

MYLO AND MAX BREAK THE WORLD

Scott Charles

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AL CHOMPKIN'S
PRODIGIOUS PIANO



MAXIMUS CHU! KEYBOARD! NOW!"
A voice like a thunderclap roared through the crowd.

"Oh crud." Max's heart pounded. He shrank even more in his seat.

Max's music instructor, Mr. Chompkin, stalked to the front of the stage. He wore ill-fitted slacks, a gray top, and (most alarmingly) a pair of ridiculous, pearl-and-pink glasses. Their massive lenses swept through the seats like shimmering search lights.

"MAXIMUS CHU," Mr. Chompkin repeated.

Not here, Max thought desperately. *Not here. Not here.*

The studio fell dangerously quiet.

Mr. Chompkin suddenly kicked out a leg.

SCREEEKK!

A gold trumpet smashed to the floor. The metal exploded on impact! A mangled horn rolled through the seats, sending chills down Max's neck.

He shivered and peeked toward the stage.

Mr. Chompkin looked madder than a cannibal! His bony hands seized a saxophone by the neck like a baseball bat.

"I SAID MAXIMUS CHU! KEYBOARD! NOW!"

A pair of vicious swings narrowly missed the students up front.

"He's coming! He's coming!" squeaked everyone.

"Geroff me!" Max yelled, as a dozen hands gripped his clothes—scooped his feet—pinned his quivering arms—

He staggered into the aisle.

And gulped.



ON THE OUTSIDE, IT WAS just another blackened glass front at a shopping mall. The bane of Max's existence was called Al Chompkin's Prodigious Piano. The funny thing was, when Max's parents first signed him

up, he was almost excited. He loved his new Yamaha keyboard—especially goofing off with its customized buttons. Learning a few extra moves sounded fun.

But that was before Max had met Mr. Chompkin.

The saxophone-bat prodded Max onto stage.

"Sit. Play. AND STOP SHIVERING!" Mr. Chompkin demanded.

There were a few nervous laughs as Max wobbled up to the school's rental keyboard. He collapsed in the seat, feeling sick.

It's just a rehearsal, Max told himself. *Just practice. Not real.*

But everywhere he looked, a new set of eyeballs stared back. He counted twenty at least. And that was without mentioning the final pair, still looming above him, behind those ridiculous, pearl-and-pink—

WHOOOOSH!

A brassy swing almost cracked Max's head! His spiky black hair stood on end. Panicked, he flung out his arms—but his elbow dipped a little too close to the keyboard.

CLERGHH!!

A hideous note sounded.

"Start the clock!" Mr. Chompkin roared. He stabbed his saxophone at the timer. By class rule, student performances lasted one minute each. No more and no less.

It was Max's worst nightmare.

Tick. Tick. Tick.

“Fifty-nine, fifty-eight, fifty-seven!” Mr. Chompkin counted down.

“Crud, crud, crud,” mumbled Max.

Fear flooded his bones. He tried to relax and play cleanly, but his wrists trembled. His fingers wiggled out of control, like live worms!

Before Max’s minute was up, at least a dozen wrong notes sounded out.

CLERGHH!! CLERGHH!! CLERGHH!!

Everyone in the room cupped their ears.

“Pathetic!” Mr. Chompkin declared.

His pearly gaze flicked from Max to the horrified crowd. “This is why we practice! To fix mistakes. To avoid looking foolish. To prevent THIS!”

CLERROORRGGGOHHHH!

His bony fist slammed the keyboard.

“Practice makes prodigies. PRACTICE. Or would you prefer to be like this student? This ... this *Maximus Chu?*” A sweaty thumb prodded Max. “*Gibbering! Weak! Our Boy Mucus!*”

“Our Boy what?” muttered everyone.

Mr. Chompkin sniffed and plunged on. “For this school to succeed, I need greatness. I need genius. I need a yacht near the Isle of Rhodes!”

He coughed suddenly.

“My dear students, my sweet little money machines, tomorrow night is the culmination of all I have paid for.

The biggest stage. The largest crowd. The most *prodigious* of instruments.”

Mr. Chompkin’s gaze slid to an enormous white sheet in back of the studio. It looked like the veil for an elephant.

“One concert to rule them all!” he cried. “Tomorrow night, live on stage, you will each have one minute to prove yourselves worthy to one day sign record deals—or to be laughed at forever. Do not disappoint me. Do not fail to practice, practice, practice! DO NOT BE BOY MUCUS!”

Mr. Chompkin’s awful voice stabbed at Max’s ears.

“I do too practice,” Max mumbled. Then: “Ow!”

There was a brassy blur. A second later, Max lay sprawled on the stage. A nasty laugh rose from the keyboard. Mr. Chompkin cracked his knuckles in Max’s old seat.

“Enough yapping!” he said. “Allow a CHAMPION to demonstrate proper technique!”

