

## Allegrezza: Concerto Undici

### CoffeeGrunt

The short walk to Octavia's rehearsal passed in something akin to an awkward, heated silence. Octavia had made it quite vocally known exactly how difficult it had been to recalibrate her sound system to her usual specification. It was around the moment when Vinyl suggested that her modifications had improved the sound of the system that Octavia almost felt like throwing one of the Ponysonic speakers at her.

Vinyl had left Octavia to it. After eating the pancakes, making something up about a DJ-ing gig, and exiting stage left as rapidly as possible while Octavia was still in one of her moods. At this moment in time the tension was still persisting between them as they trotted down the road, and Vinyl found herself wanting to break the incandescent silence between them.

"So...you fixed it okay?"

"Well, of *course* I fixed it in the end. What you failed to anticipate is the hour and a half it took to do so. I had to listen to Beethoofen's seventh symphony five times before I could prevent the double bass from overriding the violins!"

Vinyl scratched her head, narrowly avoiding falling into Octavia as she tried to keep up with Octavia's determined pace on three hooves.

"Ah well, least it's all fixed now. I won't touch it again."

"You're right, you won't if you know what's healthy for you."

"Oh, them's fighting words!"

"I prefer, 'precautionary warnings alluding to bodily harm.'"

"Them's...complicated words!"

Octavia trotted ahead, practically breaking into a canter as though fuelled by nothing more than the sheer kinetic power of her indignation.

"How can you even trot into another pony's home and toy with their belongings as though you own the place."

"I preferred you the night before, then...you talked less."

"Likewise."

Thankfully, Octavia's huffy attitude only got the opportunity to last another moment before they finally reached their destination at her breakneck speed of power-trotting. Unlike the previous grand hall she had auditioned at, this was a more sober location for the rehearsals. In lieu of gothic architecture and eerie pegoyles looming out of the masonry, it had a shimmering, slightly frosted glass front across the building, with a delicate and thin network of steel beams stretching out across its surface like a web.

Vinyl decided to start making amends by opening the door for Octavia, receiving a passive-aggressive snort before she entered into the atrium. The room was light and airy, almost like the Cloudsdale Presidium itself. Sunlight filtered through the glass front, the time of day allowing its full power to beam through the glass, scattering past the steelwork and leaving a blurred and faded mirror of the metal framework on the interior. It was carpeted in a fashionable manner too, with a sleek, polished desk crewed by a sleek, polished receptionist taking centre stage.

Octavia cleared her throat slightly, before opening her mouth to request directions. Hoofz Zimmer had simply given her the address, with no real indication of what room in this fairly sizable building she'd need to attend the rehearsal in.

The receptionist cut her off before Octavia's lips had even parted, not even looking up as she concentrated her magic and moving a hoof file back and forth across an already immaculate pedicure. Octavia was suddenly very conscious of how unkempt she must have looked by comparison. Vinyl, as always, carried all the composure and presentation of one of those old ragdolls Octavia had as a filly. She smiled for the briefest of seconds as she recalled her joy in receiving the Classypants cello kit one day. It was what started her off on the path to playing one herself.

The receptionist simply pointed a currently unpedicured hoof down a hallway, rattling off directions for stairs, corridors, left turns, right turns, gone-too-fars, and magical fractures in space-time. Octavia nodded in a bewildered manner, remembering only the room number. At least she could just follow the signs on the walls.

Octavia and Vinyl continued down the corridor, her confidence growing as she found her faith in the signs fulfilled. A thought suddenly crossed her mind as she noticed the passive, bemused smile on Vinyl's lips. Vinyl always seemed to wander around in a constant state of abject happiness with that irritatingly endearing little grin. Octavia stopped dead in the hallway, Vinyl slowing down beside her. They were outside the required room, but Octavia felt a little housekeeping was in order. At least, until she was ready to deal with it later.

"Vinyl..."

Vinyl noticed the slight trepidation that weighed down Octavia's words. She hesitated a moment, until she realised Octavia needed more coaxing to continue.

"Yeh, Octy?"

"About...about us. I...don't really want anyone to know, just yet. Let's keep it to ourselves for now, if...if that's alright with you?"

"If it's okay with you, it's okay with me. What're you so scared of anyway?"

Octavia hesitated this time. Her eyes quivered uncertainly as she stared at the cream, tiled floor as though searching it for answers.

