

The Magic Strings of Frankie Presto Study Guide

The Magic Strings of Frankie Presto by Mitch Albom

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Plot Summary

The following version of this book was used to create this study guide: Albom, Mitch. *The Magic Strings of Frankie Presto*. 1st ed. New York: Harper, 2015. Print.

The Magic Strings of Frankie Presto is the story of fictional legendary musician Frankie Presto, entwining his life story with twentieth century music history. Blessed by the Spirit of Music, Frankie is gifted with six magical strings on his guitar that have the power to save lives. His extraordinary life story intersects with real historical events and encounters with famous musicians.

The novel is told from the first-person perspective of Music, the spiritual embodiment of musical talent. The narrative is interspersed with firsthand accounts from mourners at Frankie Presto's funeral, many of them famous figures, speaking to unknown sources such as reporters or other attendees.

Part One deals with Frankie's birth and childhood-- Frankie is born in Spanish Church in 1936 during a fascist raid. Upon birth, Frankie grabs a large handful of The Spirit of Music. Frankie stays quiet during the raid and survives thanks to his mother humming a song by Francisco Tárrega to him. A nun takes Frankie in after his mother dies, but she soon grows exasperated and throws Frankie in a river to die. He is found by a sardine maker who adopts him. The sardine maker treats Frankie like a son and nurtures his flair for music along with the help of a passionate drunk guitar player named El Maestro. Frankie then flees the danger of fascism in Spain, bringing the magical guitar El Maestro gave him. Frankie soon learns his guitar has the ability to save lives with its magical strings. The story cuts back and forth to Frankie's funeral where mourners tell legendary stories about Frankie's stardom in the fifties when he was a household name pop singer.

In Part Two, Frankie meets Django Reinhardt, a famous gypsy musician who takes Frankie on tour. Frankie ends up homeless after learning the truth about his past and that his foster father lied to him about his origins. He passes through an orphanage and leaves to play gigs, meeting famous musicians of the twentieth century. With his magical guitar, he saves the life of a girl he once met in Spain, Aurora York, and sets out on a quest to find her. He eventually tracks her down to Tennessee. The narrative jumps to the seventies where Frankie is extremely high at the famous Woodstock festival. He has married Aurora and they have reconciled after some unknown fight. Frankie is on a strange quest to deliver his wife a carton of eggs.

In Part Three, Frankie and Aurora live together in New Orleans and get married. They are happy living a poor bohemian lifestyle until Frankie's success pulls them apart. Frankie chooses to become a singer over a guitar player, his true passion, and his meteoric rise pushes Aurora away. Frankie re-marries an actress, yet his life is molded entirely by his agent and he is unhappy.



The narrative jumps back to the Woodstock festival where Frankie completes a journey to the stage, revealing Aurora is not there and that they lost a baby through Frankie's drug use. Frankie plays a beautiful impromptu performance on stage then mutilates his hand to punish himself for losing the baby.

In Part Four, Frankie abandons stardom and waits for Aurora on a park bench in London every day for a long time. Tony Bennet helps Frankie re-unite with Aurora by broadcasting the story on the radio. Frankie and Aurora move to a small island in New Zealand to escape the limelight and reconnect. They adopt an abandoned baby they find in the woods. Lyle Lovett and his band The Clever Yells find Frankie in the 80s, seeking musical guidance. Frankie records a record with them that becomes a cult hit in music circles. The narrative cuts back to Frankie playing a USO show in Vietnam, where he saves the life of a young soldier with his guitar.

In Part Five, Frankie and his family return to Spain. Frankie learns that his sardine-maker foster father lied to him out of kindness. Frankie tries to track down his old guitar instructor El Maestro, deciding to play in the same taberna they did the night before Frankie fled the country. El Maestro never shows up, but Frankie encounters El Maestro's old friend, Alberto, in the alley behind the taberna. Alberto admits to killing El Maestro for money and tries to rob Frankie. Alberto charges Frankie, but a mysterious figure shoots Alberto and saves Frankie.

In Part Six, Frankie spends three years in a monastery repenting for wanting to kill Alberto. He re-unites with Aurora and their daughter. They move back to America to support their daughter while she goes to university to learn music. Frankie and Aurora are in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina, and Aurora suffers an accident that kills her. Frankie is heart-broken the rest of his life. His daughter plays a competition in the Francisco Tárrega competition, where Frankie meets the nun who once tried to drown him. She reveals she has followed Frankie his whole life and protected him as penance for her actions. He plays guitar with his daughter at the festival and forgives the nun as he dies on stage.



Part One

Summary

The Magic Strings of Frankie Presto is the story of fictional legendary musician Frankie Presto, depicting how his miraculous life and singular talent secretly influenced twentieth century music history.

The Spirit of Music, the spiritual embodiment of musical talent, narrates the novel. The narrative is interspersed with firsthand accounts from mourners at Frankie Presto's funeral, many of them famous figures, speaking to unknown sources such as reporters or other attendees.

Music says it lends a piece of itself to people at birth and comes to collect its piece back upon death. Music has come for Frankie's soul, but first tells the story of Frankie's unique life, his mysterious death, and the six magical strings on Frankie's guitar that changed lives. Part One covers the early stages of Frankie's life in Spain in the thirties and forties under a fascist regime, along with tales about Frankie's life from funeral mourners in the present.

Throughout the novel Music says, "Everyone joins a band in this life. You are born into your first one. Your mother plays the lead" (19). Frankie's birth name was Francisco de Asís Pascual Presto. He was born in Villareal, Spain, in 1936 during the Red Terror, a bloody civil war. His pregnant mother, Carmencita, arrived at a church one night as raiders pillaged the streets. A young nun hid Carmencita and helped her give birth while the raiders murdered priests and nuns. Carmencita was killed, but she saved Frankie's life by humming a melody to him by Francisco Tárrega. The song was "Lágrima" (literally meaning teardrop). Music said Frankie took a major piece of his musical power at his birth that night.

Frankie was adopted by the young nun who helped his mother give birth. Frankie heard Lágrima in a shop and was unable to stop crying. The nun then became exasperated and abandoned him in the river. Frankie was saved by a hairless dog who delivered him to a poor sardine-maker named Baffa Rubio. The man loved Frankie as his own. Baffa lied to Frankie and claimed to be his real father to spare Frankie trauma of his abandonment.

Frankie's talent developed and Baffa sought out a famous local blind guitar player to teach Frankie the guitar. The blind man was only known as El Maestro, and he was a passionate musician but a volatile drunk. He refused to give Frankie lessons until he witnessed Frankie's major talent. Over three years, El Maestro was a strict but genius mentor to Frankie and pushed him to his limits. They developed a father-and-son-like relationship. Frankie learned El Maestro lost his wife and unborn son but numbed himself with drinking. El Maestro gifted Frankie with a branguia, a guitar similar to a



ukulele. He also gave Frankie the magical six strings that Frankie would use to save lives throughout his life.

In Autumn 1944, Frankie fell in love with a young English girl named Aurora York. She was hiding in a tree as Frankie walked home one day and they played together. Aurora's father was a British spy and she knew about the goings-on of the fascist regime in Spain. Together they spied Spanish soldiers dump the bodies of dissidents in an unmarked grave. Frankie and Aurora staged a funeral for the dead. They both felt they would someday marry each other.

In a crackdown on political dissidents, Spanish soldiers raided Baffa Rubio's sardine factory and jailed him along with other political prisoners. A homeless Frankie moved in with El Maestro. Baffa got word to El Maestro to get Frankie out of the country and away from fascism. It pained El Maestro to lose Frankie, but with Baffa's money and the help of El Maestro's friend Alberto, Frankie was smuggled on board a ship to England. Alberto betrayed El Maestro and drowned him for the rest of Baffa Rubio's money. Music revealed El Maestro was Frankie's true father and his wife was Carmencita, but neither El Maestro or Frankie knew it. Music also revealed a mysterious figure was following Frankie around in Spain.

Throughout Part One, the narrative is interspersed with funeral mourners telling stories of Frankie Presto in the present tense. Marcus Belgrave tells a story of how Frankie once saved a young girl's life in a bar by distracting her abuser with impossibly fast guitar playing. Marcus swears one of Frankie's guitar strings literally turned the color blue afterwards.

Others mourners are industry music figures who tell stories of Frankie Presto at the height of his career. Frankie was a heartthrob pop star in the fifties and early sixties. The legends include a story of how Frankie once substituted for Elvis during a show in Vancouver and the audience had no idea. Other episodes describe Frankie's legendary effect on women.

A picture emerges of Frankie Presto as an extraordinarily gifted musician born to be a star whose industry fame was rivaled only by his famous kindness.

Analysis

The Spirit of Music's claim that "everyone joins a band in this life" (19) refers to the novel's main theme of interconnectedness between people. These bands are not only musical, The Spirit of Music says, but means all relationships including family, work, and friends. In his lifetime, Frankie has several relationships and the effects they have on each other are profound and life-changing.

The Spirit of Music describes the mourners at Frankie's funeral as members of his many bands throughout his lifetime. The mourners tell how Frankie influenced their lives in drastic ways, often saving their careers or personal lives. Frankie was secretly behind the scenes in several major events in the music industry. Frankie's actions are not just



entwined with his former bandmates, but with music history itself. By showing impossible coincidences, the novel suggests people have a karmic responsibility to each other. The very structure of the novel reinforces this idea; chapters are non-linear and jump between past and future, directly showing cause and effect.

Although only briefly introduced in Part One, Frankie's favorite band is the one he joins with his future wife Aurora York, and later, his adopted child. Through their love, the novel shows that people are tied to their bands in life. Aurora and Frankie frequently separate and return to each other over the story. They are tethered to each other for life. The mysterious figure following Frankie around, revealed later in the book as the young nun, is also tied to Frankie for life as punishment for trying to abandon him. The novel argues there is a sense of destiny and responsibility to those that one chooses to have in their lives.

