

Ivory Echoes

written by

Mitchell Carter

mitch.t.carter@gmail.com

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Note to the reader: This film will be presented in a 1.43:1 aspect ratio. Throughout its runtime, the piano will remain center framed. Its position in relation to the frame unchanged. The only change between scenes will be the environment and characters present.

FADE IN:

INT. ROOM - AFTERNOON

An upright piano sits alone in a room against a wall. The warm glow of the setting sun shines through a nearby window. A few knick knacks line the top along with a pothos. Its vines stretch down.

NARRATOR

Some say a piano is only wood and wire. But I've lived long enough in these keys to know it remembers.

The sound of stage lights shutting off.

CUT TO BLACK.

INT. STAGE - CONTINUOUS

A lone stage light suddenly comes on, illuminating the piano. Red curtains adorn either side of the frame.

A projector is heard spinning up. Images begin playing behind the piano. First, an image of the port of Marseille, circa 1890.

NARRATOR

I was born in Marseille, 1895.

An antique photo of dock workers is projected.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

My father, a dockworker.

Then a photo of a laundress.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Mother, a laundress.

A family photo.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Their hands hard, tired, calloused.

Again, the stage lights shut off.

CUT TO BLACK.

FADE IN:

INT. CHURCH - DAY

We see the piano against white wood paneling. Shrouded in dark shadow save for the colored light of sun passing through a stained glass window shining on it.

NARRATOR

As a child I wandered the streets
until one Sunday the church doors
opened, and I heard it.

Light in the shape of doors fall upon the piano.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

A sound unlike anything I'd known.
The piano.

At this moment, a small boy wanders in frame to investigate the piano.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

From then on, I haunted that
place.

He cautiously plays a few keys.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Sneaking the curious voices of
ivory when no one watched. Their
whispers told me I had a gift.

The boy's mother appears, grabbing his arm and pulling him away.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

My parents disapproved, but it
didn't matter.

INT. CHURCH - THE NEXT DAY

The light is now that of a church filled with bounced sunlight.

The boy plays the piano.

NARRATOR

Day after day I would learn.

In an instant, the boy transforms into a teenager.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
Practice.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. CAFE - DAY

The piano now sits against the interior brick wall of a cafe in Marseille. The owner stands off to the side, dusting off the piano.

NARRATOR
At 16, the church closed its doors.
The piano was sold to a local cafe.
I followed it, unwilling to let it
vanish from my life.

Suddenly, a young man enters and begins pleading with the owner, gesturing at the piano.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
I begged the owner for work. He
relented...

INT. CAFE - NIGHT

We're in the cafe's nighttime setting. The young man sits at the piano and plays. People of the night pass back and forth in the foreground.

NARRATOR
...though only at night, when the
café shed its daylight skin and
became a cabaret.

A drunk man stumbles into the young man, spilling his drink. Instead of apologizing, he bursts into laughter and walks off.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
In the house of God, music was
divine. Here, it was merely noise
for drunks to dance to.

The young man brushes the alcohol off his jacket before returning to play.

INT. CAFE - THE NEXT MORNING

The young man sits quietly at the piano. Exhausted. Defeated. It's the early morning. He's just finished his night of entertaining the raucous guests. The cafe is yet to open for its morning clientele. Stark contrast of energy.

NARRATOR

A fading memory come morning. I
loathed it. Still...

INT. CAFE - NIGHT

All of the sudden we're back to another rowdy night at the cafe. The young man plays. Liquor on the piano top.

NARRATOR

...I played.

Hard cut to a different night. Glasses decorate the piano.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Night...

Another night. A man flirts with women whilst leaning on the piano.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

...after night...

Yet another night. Two men wrestle on the floor. People cheer them on.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

...I played.

INT. CAFE - DAY

The young man plays his music to a new crowd.

NARRATOR

Eventually, at 21, I was granted
the daylight.

A waitress passing by pauses to notice his music. A man sitting at a table in the foreground sets down his coffee to watch.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

At long last, I was no longer
background noise. I was a voice to
be heard.

INT. CAFE - AFTERNOON

On a separate day, we see the young man playing. This time, however, there is an audience in the foreground giving him their full attention.