"I'm not entirely sure. I just know I'm not ready yet. Sorry."

"Hey, c'mere. You've got nothing to be sorry for."

Vinyl wrapped her forelegs around Octavia. Awkward, given the bulk of the cello case on her back, but had the desired effect on Octavia's tension.

"I'll keep it mum 'til you're ready, okay? Our secret."

Octavia nodded, finally breaking the embrace. She halted, taking a deep breath before smiling, and nudging the door to the rehearsal theatre open. Vinyl hasn't really admitted that the real reason she was so happy to keep their current...relationship - if it could even be called that yet - on a down-low was because she was as equally frightened of the reactions as Octavia was. Sure, everypony experimented in college and university, but keeping to the fillyfooling afterwards wasn't exactly looked brightly upon even by the common pony. Coming out of the stable to a room full of stuffy, classical musicians could only be a barnload worse.

The rehearsal theatre was very different to the audition theatre, much in the way that the whole building differed to the former; modernism creeping into the aged ways of the classical musicians. It was set out much like the cinemas Vinyl had frequented back in high school. Cushioned fold-up chairs descending in perfectly straight rows along a slope, ending in the stage itself. The ceiling was surprisingly high, the skeletal bones of the building's steel framework poking through it at some points.

Hoofz was waiting at the stage, the rest of the quartet still setting up and tuning their respective instruments. Octavia turned to Vinyl, trying a half-hug before remembering the situation they were in. She smiled, embarrassment filling her cheeks with crimson, before she cantered away to the stage. Vinyl simply trotted slowly to the nearest row to the front she could find. What she hadn't expected was for Bonbon to comfortably find a seat a few to the right of her, before exclaiming at how much of a coincidence it was.

"Well hello, Vinyl. Haven't seen you in a little while! How are you and Octavia doing?"

"Oh...we're good. As in separately good, y'know. Not together."

Bonbon nodded, winking and tapping a hoof to her snout.

"Ah yeh, don't worry. I get ya. So...uhh, if you don't mind me prying. How did you and Octavia celebrate her getting the position?"

"As in the musical position, not the se...umm. We just went back to hers. Chatted a little, y'know. Tea an' biscuits. She gave me a private show too."

Bonbon's eyes lit up, she giggled away, before evolving into a witch-like cackle. Vinyl felt her cheeks grew hot as the cogs in her brain slowly worked out exactly what she had said which would elicit such a jovial reaction.

"No, no, no, no. I mean on the cello. A show on the cello...in private!"

Bonbon nodded, shaking a tear for her eye with the tip of a hoof.

"But of course, Vinyl. I'm glad you two had...fun. In a platonic and unromantic manner."

"Yeh...exactly what you just said. They're starting the rehearsals now, lemme watch."

Vinyl leaned forward, trying her best to concentrate on the quartet, and the elderly pony leading them. As always her eyes were drawn to the practically lucent expression of the mare next to her.

"For Celestia's sake, will you stop grinning at me like that!?"

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Octavia set the case on the stage, deftly flicking open the clips and unveiling the instrument within. The whole situation was much calmer now, especially in contrast to her ragged nerves that night. Zimmer knew her skill and prowess, she had nothing to prove this time. Instead, she simply had to learn the notes required for her.

Learning was something that came relatively naturally to Octavia. Truly, any musician worth their salt-lick was also a fast learner. Decoding notes, rhythm and timbre at a speed ponies of other professions found difficult to match. Octavia's own specialty was more the art of learning and understanding a piece. Looking beyond the notes and timing to the emotion behind it, mimicking the composer's emotion and intent with each saw of her bow. If she were to try, she could most likely learn any instrument she wished to. It was simply a matter of preference and habit that she stayed loyal to her cello after all these years.

It was a gift from her father, no less. After discovering her fascination with music, her parents plied her with instruments in the hope of teasing her cutie mark from her. Xylophones were too cumbersome, a hoof was unable to play them in the light, delicate manner they required. Piano, too rapid, working across the vast spectrum of notes and keys to play her music was too much for her young and stunted fillyhood legs.

No, it was the cello she finally settled on. It was awkward at first, difficult, as any instrument should be, but it was also an instrument of the utmost precision. An acute tilt of her bow could change the tone and mood of the note entirely. She could command it with the slightest nudge or twitch at her will, playing music near effortlessly that made her parents weep in proud tears when they first heard it. She was so proud of that moment, she barely felt the heat on her flanks

as her treble clef appeared.