Frankie receives a major portion of The Spirit of Music's talent at his birth, arguing that natural talent is something bestowed not just earned. Genius is a gift and cannot be created from nothing. It can be sharpened through hard work, as shown by Frankie's tutelage with El Maestro, but Frankie already had ample talent to begin with. The mere presence of The Spirit of Music suggests that art is something transcendent and brings us closer to the heart of creation all around us. It is an element of the universe itself.

Frankie's birth during a historically bloody civil war, The Spanish Terror, also mirrors the death/rebirth cycle. As priests and nuns are murdered feet from his mother giving birth, Frankie is brought into the world. Their spiritual sacrifice is recycled into him. In that sense, Frankie's birth is nearly saint-like. He is smiled upon at birth with the gift of ample musical talent. That sense of destiny follows him around his whole life. His abandonment in the river has biblical connotations and recalls the story of Moses.

The Spanish Terror shapes Frankie. He is something beautiful literally born into a world of pain and suffering all around him. The deprivation and hatred of the fascist regime makes him appreciate his love for art and kindness. Rather than growing up bitter, he is an empathetic soul who sees the beauty in all things and acts as a medium for it. Music and Frankie are answers to oppressive rule. Artful expression can be both a reflection and critique of society. Art is dangerous to fascism and an important tool to fighting the status quo.

The hairless dog is a symbol of Frankie's divine protection. It saves him from the river and rejoins him across the world. It is the physical manifestation of a higher power or a guardian angel. When the dog is old and dies, it swims into the river to die, coming full circle and mirroring the way it saved Frankie.

The coincidences that happen to Frankie - from discovering Aurora halfway across the world -- to unknowingly studying under his real father, El Maestro - to encountering and altering the paths of legendary musicians -- suggests divine intervention at play. In later parts of the novel, Frankie also has prophetic visions when it comes to musicians' fates and those he loves. He predicts Hank Williams will die in a car crash; he knows Baffa



Rubio was executed without ever being there. Frankie is attuned to a higher world through his passion for music.

Frankie's magic strings further show he is gifted by God. When Spanish soldiers buried the bodies of dissidents in an unmarked grave, Frankie sacrificed his most precious possession, his guitar strings, to make them flowers. His kindness is rewarded with six magical strings, the same ones his mother was rewarded with by gypsies for her kindness too. Frankie saves lives with those strings and it emphasizes him as a messianic figure of sorts. Goodness and kindness are saintly.

Discussion Question 1

How does Frankie's birth reflect his destiny throughout his life?

Discussion Question 2

What is the significance of cutting between Frankie's story as a child and his funeral?

Discussion Question 3

How is music and El Maestro's teaching important during the Spanish Terror?

Vocabulary

dissonant, infuse, basilica, calliope, wafting, coiffed, prelude, allegro, adagio, naysayer, conga, rapped, frets, infatuated, embodied, composition, mahogany

Part Two

Summary

Part Two continues Frankie's story as a child, interweaving it with chapters set in the future at Woodstock when Frankie is 30 years old, alongside more tales from mourners.

In 1969, Frankie was using drugs at the famous Woodstock music festival. He was on a strange quest to bring a carton of eggs to his wife, Aurora, back at the main stage. The mission was extremely important to him though it was unclear why. His altered state made the job almost impossible. Many obstacles and temptations in the Woodstock crowd tried to stop him; an attractive woman lured Frankie into her van and tried to seduce him, but Frankie's self-control won out and he left her. He kept on his quest to find the stage and deliver the eggs, which is continued in Part Three.

In 1946, Frankie was homeless and played guitar for money on the English docks after he escaped Spain. He hoped El Maestro or Baffa Rubio would save him but neither did. Django Reinhardt, a Belgian-born famous gypsy widely considered the best jazz guitarist in Europe, was impressed when Frankie played one of his songs, Billet Doux, on the docks. Django took Frankie on as a Spanish-French translator while he toured in America with Duke Ellington. Frankie's bottom guitar-string turned blue after playing for Django.

During the American tour, Frankie hoped to find the woman Baffa Rubio said was his mother, who lived in Detroit. He did not know Baffa lied to him and the woman was actually Baffa's sister. Frankie tracked the woman down and surprised her in Detroit. She rudely told him Baffa was a liar and she had no idea who Frankie was. Frankie was heartbroken and fled. He became homeless again until he was taken in an orphanage by nuns.

The other boys at the orphanage were mean to Frankie. They were jealous of the special attention he received from the nuns for his musical talent. Frankie ran away and found the hairless dog who had saved his life, despite how impossible it was for the dog to cross a continent.

Frankie started playing music in bars for food despite his young age. He saved the young woman's life in the story Marcus Belgrave told in Part One. Frankie believed the woman he saved was Aurora York and set out on a quest to find her. He lived with Hampton Belgrave, Marcus' cousin, who often faced racial discrimination because he was black. Hampton got Frankie a job playing music at a car dealership. Legendary musician Hank Williams met Frankie there while buying a car. Frankie had a premonition Hank would die in the car he bought. Frankie lost his job after he tried to dissuade Hank Williams from buying the car. Hank Williams died in his infamous car crash soon after.



Hampton tried to manage Frankie's music career and make him a star. The stress gave Hampton a heart attack. Frankie saved Hampton's life by convincing a racist white doctor to treat him. Frankie's third guitar string turned blue. Frankie soon left Hampton to keep searching for Aurora. The hairless dog, then very old, left to die in a river. Aurora York appeared to Frankie right after the hairless dog died.

Throughout Part Two, mourners continue telling stories in the present-tense. Niles Stango, a music historian, declares Frankie Presto one of the top five performers of early rock n' roll. Burt Bacharach, a songwriter and performer, tells about Frankie's exceptional work ethic and passion during a recording session in New York.

Part Two reveals that Carmencita received the six magical strings as a gift from gypsies for her kindness. El Maestro later received the strings when they were found on Carmencita's body in the church.

Analysis

Frankie's encounter with Baffa's sister is an example of the novel's wider use of musical imagery as a metaphor for how art connects Frankie to the world. During their tragic interaction, *The Spirit of Music* does not relate the conversation in dialogue but puts it in percussive terms, saying: "she grew angry and broke the truth to Frankie (...) like a series of hard rim shots on a snare drum. Thwack! She was not his mother! Thwack! She was not Baffa's wife. Thwack! Baffa never had a wife" (195).

Throughout the novel, *The Spirit of Music* uses musical metaphors and similes to drive that point home. When it describes a thunderstorm early on, *The Spirit of Music* says, "rain rapped the roof like mallets. The thunder was a tympani drum" (8). Painting the scene with musical terms reinforces the idea that Frankie sees life through the prism of song. *The Spirit of Music* also refers to events in time signatures, giving different tempos to different sections of Frankie's life. The result shows how art, and especially music, is all around everyone and makes up the fabric of the universe.

The structure of the novel's chapters also emphasizes the theme of musicality in life. The novel has six parts like Frankie's six strings. It is often broken up into long chapters, followed by short ones, then a funeral chapter like verses and a chorus connected by a bridge. The book itself has a rhythm like a piece of music.

Frankie's strange egg quest symbolizes his need to reclaim his past. Part Two is the first time Frankie is seen at a low point in his life. During the Woodstock section, Frankie's quixotic mission to bring eggs to Aurora is confusing to the reader at first. It is not revealed until later that the whole mission is a drug-induced fever dream; Aurora is not there and Frankie is not scheduled to play at Woodstock either. On the surface, Frankie bringing eggs to Aurora is his way of fixing the terrible mistake he makes in Part Three. He thinks he can undo the past.

The eggs are also a symbol for family unity. Eggs are a staple breakfast food, and breakfast is a typical family tradition. In securing a breakfast, Frankie has the irrational



hope he can protect his family from disaster. There is also the connotation of eggs in regards to female anatomy. When Aurora had to buy eggs in New York she was mugged and stabbed and lost their unborn child. Although it is too late, Frankie wants to preserve the eggs and preserve the egg of his child.

Frankie's desire to reach the Woodstock stage is also a microcosm of his entire career. The reader only learns he has not registered to play at Woodstock in Part Three and does not belong on stage. Frankie does not realize it himself and he navigates to the stage, trance-like, hoping for salvation when he reaches it. The stage is like a mirage and represents his desire to be on the stage his whole life. In reaching it, he hopes to recapture his early happiness.

The encounters along the way represent the distractions and temptations he had to field in his early career and marriage. The seductive woman in a poncho is a stand-in for all the women that led Frankie astray. She kisses him and Frankie is tempted by her. His obsession with finding Aurora and giving her the eggs shows how he is trying to fix his old mistakes, especially when the reader finds out that he and Aurora are separated.

Discussion Question 1

What is the point of describing events in the novel with musical imagery?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Frankie blame himself for Aurora's miscarriage when he is not directly to blame?

Discussion Question 3

Why is it important to flash-forward to Frankie's lowest point so early on in the novel?

Vocabulary

scruffy, ravaged, erratic, barbiturates, shilling, omnipresent, baroque, pylons, octave, funnel, cascading, commuter, rattled, awestruck, pint-sized, profoundly, resolve



Part Three

Summary

Part Three continues Frankie's drug-induced quest to deliver eggs at Woodstock, alongside his early marriage years with Aurora York, and more tales from mourners at Frankie's funeral.

In 1969, Frankie kept trying to find the center stage with his eggs. He was distracted by children playing in mud and people who recognized him. He reached the stage at four in the morning and walked on before The Who went on. Aurora was not really at the festival and Frankie was not expected on stage. He discovered his eggs were all broken.

