

# The Cellist of Sarajevo

by Mike Tucker \*

On May 27, 1992, in war-torn Sarajevo, one of the few bakeries that still had a supply of flour was making and distributing bread to the starving, war-shattered people. At 4 p.m., a long line stretched into the street. Suddenly, a mortar shell fell directly into the middle of the line, killing 22 people and splattering flesh, blood, bone, and rubble.

Not far away lived a 34-year-old-musician named Vedran Smailovic. Before the war he had been a cellist with the Sarajevo Opera, a distinguished career to which he patiently longed to return. But when he saw the carnage from the massacre outside his window, he was pushed to his capacity to absorb and endure any more. Anguished, he resolved to do the thing he did best: make music. Public music, daring music, music on the battlefield.

For each of the next 22 days, at 4 p.m., Smailovic put on his full, formal attire, took up his cello, and walked out of his apartment into the midst of the battle raging around him. Placing a plastic chair beside the crater that the shell had made, he played in memory of the dead Albinoni's "Adagio in G minor" – one of the most mournful and haunting pieces in classical repertoire.

He played to the abandoned streets, smashed trucks, and burning buildings, and to the terrified people who hid in cellars while the bombs dropped and the bullets flew. With masonry exploding around him, he made his unimaginable stand for human dignity, for those lost to war, and for peace. Though the shelling went on, he was never hurt.

After the newspaper picked up the story of this extraordinary man, an English composer, David Wilde was so moved that he, too, decided to make music. He wrote a composition for unaccompanied cello, "The Cellist of Sarajevo," into which he poured his own feelings of outrage, love, and brotherhood with Vedran Smailovic.

The simple beauty of music stands in stark contrast to the senseless violence of war. Creativity and beauty trump hate-filled carnage. While many may think that music is powerless on the battlefield, those who heard the mournful sounds from Smailovic's cello would disagree. His music inspired hope and brought a sense of peace to war-torn souls.

Similarly, the simple beauty of love – the love of Christ – will one day be the final solution to all of man's hatred and sin. Jesus' self-sacrificial love sent Him to the cross in order that some day soon, the insanity of sin will be reversed. The music of Christ's love changes the universe.

With Love,  
Mike

(Story taken from Reader's Digest, 1996)

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