

Honorable Mention Prose – High School

United

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Grade: 12

School: Petoskey High School

A darkened atmosphere, the soft scent of cigarettes and perfume brushing past each nose. The dim lights filled the room with a subtle buzz of electricity, almost louder than the hushed conversation of the audience. Everything seemed to shake in anticipation, as men fidgeted with the keys in their pockets, and women played with the hem of their dresses. For them, they were excited, anticipation building with each passing second. But backstage, the mood was shifted.

Musicians clutched their instruments, a silence falling over them. A guitarist squeezed the strings to the point of imprints forming on his fingers. The drummer spun his sticks, around and around, as if the rhythm would comfort him for at least a moment. The singer paced, watching her bandmates with wide eyes. She knew in her heart they had prepared their music to perfection, every measure carefully tended to and practiced. Yet she couldn't shake the feeling of some unseen variable causing the whole concert to fall into disarray. The guitarist let go of his prized possession to grab the hands of the other band members.

"United we stand, and united we fall." He murmured, short and sweet. The drummer and singer smiled in agreement. With a calming breath radiating from one member to the other, they found themselves sinking into a state of relaxation that hid the nerves they all felt. Together they approached the stage, listening as the chatter of their audience fell to a hush. The only noise was the sound of the lights. The drummer took his place on his stool, starting final adjustments of the mess of drums. Once satisfied he gave a small beat to amuse the crowd. The guitarist situated the strap and positioned the guitar in the way he had done a thousand times. The pick rested in his fingers, itching to play the first note. With a final shaky breath, the singer approached the crowd.

The drummer began a beat and the first song began. The audience had turned their full attention onto the group, their eyes flicking between the instruments. The guitarist navigated the neck of his instrument, each note precise and rehearsed. Nothing was left to chance, but it didn't show. To the listener, the song seemed to form from nothing, a blend so beautiful it couldn't have been heard before, and it could never be heard again.

The notes swirled through the air, each beat materializing as a soft and warm color. They spun through the crowd, weaving between people as they filtered in and out of ears. Each sound came from the heart of the musician, the sounds bringing the colors together into a palette of melody. Each color

complimented another. The sharpness of the drums disappeared beneath the silk of the guitar. In the musician's minds, each note had disappeared. They relied on the muscle memory they acquired, letting their thoughts drift to the beauty of the sounds. Like a snake charmer they swayed, feet tapping to the beat. For them it was dancing, letting their bodies move with the wonders they were creating. Each word said into the microphone provided the meaning behind the mystique that radiated from the stage.

"You listen to me as light fades, our lips coming closer. Trapped away within the dark, our hearts beat as one." The lyrics were new, something never heard. Telling of a story too personal to share, but when mixed with the colors of instruments became a work of art.

By the end of the song, the final note faded into oblivion. Sweat danced down the face of the drummer, tears slipped from the corner of the singer's eyes. The guitarist felt his calluses tingle, but all of that faded away. The applause of the audience was nothing, white noise that appeared to come from nowhere. All they could hear was the sound of their breathing, each inhale ragged, and each exhale unsteady. The singer turned to her drummer, to her guitarist, and with a smile whispered a word that quivered with emotion: "United."