Music recounts the events that led up to the night at Woodstock. Frankie and Aurora were living in a small apartment in New York; Aurora was pregnant and took Frankie back in after he promised to straighten up his bad behavior, which included drugs and other women. Frankie broke his promise one night. He got drunk and failed to bring Aurora a carton of eggs for breakfast like she asked. Aurora left to go buy eggs herself but she was mugged and stabbed. She lived but lost the baby. Frankie was so ashamed he left and eventually made his way to Woodstock. He took a lot of drugs and became obsessed with buying eggs to fix his mistake.

Frankie took the stage and channeled his sorrow into his most inspired and beautiful performance. The Who watched from back-stage and were blown away. Most of the audience was asleep but the performance was secretly recorded. Frankie mutilated his left hand with a broken bottle to punish himself, the same hand El Maestro once said created the beauty in guitar-playing.

In 1955, Frankie and Aurora lived a happy bohemian life together. They moved to New Orleans and got married. Frankie's music career took off. He was in such high demand over the next few years, it put a strain on their marriage. Frankie made them both move to California for his career even though Aurora did not want to go. Frankie signed a contract with an agent, Tappy Fishman, who wanted to rebrand Frankie. Tappy made Frankie stop playing guitar to focus on singing, which Aurora hated.

Frankie became a massive star. He performed on television and was a household name in America. Aurora despised Frankie's ambition. She thought Tappy Fishman had turned Frankie into somebody he was not, and that the music Frankie was playing was beneath him. He ignored his guitar and magic strings. Aurora soon disappeared from Frankie's life. Over the next few years, Tappy took control of Frankie's entire life and arranged a new marriage between Frankie and an actress, Dolores Ray, for the publicity. Frankie never loved Dolores and still believed Aurora would come back someday.



At the funeral, Roger McGuinn, founder of the The Byrds, tells the rest of what happened to Frankie during that time. Roger once jammed with Frankie and was shocked by his talent. Frankie had hidden his talent for guitar-playing to become a singer and actor like Tappy ordered. Frankie was miserable. Roger McGuinn describes a party where they met The Beatles. John Lennon and Paul McCartney wanted to know if the rumors that Frankie once replaced Elvis were true but Frankie denied them. John Lennon was impressed with Frankie but insulted him when he claimed Frankie was trying to be like The Beatles.

Frankie then broke up with Tappy Fishman and his wife Dolores, self-destructing his career. He moved to Greenwich Village and played what he considered real music. He was still poor and ashamed until Aurora came back one day. She took him back when he promised to straighten up. She got pregnant. The events at Woodstock happened soon after.

Analysis

Part Three deals with another major theme of the novel: the corrupting nature of fame and ambition. The years Frankie spends with Aurora York living a poor bohemian lifestyle in New Orleans are the happiest of his life. He challenges himself and creates true art. When Tappy Fishman enters the picture, he turns Frankie into a pre-packaged pop star. He tells Frankie he cannot play the guitar anymore but must focus on singing instead. Frankie chooses ambition and puts away his guitar, along with the magical strings, rejecting a part of himself.

During their sessions, El Maestro tells Frankie, “You must decide what you're going to be-- a great singer or a great guitar player (...) Being both means being neither” (89). For Frankie, it symbolizes choosing a life between his true talent and stardom. That struggle will define his early life and career. The novel suggests it is impossible to be everything at once. Frankie cannot have artistic freedom and be rich and famous.

By choosing fame, Frankie does not realize he represses a core part of who he is. The novel argues fame and ambition require personal compromise that can often be corrupting. Frankie's outer appearance reflects the control others gain over him, such as his agent and the recording studio. Tappy gives Frankie a new hairdo without asking him, chooses Frankie's new wife for the publicity, and dictates Frankie's next career moves. Although Frankie is successful, he is miserable for years. He has become a corporate tool rather than an artist.

Frankie's separation from Aurora symbolizes his separation from true happiness. Although his life with Aurora is wonderful in New Orleans, Frankie's thirst for fame leads to their first breakup. During their car ride moving to California, The Spirit of Music says, “In earlier days, they would have spent the ride holding hands. But the car was cramped with instruments and clothing and two very different ideas of the future” (280). The clutter between them is a physical symbol of the figurative distance between them.



The Spirit of Music says Aurora is the only one who rivaled him for control of Frankie's heart. Frankie is truly happy when he is with both Aurora and music, living a life of love and passion, not record sales. Whenever he chooses ambition, Aurora disappears from his life and so do his magical strings. Ambition is at odds with true happiness and fulfillment.

Further, Frankie's guitar and his six magical strings conflate true artistic integrity with divinity. Through his real music, Frankie is literally able to save lives. Since art pervades the universe, as The Spirit of Music tells the reader, true beauty uncorrupted by ambition is noble. For ten years, Frankie spurns true music and his destiny.

Frankie's performance at Woodstock shows how true art is born of authenticity. Frankie reaches the stage in Part Three and discovers the eggs he brought have been broken. As the eggs symbolize his desire to regain family unity, the destruction of the eggs shows how his family will never be whole again. Frankie then takes the stage and delivers a heartfelt performance drawn from his inner torment.

His solo comes from his deep pain and sorrow; the result is the most beautiful show of his career. By drawing on his real emotion, he is able to create true art that his studio manufactured pop songs could never touch. El Maestro tells Frankie, "Music is pain" (66). In channeling pain, Frankie creates art that makes The Spirit of Music swell with pride.

Discussion Question 1

Why can Frankie not be both artistically and commercially fulfilled?

Discussion Question 2

Why does the novel suggest true art hurts?

Discussion Question 3

What is the significance of Aurora's departure and return to Frankie's life?

Vocabulary

double-crossed, studious, decorum, mouthpiece, wiry, racy, fringes, decipher, wee, counterpoint, lumbered, attributed, pompadour, fickle, deliverance, giddy, bubbly, frizzled



Part Four

Summary

In Part Four, *The Spirit of Music* tells the story of Frankie's life after Woodstock, his life in the early eighties, and Tony Bennett tells a story about Frankie at his funeral in the present.

After the events at Woodstock, Frankie was hospitalized for his hand injury. He was nursed back to health and recovered from a depression thanks to a surgeon. When Frankie got out of the hospital, he learned Aurora had left their apartment. Frankie was still guilt-ridden and the surgeon who saved his life convinced him to join a USO show for the troops in Vietnam.

While on tour in Vietnam, Frankie encountered Ellis, the New Orleans shoe-shine boy. Ellis had grown up and joined the army. Ellis was thrilled to see Frankie and invited him to play at his wedding reception to a Vietnamese girl that night. They played music and celebrated but the girl's family did not look pleased with the union. On the way home from the party, a Vietnamese cab driver tried to detonate a car bomb with Frankie and Ellis inside. They managed to escape and Frankie saved Ellis' life by shielding him from debris with his guitar case. Frankie's fourth string turned blue.

At Frankie's funeral in the present, Tony Bennet recounts how he met Frankie. Tony was once playing music in London and saw the same man waiting at a park bench all day outside his hotel room. Tony approached the man and discovered it was Frankie, who had been underground for years. He learned that Frankie had injured his hand and it hindered his ability to play music. The reason that Frankie was waiting at the same park bench every day was because he hoped his wife would find him there. Tony convinced Frankie to join him in a studio, where Frankie was coaxed into playing the guitar and performed beautifully. Tony told Frankie's story on the radio, while leaving out his name, and word eventually got back to Aurora via her sister. Aurora reunited with Frankie at that park bench in London and took him back when he agreed to move somewhere far away.

To disconnect from the world as much as possible, Frankie and Aurora moved to a small island in New Zealand and lived on a secret beach. During that time, Frankie slowly began to practice guitar again. A year later, they heard an animal crying in the woods. The noise led them to a stray dog crying next to an abandoned baby in the woods. As Frankie and Aurora rushed the girl to the hospital, a mysterious figure spied on them but they did not know. The baby was nursed back to health but unable to make a sound. Frankie managed to make her react to some guitar playing, proving she was not deaf. Frankie and Aurora decided to adopt the girl and named her Kai.

In 1981, three musicians in their twenties, Lyle, Eddie, and Cluck, come to the island searching for Frankie Presto. Frankie's Woodstock recording had become a mysterious



cult classic in music circles although its author was unknown. The boys believed it was Frankie and tracked him down to New Zealand. A hospitable island bar owner, Kevin, led them to Frankie's secret beach after getting Aurora's permission. The boys failed to engage Frankie at first, but they managed to get Frankie to record music in a studio with them after a second attempt. Frankie only agreed to appease Aurora, who thought it would be good for him. Frankie advised the lead singer Lyle to embrace music he was passionate about rather than what was commercially viable. The Spirit of Music revealed the lead singer was Lyle Lovett and would go on to release his first major work thanks to Frankie. When they were finished recording, Frankie jammed brilliantly in the studio for Kai. The sound recordist secretly taped the session and named the tracks "The Magic Strings of Frankie Presto."

Analysis

Part Four focuses on the nature of reconciliation and how it is constant over the course of a lifetime. Frankie and Aurora often separate for years during their relationship but always return to one another. Despite tremendous obstacles such as Frankie's career, Aurora's miscarriage, and other women, they inevitably find each other and take each other back. Their reunions further the idea they are bound to each other for life and can only grow through beginning anew. Every time they reunite, Frankie says, "Aurora (...) it means dawn" (309). Dawn is of course the new beginning a day. Aurora is Frankie's constant new dawn. Every time Frankie hits a new low in his life, Aurora eventually returns, ready to offer him a fresh start.

The Spirit of Music says, "All love stories are symphonies. And, like symphonies, they have four movements: Allegro, a quick and spirited opening, Adagio, a slow turn, Minuet/Scherzo, short steps in $\frac{3}{4}$ time, and Rondo, a repeating theme, interrupted by various passages" (261). The Spirit of Music often introduces chapters by relating these time signatures to Frankie and Aurora's current romantic situation. The beginning of Frankie and Aurora's relationship is marked by passion (Allegro). The "repeating theme, interrupted by various passages" refers to their falling outs and reconciliations. Like a symphony, theirs is an old routine. The cycle of mistakes and forgiveness is as natural as music.

