustrated and wandered away. Others came back again and again with long absences in between. In life, some Christians get tired of being part-time and leave the faith altogether. Some keep coming back again and again but wonder why they never seem to receive the promises of the Bible no matter how hard they try. They play a song that is a mere shadow of the actual song, and they can make mistake after mistake because they don't have the headset with the Maestro directing their moves. They have a form of godliness, but they have no power.

True power comes only to that final, back group of guitar players. These students were "plugged in," but they didn't do it themselves. This is because it is a supernatural process called being born again. We make the decision to follow Christ with our whole hearts, but it is God who "plugs us in" by giving us the Holy Spirit. When we have the Holy Spirit, our lives change because we are a new creation. This group has stopped playing all other instruments and has given control to the Maestro. They don't make their own decisions about how and when to practice, and they don't try to figure out how to play on their own. They are committed only to the program that the Maestro is directing, and this is the only group who will make it to the Big Show. Sometimes those who were plugged in still made mistakes, but it didn't change the song. Christians, who are still fallen creatures, still sometimes sin, but the Holy Spirit lets us know how to get right with God again, and our song goes on.

In life, only Christians who die to self and live for Christ in truth will make it to eternity. Those who believe lies that do not match the Word of God are no longer following the true Christ. Galatians 1:9 "As we said before, so I say now again, if any man preach any other gospel unto you that that ye have received let him be accursed." Likewise, those who do not commit their whole hearts to Him will not be accepted by God. Revelation 3:16 "So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth."

Are you playing the instrument that will lead to the Big Show, or are you just making noise for a time? If you chose the correct instrument, are you plugged in to the power? Have you laid down all your own thoughts, hopes, dreams, and will for your own life and given control to the Maestro? Are you plugged in to the power, walking with the Holy Spirit directing your path? John 15:4 "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me." If you are still worshipping the things of this world or still trying to do things your own way, there is still time to deny yourself and take up your cross to follow after Him. John 10:27-28 "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand."

Salvation is there for the asking. If you're ready, you can pray like this: "Jesus, I believe that you shed Your blood, died on the cross, and rose from the dead for me. I repent of my sin. I ask you to forgive me and come into my heart. Help me to live for You in Jesus' name. Amen."