Up on stage, Mr. Chompkin was hamming it up. He yawned languidly. He wiggled his stiff neck. He began kneading invisible dough in his fingers, like some kind of pearl-and-pink baker.

And he completely forgot about Max.

“Zoo Mode Active,” beeped the keyboard.

“Quiet, you skimpy piano!”

Mr. Chompkin spread his fingers across the keys, just as Max’s thumb slid from the special-effects button.

Max grinned and fell back.

“Three, two, one, GENIUS!” Mr. Chompkin declared.

And he started to play.

—2—

THE SALTWATER YACHT



The performance that followed was ... epic. At first, the keyboard oinked like a pig. Then came squeaky rat noises, an extremely long “Mooooo!” and finally, just when Mr. Chompkin’s temper had reached boiling point—

“NAIIYYHHH!!”

The earsplitting wail of a goat.

Mr. Chompkin howled with rage. He angrily whipped off his glasses. There was a pearl-and-pink flash as he seized the keyboard between two bony palms, lifting it over his head.

CRACK!

The keyboard exploded across his bent knee.

“YOU—HAVE—BEEN—PUNISHED!” he shrieked.

The words echoed across the music studio. Everyone fell silent. Even Max. His heart trembled as bits of loose plastic bounced off the stage and into the seats. Although the keyboard had belonged to Mr. Chompkin, not Max, Max suddenly felt as guilty as if he’d snapped it himself.

“Sorry,” he told the broken machine. He started to gather the twisted-up pieces.

Mr. Chompkin whirled on him.

“*Boy Mucus!* Where are you skulking off to? The spa?”

“Trash can,” said Max.

“I don’t think so! This isn’t Fancytown, USA. Reduce. Re-use. Recycle. Get your dainty feet up here and FIX THIS WRETCHED MACHINE. We go again in five minutes. FIVE.”

Max spent all five minutes trying to prop up the keyboard. Incredibly, the speakers still worked. A mangled wire connected the two broken halves. It wriggled over the gap, like an electric eel in a swamp.

“This can’t be safe,” Max mumbled.

“Music isn’t safe!” Mr. Chompkin shot back. “Especially for those who don’t practice!”

Max eyed the wiggling wire. He could picture it now: the sizzle, the heat, the lightning-like spark that would shoot up his arm the moment his thumb touched the—
BOOOM!!

“Aieeee!” shouted Max, leaping backward. He started frantically rubbing his hands. Were they shocked? Were they burnt?

No.

The booming noise came from Mr. Chompkin. He’d taken a flying leap off the stage, landing hard and staring in shocked disbelief at the distant front lobby.

Music was filtering in. Lovely music.

Mr. Chompkin could hardly contain himself.

“Beautiful! Blue water! Wondrous!”

He hopped after it.

Max didn’t need a set of frog legs to know what had happened. He knew every one of those notes, including the light, flutelike riffs. He also knew the tiny musician who played them nonstop every night before bed.

“Baby Jess,” muttered Max.



“HOW OLD ARE YOU, little star?” Mr. Chompkin oozed.

Max’s sister, Baby Jess, scowled at him. She stood about three feet tall (in her onesie) and waved her toy plastic flute like a cutting knife.

Mr. Chompkin looked positively giddy.

“Perfect! She’s perfect!”

BANG!

SCOTT CHARLES

The front door flew open. A woman in a gray baseball cap all but kicked herself into the studio. It was Max's mom, Mrs. Chu. She scooped Baby Jess by the armpits.

"There you are! Goodness! My apologies, Mr. Chompkin. I know how you feel about interruptio—"

"I hate them!" Mr. Chompkin interrupted.

"Er, yes—"

"That being said, your little Sea Doo has talent. Give her to me. She belongs in my class!"

Mr. Chompkin shot out a hand. Max's mom leaned away from him, frowning.

"She's three years old, Mr. Chompkin."

"She's a saltwater yacht, Mrs. Chu."

Over Max's mom's shoulder, Baby Jess blew a fat raspberry in Max's direction. Her tiny hips wiggled and she plonked to her feet, Houdini-style, then broke into a surprisingly quick run for the door.

Max's mom groaned and gave chase. "I'm starting to regret the Child Genius project," she muttered.

Mr. Chompkin looked madder than ever when he returned to the studio—like a shark on an all-cabbage diet.

"ONCE MORE, WITH MUCUS!" he shrieked.

Max ducked his head as a trumpet valve whipped onto stage.

It hit the wiggling wire and sparked.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Scott Charles is the author of *Creeptown*, a horror adventure series for young readers, and the standalone adventure *Mylo and Max Break the World*. He writes thrilling books for busy kids who might not want to be reading, but what choice do they have? Zero! None!

Scott grew up in a pair of small towns outside of Princeton, New Jersey. He attended Duke University, where he graduated with a B.A. in Public Policy and successfully summoned [REDACTED]. He enjoys the spoils of his dastardly deal at his home in Charlotte, North Carolina. You can find him at the library, across a chess board, or on a soccer field late, late at night.