The importance of new beginnings is reinforced in the studio chapter between Lyle Lovett and Frankie. Lyle and his friends recall their shock when they hear Frankie practicing basic scales. When Lyle asks why Frankie is playing scales, Frankie says, "Retraining (...) My fingers. My ears. It's a long process (...) I messed up my hand. I'm working on finding it" (354). For a genius guitar player like Frankie to play scales is a true sign of humility and the importance of starting afresh. It suggests that the only means of healing after tragedy is to rebuild from square one. Frankie's absence of ego and his monk-like penitence allows him to start the process of recapturing the beauty that once inspired him.

El Maestro tells Frankie, "You will never know all there is to know. You will learn until your final days" (484). In keeping with the theme of new beginnings, all people, and



especially artists, are students for life. Even the masters are constantly starting over. It implies mistakes and forgiveness are not only inevitable, but the natural course of life.

Life's cyclical nature is also revisited in Part Four. Kai is brought into the world in the same circumstances as Frankie: she is an abandoned mute child found by a stray dog. Although it is revealed later she was deliberately placed for Frankie by Josefa, the nun who abandoned Frankie, Kai's situation mirrors Frankie's childhood too closely to be coincidence. Frankie inspires his daughter and eventually turns her into a world-class musician, the way his father, El Maestro, did for him. El Maestro tells Frankie, "You will make someone love music the way you live it" (484). The Spirit of Music also later states it does not need to redistribute Frankie's talent on the world because Frankie already did it himself in life. Frankie's similarity to Francisco Tárrega and his daughter's similarity to him speak to a symbolic reincarnation in how generations of artists pass the baton.

Discussion Question 1

Why are all love stories like symphonies?

Discussion Question 2

Why can Frankie not ever "master" the guitar in El Maestro's eyes?

Discussion Question 3

How is the cyclical nature of talent reflected in Kai's adoption?

Vocabulary

glistened, anguished, steadfast, propelled, wraparound, remnants, bolstered, slumped, drifters, muted, etudes, distortion, milestone, flick, phonograph, inversions, dexterity

Part Five

Summary

In Part Five, *The Spirit of Music* recounts the events after New Zealand, and Paul Stanley tells a story about Frankie at his funeral in the present.

Aurora wanted Frankie to show their daughter Frankie's home in Spain, and she thought it would help Frankie come to terms with his past too. Frankie still had not forgiven Baffa Rubio for lying about being his father. Frankie did not want to return to Spain but eventually agreed. Frankie found that Spain had changed dramatically since the fascist days of his childhood.

The family returned to Frankie's old home. It had been entirely renovated, but the woman living there had a box of Frankie's hit records and his old branguia guitar that Baffa Rubio had left him. She told Frankie that Baffa was now dead. Frankie visited the cemetery and experienced a psychic episode where he saw Baffa lined up against a wall and shot by a firing squad. Overcome with remorse and moved by his adopted father's sacrifice, Frankie told Aurora and his daughter Kai his whole childhood story.

Frankie then tried to find El Maestro in Spain. He had never tried before because of the shame he felt for playing superficial music El Maestro would have hated. Unable to find El Maestro, Frankie ended at the taberna where he and El Maestro played music their last night before Frankie left for England. He struck up a deal with the bar owner to play music that night, hoping it would lure El Maestro. Frankie played with the house-band but El Maestro never showed up in the crowd. In an alley outside, the conga player revealed himself to be Alberto, El Maestro's friend who betrayed him for money.

Alberto told Frankie the story about killing El Maestro and asked Frankie to kill him. He had been living with terrible guilt his whole life. Disgusted, Frankie still refused to kill the man. Alberto then pulled a gun and tried to rob him, but Frankie yanked the gun from Alberto. Alberto charged and Frankie shot three times. The old man was killed. Inside the taberna, the guitar's fifth string turned blue.

In the present, Paul Stanley, a member of the band KISS, tells a story about Frankie in the eighties. He recalls KISS' amazement when Frankie Presto came to an open audition call for their band. Although Frankie's playing was incredible, the other band members did not want him because of his age. Paul Stanley took Frankie out for a meal, learning that Frankie only wanted to join the band because his daughter Kai was a fan. Paul remembered thinking it was strange reasoning until he had a son of his own and wanted his child to look up to him too.



Analysis

Part Five deals with the importance of knowing one's origins and overcoming past trauma. Frankie returns to Spain while still harboring anger towards Baffa for lying to him as a child, but the revelation that Baffa was always trying to protect Frankie instead makes him feel remorse for having the story wrong for most of his life. Frankie's decision to then divulge his childhood story to his family, and his decision to seek out El Maestro, represents his realization of the importance of coming to terms with the past and knowing one's history.

Frankie's past had for so long been riddled with trauma, he had pretended to forget it. His pop music, like his famous persona, was glossed-up and fake as he tried to hide his true origins. The past for him was painful and something to be repressed. Spain itself acts a microcosm for Frankie's turnaround. Far from the fascist regime of Frankie's youth where all was policed, modern-day Spain, "...had changed dramatically since the 1940s. The dictator Franco was dead, and the country he'd held down for so long was slowly rising" (390). Like his homeland, Frankie's self-imposed oppression is slowly rising too. He frees himself in ways that allow him to reconcile his past. There is also the similarity between dictator Franco's name and Frankie, further drawing superficial parallels.

Frankie's decision to play music at the taberna where he experienced tremendous fear the night he had escaped also compounds Frankie's redemption. El Maestro had once made him play illegal music during the fascist days to the whole taberna, an event so harrowing to Frankie it gave him stage fright later in life. Playing a show at the taberna is an exposure therapy for Frankie and a means to conquer the demons of his past. The taberna loses its power to horrify him, mirroring how Frankie is no longer horrified of his past. Alberto is the last personification of Frankie's traumatic childhood. The man who killed El Maestro is the walking embodiment of everything that was taken from Frankie. Frankie's refusal to kill him represents his refusal to give into his past hatred and fear.

Frankie's return to Spain is conflated with the story KISS member Paul Stanley tells about Frankie auditioning to join KISS for his daughter. Frankie tells Paul Stanley, "So I thought, if I were in a band that she [Kai] liked, that would be a good memory for her" (384). Paul recalls being stunned that Frankie wanted to join KISS to impress his daughter, but later admits he understood when he had a son of his own. Frankie's desire for Kai to have good memories of him shows his enlightenment in terms of his past. Abandoned as a child, Frankie never knew the true story of his mother or even Baffa Rubio. Frankie wants Kai to grow up knowing her father because he has come to understand the importance and healing power knowing one's personal history after his return to his home.

Discussion Question 1

How does playing at the taberna help Frankie overcome his past?



Discussion Question 2

Why is it important to Frankie that Kai sees him perform?

Discussion Question 3

How does modern day Spain represent Frankie's new outlook?

Vocabulary

chops, sheepish, canonized, bestowing, eucharist, indelible, unkempt, stark, tousled, delegate, rosette, raucous, ebullient, conjure, ovation, deluded, mellifluous

Part Six

Summary

In Part Six, *The Spirit of Music* finishes Frankie's story and mourners finish their stories in the present as Frankie's funeral starts.

In the present, Wynton Marsalis, a grammy winning musician, reveals he found Frankie Presto in a Spanish Monastery by coincidence. Frankie had played music with Wynton's father in New Orleans in the fifties. After Alberto's death, Frankie had taken a vow of silence for three years as penance. Although police ruled an unknown third party as Alberto's killer, Frankie's desire to kill Alberto made him seek repentance. Wynton convinced Frankie to leave. After traveling the world by ship for another five months, Frankie returned to New Zealand where Aurora was waiting for him at the ferry. She had been waiting at the ferry for his arrival every day for three years. She took him back.

Frankie and his family reunited and they celebrated Kai's 12th birthday. Aurora was upset when she learned Frankie had given up his old guitar. She knew it had the power to save lives and she was worried it would be needed again in the future. After Alberto, Frankie thought the magic strings had only brought trouble.

In the present, Ingrid Michaelson, a singer and songwriter, tells how she met Frankie Presto under another name, Frankie Rubio, in New York. As a young girl, Ingrid wandered into a music store in Staten Island. Frankie was the store's music instructor and his talent impressed her. He agreed to teach Ingrid music. Frankie and Aurora had moved to New York after Kai had been accepted to Juilliard so they could be close to her and support her. Frankie's incredible talent began to draw many famous musicians to the store until his secret was out. Once he had been discovered again, he and Aurora moved back to New Orleans.

Frankie and Aurora enjoyed their time in New Orleans until Hurricane Katrina hit. Aurora hurried to help board up a church during the storm. Frankie had tried to get Aurora to leave when she suffered an accident, hit by a piece of wood. Aurora was hospitalized. Frankie played music for her and the others in the hospital room. When he finished playing, Aurora had died. Frankie broke down. He felt remorse for giving up his last string which could have saved his wife's life.

Frankie spent the rest of his life mourning Aurora. He taught music to children in the Philippines and lived alone. Kai convinced Frankie to come back once she had been accepted into Spain's annual Francisco Tárrega competition. On the morning of the competition, Frankie visited the statue of Francisco Tárrega, when an old woman appeared to Frankie with his old branguia.

Frankie was shocked to hear her story. The woman was the mysterious figure who had been following Frankie his whole life, Josefa, the nun who had once abandoned him in



the river. As penance for what she had done, she decided to follow Frankie around like his guardian angel. She had helped him out many times, including delivering Kai to him and shooting Alberto. She revealed the truth about El Maestro being Frankie's father. Josefa asked for forgiveness, but Frankie was overwhelmed and refused to give it.