NARRATOR

Intellectuals and appreciators of the arts would gather to hear my compositions. Moody, atmospheric, ambitious.

He stops playing. A conclusion of his work for the night. The guests applaud.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

By 28, I had gained recognition. For a fleeting moment, I believed I had risen above the smoke filled nights, that I had found my place.

INT. CAFE - MORNING

Suddenly the scene is washed in cool morning light. The young man sits at the piano but he does not play. He rests his hands upon the wood. Standing near him, the owner. He speaks to the young man. His faced distressed.

NARRATOR

But then came war, and with it, fashion changed. Jazz became the new language. Before, I was dismissed as too young. Now I'm "too old". Unwanted. Forgotten.

The men dissolve away, leaving only the piano.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. APARTMENT - AFTERNOON

The piano sits against an old plaster wall near a window. The area is sparsely decorated. An apartment atop the second floor. It belongs to the young man.

NARRATOR

The cafe shut down and the owner, in need of money, sold me the piano.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

The young man sits at his piano, playing and notating sheets of music.

NARRATOR

The work dried up. The fire didn't.
I wrote feverishly.

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

A different day. Empty bottles of liquor dress the piano. The young man playing almost frantically.

NARRATOR

Played to no one.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

A different night. More bottles stop the piano. Sheet music everywhere. The young man angrily gestures out his window to the universe.

NARRATOR

Falling deeper into bitterness.

INT. APARTMENT - SUNRISE

The rising sun casts a beautiful warmth over the young man. He is slumped over his piano.

NARRATOR

Slaving over these keys until my
death in 1926. Age 31.

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

The young man is gone. His apartment cleaned up. The piano remains.

NARRATOR

My body was buried, but my spirit
remained. Trapped inside what was
once my voice of freedom.

Two burly men in workwear appear into frame and split off onto each side of the piano. They prepare to lift the piano.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

And then...

The men heave.

CUT TO:

INT. SHOP - AFTERNOON

The piano sits in a music shop. Other instruments in the foreground. A price card sits on top.

NARRATOR

...silence. Silence that...

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Some unknown time later. The piano sits against a wall. Pictures hang. A portrait. High class.

NARRATOR

...stretched.

INT. NEW HOUSE - NIGHT

Yet another home. New decorations. The soft glow of a lamp.

NARRATOR

Years folding into...

INT. ANOTHER HOUSE - AFTERNOON

The piano sits on a new wall. Different decorations.

NARRATOR

...decades until they...

INT. APARTMENT - DAY

A new wall. A new home.

NARRATOR

...become the...

INT. HOUSE - EVENING

The piano sits near a window with a view of the evening sky. Patterns of setting sun speckle him.

NARRATOR

...same...

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Another home. This time with decorations suggesting the changing eras.

NARRATOR

...moment.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Another stop in the journey for our piano.

NARRATOR

Irrelevant.

INT. HOUSE - MORNING

Family photos adorn the piano.

NARRATOR

Meaningless.

INT. SHIP - DAY

The piano sits in the cargo area of a boat. A porthole next to it gives us a view of a clear blue sky while another casts a round shape of sun on it. Seagulls and waves can be heard.

NARRATOR

Now I simply wait.

INT. SHOP - DAY

Another shop. This time more modern instruments are near. A more modern "FOR SALE" sign.

NARRATOR

Wait to go where I am moved.

INT. HOUSE - AFTERNOON

A new home. The piano is surrounded by family images. A small child sits on the right end of the bench and plucks a key.

NARRATOR
Forced to be at the mercy of
others' curiosity...

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Lamp lit. Obscure keepsakes sit along the piano. An older woman sits on the left end of the bench. She plucks an awkward chord.

NARRATOR
...mediocrity, or worse...

INT. HOUSE - DAY

Upper middle class. A teenage girl sits at the bench resting an arm on the keys and unenthusiastically plays a key.

NARRATOR
...boredom.

INT. HOUSE - MORNING

Clean. Considered. Intentional decoration has been done by the home owner. Including those that sit on top of the piano.

NARRATOR
To most, I am furniture.