It became a routine, not in the dull manner a laypony would go through. Working in an office, enrolling in dross such as filing reports and compiling spreadsheets. More like the greeting of a close relative after a hard day's work. The stalwart cello that relied on her for stability as much as she relied on it. As such, she rested herself against it, watching as Lyra and the others tuned and tweaked their instruments. She idly twiddled the tuning pegs, the cello already being mostly in tune before she had departed her home. It helped take her mind away from what chaos Vinyl had wreaked on her home audio system.

Hoofz distributed the sheet music, each pony placing it upon their music stand. Octavia perused the notes. Smooth jazz, very suave. Not a style she was familiar with, but it could hardly be called an intensive genre. The entire purpose of it was to lull the audience into a calm and contented demeanour. Perfect for the aristocratic members of the Gala parties. No real need to dance, not even a reserved waltz. Simply the necessary music required to aid the various ponies in their small talk and mingling.

The quartet was fairly diverse. There was Octavia and Lyra taking the strings department. A stallion with a blue coat and a trio of notes on his flank was currently holding his saxophone in a casual leaning stance, poring over his music. The other pony was a near jet-black colt, his mane and tail the purest pearl white. On his flank was a small segment of a piano, the white keys standing out from his coat while the black keys blended in flawlessly. It could easily be mistaken for teeth if the light wasn't in such a beneficial position.

Turning her attention from the potential dentist pony, Octavia began to practise small segments of the notes. Her's was the more involved role, along with Lyra's. The piano stayed to a melody that could almost be referred to as, 'chilled,' while the saxophone stayed at the low, jazzy tones that fitted the character of the instrument so well. It was the job of Lyra and Octavia to be the garnish in the quartet, flavouring the otherwise mellow palette of the piece.

She shot a look to Lyra, who seemed to have reached the same conclusion. Despite her constant jibes, Octavia knew Lyra was a potent musician. In fact, it could be argued that was the reason she threw insults at Lyra in the first place. No classical musician made friends in their business, just rivals and doormats. Each nodded in perfectly timed synchronisation, only a hoofful of metres apart, but still too far to engage in the labour of conversing with each other.

Somewhat fortunately, Hoofz noticed the tense and icy blockade between the pair, and sundered it with a calm sentence.

"Miss Heartstrings and Miss Philharmonica, I'd recommend you two had better begin conversing if you are to align the tempos of your two pieces, it would greatly help the composition as a whole."

Lyra nodded first, sharply with a nervous vigour before treading confidently over to Octavia, Lyre encased in a purple field of magic.

“Well, Octavia, it seems Mr Zimmer has paired us up. I suppose we’ll have to cooperate if we want to see our paychecks after all this is over.”

“I imagine so. But please, lower the tone of that lyre of yours this time, it’s far too...*bright* for this piece.”

“Says the pony who plays an instrument with a tone almost as low as her brow!”

“It was but a simple request! However, I can see *nothing* is simplified enough for you to understand!”

Vinyl watched the verbal slugging match until Zimmer stepped in, demanding the pair cooperate. Even at this distance she recognised Octavia’s annoyed face, the little scrunched up snout and narrowed eyes she pulled whenever she had been bested. Vinyl loved trying to tease that face from her, it was her most adorable visage.

Bonbon chuckled, leaning onto the row of chairs in front as she peered onto the stage, watching Lyra and Octavia reluctantly practising timing exercises they wouldn’t have performed since kindergarten, most likely. Each would play slightly faster, louder or higher than the other, eliciting a small shake of the head from Hoofz as he told them to start again.

Bonbon chuckled, turning to Vinyl.

“My wife and your fillyfriend sure do get along well.”

Vinyl’s cheeks heated up, she barely managed to coherently sputter her words. “Bu-but...she’s not my fillyfriend, okay?!”

“Oh, yeh. I forgot..wink, wink. Nudge, nudge, eh?”

“Seriously, you...you are the worst kind of pony.”

Bonbon relaxed back in her chair, flicking only the briefest of challenging glances at Vinyl before speaking.

“You gotta admit, she’d look adorable in socks.”

“Who, Octy?”

“Nope. I was talking about Lyra.”

Bonbon’s grin went stratospheric. She turned to Vinyl, winking while still managing to maintain the impossibly wide muzzle stretching caused by her gleeful smile.

“Gotcha!”