Kai won the Francisco Tárrega competition. In her speech, she thanked Frankie for inspiring her and invited him to play music on stage with her. She said a stranger brought his old branguia and Frankie knew it was Josefa. Frankie did not want to join Kai on stage but came around. The audience was astonished to learn Kai's father was really Frankie Presto. They played together beautifully. Frankie played Lágrima one last time. Moved to tears, he saw Josefa in the audience and loudly announced his forgiveness and thankfulness. Frankie then died on stage, and as his soul left his body, it looked for one brief instant like he levitated.

In the present, The Spirit of Music says "Come to the Water" is playing as the pallbearers carry Frankie away, appropriate for a boy once almost drowned. The Spirit of Music says it would usually redistribute Frankie's talent onto new souls, but Frankie had already done it in his lifetime. All the gatherers are students of Frankie's. The Spirit of Music departs with the final message that music is in the connection of human souls.

Analysis

Part Six brings three last major themes of *The Magic Strings of Frankie Presto* to the foreground. The first is the theme of silence, the second is water, and the third is music as human connection.

Throughout the novel, the notion of silence plays a major role in Frankie's life. At birth, Frankie is miraculously silent during the raiders' pillaging. He is so quiet that he says nothing for a long time until he hears Lágrima again and cannot stop crying. From the very beginning of his life, sound is associated with danger. If Frankie had cried, he would have drawn the raiders and been killed. Silence therefore acts as a metaphor for fascist Spain. Literal silence symbolizes the figurative silence that was needed to survive on the streets. Music and all art was censored.

For his entire childhood, Frankie had to censor a very core part of who he was just to live. He only makes a sound when he hears Francisco Tárrega, who acts as Frankie's spiritual predecessor as a musician. Frankie is literally voiceless until he inherits sounds, representing his music, from Tárrega. It is the same for Kai, who is voiceless until Frankie gifts her with music of his own making. The mute-silence motif emphasizes how art is cyclical and passed on.

Silence also acts as a means of penance for Frankie. As a musician, he expresses himself entirely through sound and to give it up is true penance. Throughout his life, Frankie makes mistakes, pays for them, and starts anew. His abstention from music in these periods is a self-imposed silence. Like a song, his life has natural variations



between sounds and silence, like his absences from Aurora, marked by periodic mistakes and subsequent acts of contrition.

Water is the second major motif that re-emerges in Part Six. Water is present in some form or another at most of Frankie's major life or death events. He is almost drowned in a river as a child, the hairless dog dies in a river, El Maestro is drowned, and Aurora dies during Hurricane Katrina in a flood-related accident. After Aurora's death, The Spirit of Music says, "There was nowhere to go. No place to scream. Once again, his [Frankie's] life was altered by rushing waters" (456). Water recalls baptism and the theme of new beginnings. With every tragedy, Frankie picks up the pieces as if he were born again. Frankie's Moses-like abandonment down the river also reinforces the religious reading of the water motif.

At Frankie's funeral, the song choice is "Come to the Water." The Spirit of Music says, "How fitting for a child once thrown in the river. Water was also the gateway to Frankie's journey home" (426). This refers to Frankie's journey by boat rather than plane, and it is on the sea where he often comes to deep self-discovery before returning to Aurora. Water is a primal element from which all things came and which all things return, a basic building block of creation.

Music as a medium of human connection is the final message of the novel. The Spirit of Music says, "I am Music. And Music is in the connection of human souls, speaking a language that needs no words" (489). The final message hammers home the novel's entire point: music is a transcendent element of the universe that flows through all things. People are bound to each other (by bands) even if those bands have nothing to do with traditional notions of music, but are merely what are commonly called relationships. The coincidences present throughout Frankie's life emphasize how connected he is to those he shaped.

Discussion Question 1

What is the significance of water in Frankie's life?

Discussion Question 2

Why does Frankie choose to forgive Josefa?

Discussion Question 3

What meaning does silence have for Frankie?

Vocabulary

incarcerated, refectory, seclusion, monastic, devotional, envision, battered, juxtapose, bootleg, carousel, conservatory, ensemble, innovation, amputation, adjoin, frantic, dwindle



Characters

Frankie Presto

Frankie is the main character of *The Magic Strings of Frankie Presto*. The novel follows Frankie's entire life from his birth to his funeral. Frankie Presto is a major heart-throb pop star during the 1950s whose origins are a mystery. He disappeared from stardom early on, emerging only sporadically in music history through cult classic recordings rumored to be written by him. *The Spirit of Music* reveals Frankie's true story: he is the one of the most gifted musicians of all time, born with tremendous music talent.

Frankie is a musical prodigy and a tender soul. There is a sense of destiny about Frankie throughout his life; his circumstances mirror famous Spanish musician Francisco Tárrega. Tárrega's song *Lágrima* book-ends Frankie's life, sung by his mother at the church Frankie was born in and played at Frankie's funeral. The connection is in keeping with *The Spirit of Music*'s claim that talent is recycled, so Frankie is the inheritor in a long line of musical lineage that goes back to Beethoven. Further, Frankie's guitar-playing is literally magical as his branguia has six magical strings with the ability to save lives.

When Frankie learns to play music in his native country under the tutelage of El Maestro, he is closest to *The Spirit of Music*, and musical purity, despite having to hide his abilities from the Spanish dictators. It is only when Frankie travels to America and gets a taste for stardom that he is "corrupted" by ambition. He puts fame and fortune first, forgetting his six magical strings and his true love Aurora, and thus he represses his true self. For Frankie, one of the major conflicts of his soul resides in his choice between playing the guitar and singing. El Maestro tells him he cannot be both, but must choose. That duality represents Frankie's challenge in his early life. Although Frankie knows success in the fifties, he is never satisfied until he returns to Aurora and his magical guitar.

Despite being true to himself, Frankie does not feel worthy of adoration. He hides his past the rest of his life, which is marked by long periods of silence in the novel. Like his oppressive homeland, Frankie tries to censor key parts of himself and lives in shame for having turned away from his true passion. He learns to embrace forgiveness and comes to terms with his origins despite the trauma they once held for him.

El Maestro

El Maestro is Frankie's guitar instructor and secretly his father. A blind and cantankerous drunk, El Maestro is nevertheless a brilliant and passionate guitar player. He was once the most promising musician in Spain until he was wounded in a war while saving his wife's brother. Burdened by tragedy, El Maestro believes his wife and unborn child died during a raid on a church. He never finds out that his wife managed to give birth and



that his pupil, Frankie, is truly his son. Like Frankie, El Maestro's life mirrors famous musician Francisco Tárrega because both suffered eyes injuries. The similarity furthers the novel's idea that music is inherited and passed down to like souls. That El Maestro ended up teaching Frankie despite their separation at birth testifies to how they are bound together by a greater force.

El Maestro is a major influence on Frankie. The Spirit of Music frequently cuts back to his conversations with Frankie throughout the novel, showing just how much El Maestro shaped the boy. El Maestro is a vehicle for the idea that "art is pain." He teaches Frankie this lesson early on through simply making Frankie's fingers form calluses when he learns to play the guitar, but it symbolizes the novel's larger idea that true art is born of deep suffering. In that sense, El Maestro is suffering incarnate. He drinks heavily to numb the pain of losing his family. Frankie is closest to The Spirit of Music's true purity under El Maestro's instruction, suggesting the intricate relationship between pain and beauty is like teacher and student.

El Maestro also represents the former artist whom inspires the next. He teaches Frankie that an artist never truly stops learning, but only lives long enough to make beauty and inspire the next generation. In keeping with the novel's idea of the cyclical nature of talent, El Maestro is the former mentor that Frankie will become for the many students at his funeral.

Aurora York

Aurora is Frankie's wife and true love. Fated to be with Frankie since childhood, she always returns to him over the course of her life after his many mistakes and tragedies. Despite knowing that Frankie is in many ways too erratic, she cannot fight their attraction and both seem to know they will end up together again as if they are spiritually connected. As the Spirit of Music states, Aurora is the only one who truly rivals music for Frankie's heart. She holds the same purity for Frankie the way true art does.

Whenever Frankie sees Aurora after one of their long times apart, Frankie tells her that "Aurora means dawn." The meaning is that Aurora symbolizes every one of Frankie's new beginnings. She anchors him and keeps him focused on what matters, artistic fulfillment and family. In that sense, she is the opposite of all the things Frankie comes to be attracted to: fame, fortune, and success. She does not care where they live or how much money they have, as long as they are together.

The Spirit of Music

The Spirit of Music is the narrator of The Magic Strings of Frankie Presto. An omniscient god-like being, The Spirit of Music knows all and relates Frankie's strange story for the benefit of the reader as if they were a casual visitor. Speaking in passionate terms and musical imagery, The Spirit of Music acts as proof that art pervades the universe and



some are divinely gifted with its abilities. It often refers to Frankie and Aurora's love in time signatures and makes the claim that love is a symphony.

Through The Spirit of Music's love for Frankie, there is a theme driven home that art is a transcendent higher plane to aspire towards. Music literally forms the building blocks of the universe. Frankie is close to The Spirit of Music when he is making music for the joy of it, meaning true musical purity is not necessarily found in commercial success. The Spirit's mere existence is proof that humankind has been put on earth for the appreciation and creation of beauty. Its existence is also testament to how artistic gifts are not always meted out equally, since some babies take a bigger piece of the spirit upon birth.