INT. DEN - AFTERNOON

Dimly lit. Wood paneling. Sunlight bounces in. The piano is covered in junk. Clothes.

NARRATOR
A shelf.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

The piano sits catty cornered. A floor lamp behind it. Party banners on the wall. Platters of food sit on top the piano. People mingle in and out of frame. Muffled laughter. Some linger by the piano for food.

NARRATOR
Decoration to fill a space.
And I wonder, does every object
carry its own quiet longing? Does
the paint brush ache to be stroked?
(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
The clay yearn to be shaped? Does
stone dream to be carved?

INT. DINING ROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

The same room. The banner half hangs on. Empty cups litter
the piano. Quiet morning.

NARRATOR
Will someone ever craft a
masterpiece with my keys?

DISSOLVE TO:

INT. VARIOUS SPACES - VARIOUS TIMES

We morph between 10 spaces. Different homes. Rooms. Elongated
smears of people come and go. Some pass by. Some play the
piano until we end on a space empty with no people.

NARRATOR
Years pass differently when you
cannot move. The faces blur. The
hands blur. They pound and prod,
searching for something in me they
cannot name, then leave before they
hear it.

INT. MUSIC ACADEMY - DAY

A young girl sits next to her piano teacher.

NARRATOR
Young.

INT. HOME - AFTERNOON

An elderly woman sits at the bench. Her walker next to her.
She does nothing.

NARRATOR
Old.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

An over zealous man plays to a room of party guests. He slams
the keys without thought. Others simply dance in the
foreground.

NARRATOR

Drunk.

INT. HOME - AFTERNOON

A young couple sit together at the piano. Moving boxes surround them. They touch heads.

NARRATOR

In love.

INT. HOUSE - NIGHT

A lone man sits at the bench. Liquor next to him. He does not play. He holds his head in his hands.

NARRATOR

Some bring the weight of their whole lives.

INT. HOME - DAY

A brightly, sun lit room. Sparse decoration. A man walks by the piano, touching it only to feel to grain.

NARRATOR

Others only brush past me, like a stranger in a crowded street.

INT. ROOM - AFTERNOON

We're back in the room from the beginning. Where our story started. The warm glow. The knick knacks. The pothos. Only this time we hear faint arguing.

A man rushes past the piano. A door opens and slams.

Shortly followed by a woman tracing his steps. She stops in front of the bench. Tears are stifled. Her glance falls to the piano. Her sorrow takes her to the bench.

NARRATOR

What's this?

The woman begins to pluck at a few keys. Sparsely at first, but they begin to form a song. Not perfect, but honest to her pain. Music from her heart, from her soul. Her ache laid bare in a moment of vulnerability. The camera breaks form and begins to slowly push in on her.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

These notes... they shake, they falter. Yet how they burn. She does not play to impress. She plays because she must. Because it's the only language left to her.

We gently orbit to her profile, exposed to her face, hands. She continues her song.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

I waited over a century for a master's hand. For greatness to return me to glory. But here, this trembling, broken touch, this is what I longed for all along. And every touch leaves something behind. A memory I keep for them. And in those memories I see what's always been there. Beauty in the flawed, the human.

The camera pulls back from her profile, revealing the artifice of everything. The set, the false walls, the lights.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

Even here, where walls are canvas, where light is sculpted into form, expression breathes.

The camera then begins a huge orbit around the set, reveling in the seams of everything. The exposure of peeling back the curtain.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

The walls, the lights, the notes... they are the language. But the art is what speaks through them. The pulse. The expression.

The camera completes its orbit, settling back into that familiar frame from which we began. The woman's playing comes to an end.

She pauses for a moment, taking in her emotions. And with a low head, she closes the piano, and steps away. We linger in the silence with the piano.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)

They always leave. Yet in their leaving, I remain filled. Not with masterpieces, but with fragments of truth. Imperfect and unguarded. Tender, and raw. That is the gift.

(MORE)

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
To be the vessel of their
expression. No matter how fleeting.
I am here for whoever needs me,
whenever they do. Until then...

CUT TO BLACK.

NARRATOR (CONT'D)
...I wait.