Baffa Rubio

Baffa Rubio is a Spanish sardine-maker who adopts baby Frankie after finding him abandoned in the river. Baffa raises Frankie as his own, lying to him about being his true father to spare him pain. The Spirit of Music calls Baffa a simple man, yet his importance in Frankie's life cannot be overstated. Frankie is not only saved by Baffa, he is pushed towards learning music. Although viewed as simple and ungifted by the Spirit of Music, Baffa represents the unsung acts of heroism needed to fight injustice. Baffa protects Frankie from the oppressive Spanish dictatorship despite tragically never seeing his adopted son again. Frankie's later blame of him for lying to him only compounds the tragedy of Baffa Rubio as a man fate forgot.

Hampton Belgrave

Hampton Belgrave is a black musician living in Tennessee during the 1950s. After Frankie stows away in Hampton's car after gigging with Hampton's brother Marcus, Hampton takes Frankie in and gets him a job. A brusque yet kindhearted soul, Hampton takes an active interest in Frankie's career. His failed attempt at managing Frankie gives him a heart attack that nearly kills him. A victim of racial discrimination in the segregation-era south, Hampton offers Frankie a pessimistic but realistic lens into commonplace hatred and the waste of talent that was so pervasive during the early twentieth century. Hampton's kindness in the face of intolerance inspires Frankie in his own later acts of kindness.

Django Reinhardt

Django Reinhardt is a real musician, a Belgian-born famous gypsy guitarist considered the best jazz guitarist in Europe. Django meets Frankie on the English docks, and after being impressed by Frankie's rendition of his song Billet Doux, he hires Frankie as his personal translator in an American tour. Django bonds with Frankie over their shared sense of loss; Django's newborn baby had just died when he met Frankie. Django's appearance on the docks represents the sense of divinity surrounding musical talent in the novel. It also speaks to the deep relationship between suffering and true beauty. The



Spirit of Music lauds Django as the best jazz guitarist in Europe, and he has also known terrible pain.

Francisco Tárrega

Francisco Tárrega is a real musician who lived in Villareal, Spain, and was regarded as a master guitarist and composer. Although Tárrega was born a century before the events of the novel and he never makes an appearance, his specter hangs over Frankie's life. His composition Lágrima helps bring Frankie Presto into the world and ushers him out of it. There are many parallels between their characters, from their orphaned origins to injuries and abandonment, suggesting that Frankie is a spiritual reincarnation of Tárrega. Their similarities speak to the novel's main ideas that talent is something inherited and passed down to the next generation. Tárrega inspired El Maestro and Frankie, who would leave a massive legacy on twentieth century music history.

Kai

Kai is an abandoned baby that Frankie and Aurora adopt as their daughter. She is found abandoned in the woods, and it is later revealed that Josefa was the one who placed her there to be found by Frankie and Aurora. Kai is initially mute until Frankie coaxes sounds out of her through music. Kai eventually becomes a world-class musician like her father. Kai's storyline recalls the novel's themes of silence and the cyclical nature of destiny. Her situation is exactly like Frankie's, from the abandonment to her strange lack of a voice. Like Frankie, she is silent until given voice by another musician.

Josefa

Josefa is the nun who takes Frankie in as a baby and then later abandons him in the river when he will not stop crying. Guilt-ridden for her crimes, she follows Frankie around his entire life as a guardian angel of sorts and secretly helps him out of trouble. She only reveals herself to Frankie at the end of his life when she asks for forgiveness. Josefa is a complicated figure; at once cowardly yet also a contrite old woman who has paid for her crimes. Her terrible act was also ironically the very thing that allowed Frankie to live the fantastic life he did, as he later attests. Her appearance in the novel hints at themes of forgiveness and Frankie's often misplaced blame.



Symbols and Symbolism

The Magic Strings

Frankie's magic strings is a major symbol of the novel, representing music's power to save lives - both literally and figuratively. Whenever Frankie channels his God-given gift for music instead of chasing celebrity status, the magic strings are active. Every time the strings turn the color blue after saving a person's life, Frankie had been using his music: he played lightning-fast to distract Aurora's attacker; he saved Hampton by offering the racist doctor a performance; he physically uses his guitar case to shield young Ellis from a shrapnel blast. The magic strings are a symbol of the novel's theme of "music as salvation," showing how it can save people in both extreme and everyday ways.

Hairless Dog

The Hairless Dog that saves Frankie from drowning in the river is a symbol of Frankie's divine protection. Wherever Frankie goes, the hairless dog follows him and protects him as a guardian angel of sorts. With the help of Josefa, the dog crosses a continent and stays with Frankie until its dying days -- where it drowns itself in a river. The dog's abnormal intelligence suggests divine work at play and that fate itself is looking out for Frankie to complete his mission on earth. The same thing can be seen with the stray dog that finds Kai in the woods, mirroring the exact circumstances of Frankie's salvation. Dogs are angels in the novel.

Aurora

Aurora, while a major character in the novel, also functions as a symbol for new beginnings. Whenever Frankie is in touch with his life's true purpose and happiness, he is with Aurora. On the other hand, he is miserable and fallen from grace when she is done. Every time they reunite, Frankie says "Aurora (...) it means dawn" (309). Dawns are the start to a new day, and Aurora symbolizes the novel's theme of embracing new beginnings. Frankie and Aurora often split and return. They make several fresh starts, which the novel suggests is a natural - and necessary - component of life.

Water

Water makes an appearance at most life or death moments in Frankie's life, symbolizing a higher power and its gift for creation and destruction. The Spirit of Music says, "How fitting for a child once thrown in the river. Water was also the gateway to Frankie's journey home" (426). Frankie is nearly drowned in a river; the biblical connotation is Moses in a basket, showing the religious imagery of water. Frankie's wife Aurora dies in



a Hurricane Katrina-related accident. "Come to the Water" is the song choice at his funeral. The power of life and death and water intersect throughout the book.

Frankie's birth in a church

Frankie's birth in a church symbolizes his saint-like persona. The religious implication of being born in a church is obvious, but his origin story is even more miraculous; he is born amidst carnage and yet he stays impossibly quiet. He is born under the auspices of the church's patron saint. The Spirit of Music implies that the church's saint himself created noise to save Frankie from ruin. Along with Frankie's extraordinary life and the gift of his magical strings, his birth proves he was put on the earth for the purpose to save people with his music.

Frankie's death

Frankie's death symbolizes the natural cyclical nature of talent and the spiritual reincarnation of artists. Frankie's death is shrouded in mystery - he is rumored to have levitated before dying. The Spirit of music says the levitation was just Frankie's soul being pulled between heaven and earth, both of which desired to keep him and his music. The mystery of Frankie's death then shows the effect a powerful musician and teacher can have on the world. The funeral is chock-full of examples of Frankie's success; many world-class musicians have created careers thanks to Frankie. The Spirit of Music argues this is the artist's natural cycle: they create, inspire, and sprinkle their talent to new generations.

The Egg Quest at Woodstock

Frankie's quixotic quest to deliver eggs to Aurora during the Woodstock festival represents his need to save the family unit. After his failure to buy eggs one morning leads to Aurora's miscarriage, he feels tremendous guilt and responsibility for losing their unborn child. He takes a lot of drugs at Woodstock and convinces himself he can change the past if he brings the eggs to Aurora, who is not actually at the festival. Eggs also have implications of fertility. The journey through Woodstock is full of symbolic temptations, from seductive women and fame. When the eggs are broken, it symbolizes Frankie's failure to save his family in his own eyes.

Left Hand as maker of beauty

For Frankie, his left hand symbolizes his ability to bring true beauty into the world. El Maestro tells him the left hand creates the beauty because it's the hand that creates chords on a guitar. When Frankie mutilates his left hand as a self-imposed punishment for ruining his family, he is symbolically destroying his one true purpose: his ability to bring great beauty into the world. Frankie's left hand stays injured the rest of his life, but



he manages to still practice the guitar. This represents the power to transcend one's trauma and still create art.

Hollywood

Hollywood represents a land of temptation for Frankie. If New Orleans is the place where Frankie was unknown and found artistic fulfillment, Hollywood is the exact opposite: he enjoys superstardom but feels empty. Hollywood forces Frankie to reject a core part of himself: his love for guitar and his magical strings. In spite of his fame and riches, he is unhappy for a decade. Hollywood acts a microcosm for one of the novel's main themes that passion trumps commercial pursuit. When Frankie rejects Hollywood, he finds himself closer to The Spirit of Music, Aurora, and he once again has the ability to save lives through his music.

Lágrima

Lágrima by Francisco Tárrega is the song that Frankie hears when he comes into the world and when he leaves it, symbolizing how art comes from pain. The song literally means "teardrop." Frankie's mother hums it to him before she dies and it saves his life. Francisco Tárrega also wrote the song to express his pain at leaving Spain. El Maestro tells Frankie, "Music is pain" (66). Frankie's greatest compositions all come from terrible pain in the novel, from the Woodstock performance to his last performance.



Settings

Villareal, Spain

Villareal, Spain, is where Frankie is born in 1936 and where he spends his childhood. Once the home of master guitarist Francisco Tárrega and world-class music, Villareal is occupied by a fascist regime. The Villareal of Frankie's childhood is a dark place that snuffs out all political dissent with censorship and assassination. Frankie is literally born into the carnage in Villareal when his mother gives birth to him in a church during a raid. Frankie nevertheless manages to nurture his talent for music in a time where most international songs are blacklisted in the local taverns. It is because of Villareal's oppressive nature that its beauty becomes all the more precious to Frankie. El Maestro's small apartment in Villareal is where Frankie falls in love with music and is closest to its purity.

America

Frankie escapes to America after fleeing fascist Spain. It is across America that Frankie begins the major leg of his journey and makes his true mark in music history. He plays everywhere from New Orleans to Hollywood, meeting key musicians of the twentieth century all along the way. Frankie's talent is set free in America as compared to Spain, but he suffers a censorship of a different kind. Hollywood forces Frankie to become a pre-packaged pop star. America is the place that grants Frankie freedom yet tries to control him. For Frankie, it is a land of temptation and selling out.

New Zealand / Waiheke Island

Frankie and Aurora escape to a small island in New Zealand, Waiheke, after the tragic events of their early marriage. They live on a small secret beach where they hide from the world. They finally find the peace they are looking for on Waiheke, along with an abandoned baby they adopt and form the family that once eluded them. Waiheke becomes an oasis for Frankie. He begins life anew, literally practicing scales on his guitar as if he was just learning for the first time. Waiheke is Frankie's fresh start from the corrupting nature of the commercial music industry and temptations of fame and fortune.

Woodstock

The famous Woodstock festival in the seventies is where Frankie is at his lowest. After Aurora is mugged, stabbed, and miscarries as an indirect result of Frankie's actions, he flees to Woodstock and takes a lot of drugs. The festival acts a microcosm for Frankie's state; he is lost and dangerously drug-induced. The crowd is full of temptations that stand in for the many temptations he has faced his whole life: fame, drugs, and other



women. Frankie's obsessive need to reach the stage and deliver a carton of eggs to Aurora is a tragic and misguided attempt to recapture the family life he blames himself for losing. Amidst the drug-haze and pain, Frankie channels his suffering into a passionate guitar solo that becomes a mysterious classic among music lovers.

Frankie's Funeral

The novel begins with Frankie's funeral, revisits the scene over the course of the story, and ends there. The funeral scene acts as a living testament to Frankie's extraordinary life. Mourners, many of them famous music industry figures such as Tony Bennett and Paul Stanley, each share legendary tales. Through their accounts, Frankie emerges as a singular figure in the music hall of fame who touched many lives with his kindness and charity. Many of the gatherers are unofficial students of Frankie's and their careers were shaped by his teaching.



Themes and Motifs

Music as salvation

In *The Magic Strings of Frankie Presto*, Mitch Albom portrays music as a divine power that has the ability to enrich and save lives. Frankie is bestowed with tremendous musical ability upon his birth by The Spirit of Music and the magic strings of his branguia literally turn blue every time he saves a life. Albom is suggesting that music is humanity's salvation and must be nurtured.

From the very start, Frankie's life is saved by a song; his mother hums Lágrima and the song saves Frankie from the murdering raiders. In fascist Spain, music has the power to challenge oppressive authority. The dictator fears international songs and tries to censor them, only showing what the power of music can do. Frankie's six magical strings literally save lives yet also act as a metaphor for music's power. Music is shown time and again to deliver the characters of the novel from ruin; Frankie saves Aurora from an abuse by playing the guitar, he saves Hampton by promising the doctor a song; his guitar case literally saves Ellis from shrapnel. Frankie has not only been gifted with extraordinary talent, he is a saint-like figure who saves lives through songs.

Frankie's central conflict lies in turning away from his gift. The Spirit of Music laments it when Frankie turns away from music's purity in order to chase "impure" things like fame and fortune. The ten years that Frankie spends in Hollywood give him super stardom but they are also his most miserable years. He puts away his branguia and six magic strings, never saving any lives in that time. Frankie is not the only one to suffer such inner torment; Lyle Lovett and his band face the same struggles when they visit Frankie on the island of Waiheke. They seek commercial acclaim over following their hearts and the result is a mediocre first recording. Frankie, having learned the truth about following your passion, advises them to make the kind of music they want to make. The result is a work that paradoxically is more commercially viable, but more importantly, is a born of true artistic fulfillment. The novel suggests we get closer to a higher power with the salvation of music.

By divinely anointing Frankie with musical prowess, Albom shows music truly is a "gift" that is given from on-high and not necessarily earned. The Spirit of Music speaks about those who grab more of it than others, such as Frankie and Beethoven. The pre-determinism of talent proves that music is a destiny and not a choice. Albom is saying there are those put on the earth to grace us with music's power to enrich life and literally save it.

Everyone joins a band in this life

The line "everyone joins a band in this life" is the anthem of *The Magic Strings of Frankie Presto*, referring to how relationships deeply interconnect people for life and



have the power to influence the world. The Spirit of Music frequently repeats that everyone joins a band and stresses that it does not mean only musical ones. Frankie's life has a major impact on all those whose bands he joined, musical and otherwise.

Frankie and Aurora's relationship is the most important “band” that Frankie joins, depicting how the people one chooses to have in their life are inextricably tied to them. Throughout all their manifest setbacks and tragedies, Frankie and Aurora return to one another time and again. There is a pre-ordained aspect to their love and they know they are meant to be together. Despite some seemingly insurmountable problems such as a miscarriage and infidelity, Frankie and Aurora realize the importance of starting over because they are eternally invested in each other. The Spirit of Music says that bands often reunite and nowhere is that made clearer than with Frankie and Aurora.

The mourners at the funeral exist as living testimony to how Frankie's actions changed lives and influenced the world. Each mourner gives a tale of how Frankie either saved their lives or saved their careers, the result heavily shaping music history. The stories include Frankie posing as Elvis during a show in Vancouver; Frankie's meetings with the Beatles; Frankie's influence on Lyle Lovett; Frankie's recordings at Woodstock and in New Zealand. Each of the events shows Frankie as the secret player behind huge industry events in the twentieth century. Frankie's impact on his students or “band members” cannot be overstated.

Not only does Frankie alter the lives of those he willingly seeks out, he often finds himself encountering famous figures through sheer coincidence, suggesting destiny is at play. Django Reinhardt encounters Frankie on the English docks; Hank Williams buys his fate car from the dealership Frankie works at; Tony Bennett finds Frankie playing his music outside his hotel room. The coincidences are too numerous and prove that Frankie is fated to play a role in these musician's social “bands” and steer their lives somewhat. The sense of fate speaks to the mysterious interconnection between all people and how they help each other in many unseen ways.

Beauty comes from suffering

The connection between beauty and suffering is a major theme of *The Magic Strings of Frankie Presto*, depicting the two as inseparable in great works of art. Every important song Frankie writes or comes into contact with has been shaped in some way or another by pain.

Suffering is first conflated with beauty by El Maestro, who tells Frankie that “music is pain” (66). On one hand, El Maestro is literally referring to the necessity of calluses forming under Frankie's fingertips so he can better play the guitar, yet El Maestro is also referring to the figurative meaning: true music is born from deep anguish. Besides *The Spirit of Music*, El Maestro is depicted as the novel's major authority on music. He is a passionate and brilliant player and the novel routinely intercuts his conversations with Frankie for their thematic relevance. El Maestro's life is also chock-full of misery and suffering; he lost his eyesight during the war and believes his whole family to be dead.



The link between suffering and true beauty is therefore personified in El Maestro. Francisco Tárrega is another figure that embodies the same parallel; his song Lágrima literally means teardrop and it acts as the soundtrack to Frankie's life. Tárrega's life is also characterized by deep pain, bearing the same conditions as Frankie and El Maestro. They are not the only ones; the brilliant Django Reinhardt is also depicted as suffering greatly. As these characters represent the novel's highest achievements in music, they also represent much suffering, creating a link between beauty and suffering.

Frankie's most beautiful performances come from suffering. During the Woodstock sections, Frankie channels all of his recent heartache into one majestic guitar solo that goes on to become a mysterious cult hit of epic proportions. Until that point in his life, Frankie had played puffy pop pieces that spoke of love and heartbreak but had no real feeling behind them. By using music as a therapeutic conduit for his anguish, even The Spirit of Music is in awe of Frankie. El Maestro tells Frankie that the left hand creates the beauty because that is the hand that forms chords with frets. Frankie suffers his injury on the left hand, self-mutilating it as punishment for destroying his family. Frankie later re-learns the guitar, creating beauty in spite of his injury. In this regard, beauty and suffering literally go hand-in-hand.

The era Frankie lives in as a child also conflates beauty with suffering. In fascist Spain, true art becomes an act of bravery and it is rendered all the more beautiful for it.

Following passion over fame

The Magic Strings of Frankie Presto champions following one's artistic fulfillment over commercial success. Frankie and many of the famous musicians grapple with this inner conflict their entire lives. For Frankie, the struggle is symbolized by his decision to become a Hollywood pop star over his true life's passion, guitar-playing. Much of Frankie's pain is caused by his first decision to abandon the guitar, cementing the novel's major theme that true fulfillment lies in finding the joy in one's art instead of chasing riches.

In turning away from the guitar, Frankie literally turns away from the six magical strings he was blessed with. No lives are saved during Frankie's time in Hollywood because his true music was muted. His calling is therefore conflated with divinity. He is not only avoiding what he loves, he is not fulfilling his God-given purpose on the earth. Frankie is not even happy with new fame; he never achieves enough of it to satisfy him. His "teen idol" mantle proves to be fleeting. He quickly slips from the top charts and wallows in misery. With a 16-bedroom mansion and a superstar wife, Frankie finds only grief.

Aurora also symbolizes Frankie's rejection of his true purpose. The Spirit of Music writes, "Aurora's absence paralleled Frankie's rise to fame, and while it may seem coincidental, I assure you it was not. She knew she was sharing Frankie's heart now, not only with me (which she could tolerate) but with ambition (which she couldn't)" (289). Aurora's departure from Frankie's life is a void in his life. Aurora is linked to Frankie by fate and she has the ability to intervene when he is turning away from his true passion.



She departs every time Frankie is unhappy, and re-appears in his life every time he is content. Since she is only around him when he is not famous or later when he has given up fame, it can be surmised that he is happiest when he is pursuing art above riches.

Tony Bennet and Lyle Lovett are characters that also represent the inner turmoil of selling out. When Tony tells his Frankie story at the funeral, he says, "Under duress, I had recorded an album of rock songs. A terrible fit for me. Even making it, I got physically ill. It was a tough time. I felt like I was locked out of the thing I loved most" (344). Tony instead chooses to go to London and make the music he wants to make, inadvertently meeting Frankie in a strange coincidence. The link is once again made clear between destiny and following fulfillment. Lyle Lovett and his band The Clever Yells also appear to Frankie in the 80s before Lyle Lovett was famous. During a studio recording with Frankie, their sound is mediocre. Frankie advises Lyle to make the music he adores over what he thinks will sell. The result is much more interesting and later catapults Lyle to fame. The novel suggests that by abandoning goals of success, it is paradoxically easier to find.

Silence

If *The Magic Strings of Frankie Presto* is a novel about the power of music, it is also about the absence of it. Music represents the highest ideal of sound and so the novel's depiction of silence is the opposite of that beauty, relating to ideas of censorship and mourning. Frankie is silent at many key traumatic points in his life.

Silence stands in for censorship during Frankie's childhood in fascist Spain. In the very first moments of Frankie's life, he is born into a church during a raid where nuns and priests are being murdered. His life is saved by his strange silence; the raiders do not find him because he is not crying. Silence and survival go hand-in-hand, working as a metaphor for political silence in fascist Spain. To survive later in Spain requires total silence from voicing one's opinions about the ruling dictatorship. Silence as censorship also extends to music. The government forbids most international songs from being played besides the government approved songs.

Frankie's silence in his childhood is contrasted with his sudden eruption of noise when he hears Lágrima. All the pent-up pain and trauma he has endured as a baby is unleashed in that moment. The Spirit of Music says, "From that day forward, the child was never content. He would cry all the time (...) It seemed he was crying for something he could never have" (22). The thing he could never have was his mother. He once quiets, but cries when he hears church bells from where she died. Frankie becomes so loud and unbearable, Josefa, the nun taking care of him, chooses to drown him in a river. Once again, the lack of silence is related to danger.

Every time Frankie is silent, either in his opinions or in hiding his love for music, he is living in fear. By being silent, which he is for the first part of his life, Frankie is repressing a core part of who he is. Fear deprives the world of Frankie's Presto true beauty, music. The novel suggests music is the answer to silence. It has the power to inspire and



change the world. In their childhood, Frankie and Aurora witness the body of political dissidents buried in an unmarked grave and they fashion them a bouquet of guitar strings. Strings are tools of sound; their function as an ode to those who spoke up in times of deafening silence.

Silence is also depicted as a means of penance for Frankie. After he wants to kill Alberto, Frankie confines himself to a monastery and does not speak for three years, a massive sacrifice for a musician. Wynton Marsalis, a New Orleans trumpeter, finds Frankie and says, “Three years of silence? (...) part of me felt like I had come there for a reason, because it was all too much coincidence” (423). Frankie's silence is a self-imposed censorship for his murderous impulse. Wynton convinces Frankie silence is not the way; the world needs his music and sound. The novel suggests the answer to hate should never be silence, but music.



Styles

Point of View

The *Magic Strings of Frankie Presto* is primarily told from the point of view of The Spirit of Music, the literal embodiment of music. It is also told from the point of view of mourners at Frankie Presto's funeral, many of them famous music industry figures. Both sections are narrated in first-person. The bulk of the chapters are told from The Spirit of Music's perspective, with the mourners' narration interspersed a handful of times in every part. The Spirit of Music is an omniscient narrator and admits to knowing everything that has happened and will happen to his students of music. The Spirit of Music opens his tale at the end of Frankie's story, his funeral, and traces Frankie's life back chronologically up until Frankie's death.

Albom's decision to insert non-linear accounts from the funeral mourners adds suspense to the novel. Through their stories, the narrative is constantly jumping to different points in time when Frankie is successful or after he has run away from the limelight. The funeral accounts create mystery, begging the reader to wonder how the young boy in the first few chapters will grow to become a worldwide sensation. The mourners' stories vary wildly; some are superfluous and add richness to the novel, while other stories are necessary to understanding the plot. Altogether, mixing an omniscient narrator and limited point-of-view perspectives forms a coherent whole and a satisfying pay-off to the suspense.

Language and Meaning

The Spirit of Music uses musical imagery to reinforce the idea that music pervades everything. For example, the Spirit of Music describes a storm in this way: "rain rapped the roof like mallets. The thunder was a tympani drum" (8). The author is implying that music is a divine element of creation. Music's beauty permeates everything, from a normal storm to life's most dramatic moments. The novel is full of analogies and similes that are put in musical terms to reinforce this idea.

The Spirit of Music also structures Frankie's life and his love for Aurora using time signatures. The Spirit of Music says, "All love stories are symphonies. And, like symphonies, they have four movements: Allegro, a quick and spirited opening, Adagio, a slow turn, Minuet/Scherzo, short steps in $\frac{3}{4}$ time, and Rondo, a repeating theme, interrupted by various passages" (261). Frankie and Aurora's romance mirrors this language, from their initial passion to their frequent break ups and reunions. The use of musical language throughout the novel also emphasizes that Frankie sees life through the lens of music. His life's passion for Aurora only makes sense to him in relation to his other life's passion, music.



Structure

The novel is structured like a song, symbolizing the idea that music is the fabric of life. The Spirit of Music composes the bulk of the narrative and it's broken up into six parts, just like the numbers of strings on Frankie's magical branguia. Albom's deliberate structural choice then associates Frankie's life with the magic of music, suggesting that all lives can be seen the same way. The Six Parts are divided into 63 chapters. These chapters are mostly narrated by The Spirit of Music and interspersed with funeral mourners' stories. The timeline then jumps between Frankie's chronological, related by The Spirit of Music, and his funeral, where mourners tell stories from different parts of Frankie's life. The divisions between them follows a pattern of long Spirit of Music chapters and short funeral mourner narration, with sometimes very short Spirit of Music chapters. This rhythm is consistent over the course of the whole book and reinforces Albom's metaphorical use of structure. The rhythm mirrors music itself: the chapters are like verses and a chorus connected by a bridge.

Albom's use of structure also adds compelling mystery and suspense. By introducing non-linear funeral stories into the mix while the main story takes place, it adds intriguing questions that hook the reader. Albom purposefully makes Frankie's death a mystery within the first few pages and the resolution is only given at the end of the novel. These questions add a thriller-like aspect to the plot and keep the pages turning. The author's few mentions of the "mysterious figure" following Frankie around early on also contribute to this suspense. The revelations all await at the end, in keeping with traditional thriller formulas. While the novel itself is not a thriller, it puts these elements to great use.



Quotes

Everyone joins a band in this life.
-- The Spirit of Music (chapter 3 paragraph 1)

Importance: This quote embodies the novel's main theme of interconnectedness between all people. Bands are not just musical; they're relationships that inevitably shape us and influence others. The line is repeated throughout the book, showing the rhythm-like relationship music has to life.

Aurora means dawn.
-- Frankie (chapter 43 paragraph 4)

Importance: This quote captures the importance of new beginnings. Every time Frankie returns to Aurora, he says these words. It represents how he starts fresh several times over the course of his life.

Music is pain.
-- El Maestro (chapter 8 paragraph 14)

Importance: This quote shows the novel's theme that true beauty comes from great suffering. Frankie's pop star songs enjoy fame but no real critical acclaim after his first album. His greatest compositions all come from his pain and trauma.

You must decide what you're going to be-- a great singer or a great guitar player (...)
Being both means being neither.
-- El Maestro (chapter 11 paragraph 6)

Importance: This quote shows the importance of picking a path. El Maestro teaches Frankie that he cannot be anything but not everything; the choice between being a singer and a guitar player represents the choice between being famous or spiritually fulfilled for Frankie.

I am Music. And Music is in the connection of human souls, speaking a language that needs no words."
-- The Spirit of Music (chapter 63 paragraph 3)

Importance: This quote captures the novel's central conceit that music is an inherent part of the universe. It possesses the power to connect people and affect great change.

You will never know all there is to know. You will learn until your final days."
-- El Maestro (chapter 63 paragraph 7)

Importance: This quote by El Maestro refers to the fate of artists. They learn, create, and inspire the next generation. Even masters learn until their dying days. This cyclical nature is made apparent at Frankie's funeral in all the students he inspired.



All love stories are symphonies.”
-- The Spirit of Music (chapter 33 paragraph 9)

Importance: In keeping with music as a metaphor for life, The Spirit of Music claims a symphony's structure mirrors romance. Like love, they have four movements: Allegro, a quick and spirited opening, Adagio, a slow turn, Minuet/Scherzo, short steps in $\frac{3}{4}$ time, and Rondo, a repeating theme, interrupted by various passages.

Left hand finds the beauty.”
-- El Maestro (chapter 49 paragraph 20)

Importance: An artist's ability to create beauty must be nurtured. The left hand symbolizes that ability and when Frankie mutilates it, he turns against himself.

Truth is light. Lies are shadows. Music is both.
-- The Spirit of Music (chapter 10 paragraph 4)

Importance: Music has the ability to represent life in all its beauty and ugliness. It is a supreme art because it gives expression to every emotion of the spectrum.

You cannot eat if you do not chew. And you cannot play if you do not (...) listen.
-- El Maestro (chapter 7 paragraph 12)

Importance: Despite Frankie's impatience, he learns not to touch a guitar for the first few months under El Maestro's tutelage. This quote refers to any beginner's need to understand their art form before attempting it.

God gives you nothing.
-- El Maestro (chapter 43 paragraph 6)

Importance: While meant as a cynical curse to life's misfortunes, the meaning of this quote is double-edged. If God gives one nothing, then people have the power to affect their own change. Frankie, of course, finds God gives him much through his magical strings and destiny.

I want to love you/I will be true/No one will love you/ The way I do
-- Frankie (chapter 49 paragraph 4)

Importance: These are the lyrics to Frankie's major pop song hit. They are ironic because he gave up “being true” to Aurora in order to sing them. They represent the superficiality of commercial success.