

Waterways

Poetry in the Mainstream



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Volume 43

Number 1

In the old days hotel lobbies
were home to well-tuned Steinways

from "Dreams" by Gilbert Honigfeld

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Cover photo "*This morning Barbara came home
from the farmers' market with a gift from*

Staten Island Family Farm" by Richard Spiegel

Frontispiece photo "*Regina at the Steinway Baby Grand*"
by Barbara Fisher (1967)

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Regina at the Steinway Baby Grand

Marilyn Braendeholm

Playing at the Ritz

Mum paid for my piano lessons,
but I paid for them with fingernails
clipped to the quick, all because

Mrs Murray, my piano teacher said,
They'll be no tick.tick.tap on the keys.

I practiced two hours a day.
An hour before school,
and one more hour after.

The piano was in the basement,
at Dad's insistence, because
of what he called grotesque noise,

and as I practiced, I pretended
the basement was the lobby of the Ritz,
and that I was the hotel's pianist.

I played and played, and never
slouched over the piano keys -
Posture is important, Mum said,
if you want to be respected.

And since this was pretend, Mum
also worked at the Ritz, keeping
my piano clean and dust-free with

her soft cloth, bees wax, and tidy-up
box for snotty tissues from guests
moved to tears by my music.

Last autumn, when the hotels reopened
after Covid, we stayed at a guest house
in Cornwall. It had a piano in the lobby.

I walked over and struck middle C
with my index finger. And that was it.
Nothing more came out of me.

Couldn't remember one song memorized
all those years ago. It's like
my high school 101 Spanish lessons.

Mi casa es su casa.
That's all I can remember.

It was a lovely hotel though.

Robert Cooperman

**Pictures at a Performance of “Dark Star”
The Fillmore East, 1969**

None of us had seen the Grateful Dead,
didn't know what to expect, knew only
that their name creeped us out a bit:
like a horror movie's first ominous scene,
only, I found out later, that wasn't
what “Grateful Dead” meant at all.

Without an intro, they launched into
what twirlers around us declared was,

“Dark Star”:

seemingly stray notes, like interstellar mists
moments before The Big Bang.

As the music gathered momentum,
I closed my eyes and saw a beam of light
dance planet to planet, then the lyrics:
a dark star crashing, “pouring its light
into ashes,” years before “dark star”
became synonymous with the black holes
that will someday devour everything.

Then guitars, keyboards, bass and drums
rumbled and roared, a rocket ship
attaining escape velocity, followed

by a brief cosmic tide throbbing
like the whole Milky Way at once,
then the main theme restated
by a galaxy-soaring guitar.
Last, the second set of lyrics:
“Mirror shatters,” two figures
walking off together,
while the notes echoed, the universe
safe, for the time being,
in that fading music of the spheres.

Fame

Not one single
Shark
Has ever played
A piece by Bach
Paintings
Of Van Gogh's
Are unknown
Among the crows
No flower
Has expressed a desire
To grow higher
Than the Eiffel Tower
And to my knowledge
No tree
Has ever heard
Of me

Mary Belardi Erickson

Tuner, Please

Less tuning, the old upright's
gone flat. Yet it's my piano,
the one I learned to play on.
When practicing, I feel past joy
in my present playing.

Jon comments, it sounds good!
even though keys twang and stick.
Sour notes must be bore
until a tuner ousts discord.

Mary Belardi Erickson

By a Back-Road

Making brassy music,
I take the coda west —
wheeling across the plains
where cottonwood centenarians
tower, pierce air, breathe rain.
The wind trills its strength —
thundering percussion.

Keeping time on freeways —
counting tacit measures —
I turn north onto familiar highway:
the direction of bluesy morning glories
climbing their porch trellis —
vigor of vines and day's blue glory.
I hear the noon whistle,
newsy voices, diner's silverware —
clinking rest.

Out on county gravel
I strum my way into dusty rhythms —
the swish and rustle
of red-orange fields in cut time.

I slow — to hoof-it and to amble
toward perennial, variegated-voices —
the ditch's tiger lilies,
their brown freckles, their faces lifted —
orange petals bent back.

Piano

After forty years of silence
it was uncertain if the mute piano
would ever sing again.

The old woman
had kept the aging instrument as a
catchall for magazines and un-
solicited real-estate notices, its
hidden keyboard discol'ring with time.

Her children found a piano tuner
willing to make a house call to form
a diagnosis and possible plan of action.

The prospects were grim; dry felts,
rusted strings, weakened pinboard,
cracked ivories. Saving the old
piano would require a fortune or a miracle.

The dead woman's children had to pay
three hundred forty dollars to a
taciturn drayman to cart off the
old husk of a piano, heaving it into
his truck with a final wounded chord.

Action

In the old days
if I was looking for
some action I'd head
for a high-end shop-
ping mall where you'd
always find a spread
of big-name pianos
tuned to perfection just
waiting for me to run
my fingers through
their keys while I
waited, eager as a
lover, for a grand re-
action.

That was then
before digital and
online shopping and
discount pricing where
there is no delicious
foreplaying, just the te-
dium of slitting open

a This End Up crate
and inevitable dis-
appointment in the consum-
mation once the new
object of my desire is
plugged in and waiting.

Charlie's Song

I'm adrift this morning
in a sixty year old
cloud of smoke and booze
and girls imported from
a woman's junior college
where like them I'm an im-
port too, there for a pur-
pose, creating a mood
for rich frat boys un-
loosed from parental over-
sight hellbent on get-
ting laid while I'm at
the piano with three other
players only one of whom
has lingered enscripted in
memory, Charlie Teske,
who midway through our
second set put down his
trumpet with the straight
mute in its bell and
surprised the hell outta
me when he bent down
and from a black velvet
bag pulled out a horn

I'd never seen nor heard,
kind of a contralto trumpet
with an oversized
bell out of which poured
the most plaintive laments
unmuted, lullaby-soft, un-
embellished, a slow 4/4
rendering of My Funny Valentine
in C minor, Charlie's song
without words still unforgotten.

Mary K. Lindberg

Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart Sighted
in New York City
Breaking News — Summer 2019

Mozart buys concert tickets online,
has hair styled in Greenwich Village,
gets knockoff sun glasses on the street,
blue jeans at Old Navy, sneakers at Nike.

At the Village Vanguard he orders merlot,
listens to Wynton Marsalis play jazz. When
he improvises at the piano, the crowd cries,
Who is this guy? A natural on ivories.

He's cool.

At the Metropolitan Opera, he reacts strongly
to the moving carnival scenery, colored lights,
I can't believe what they did to my Cosi!
Mumbles, I'm still not sure about the ending.

He hears a Beethoven concert

at Lincoln Center.

Music loud. Fast. Composer makes music out
of moonlight, puts a funeral march

in one symphony,

chorus in another. What will he do next?

At a performance of his own

G Minor Symphony

featured at Carnegie Hall, the tempo drags.

In a side box Mozart stands like a metronome,
waves usher's flashlight for a faster beat.

The orchestra looks up, plays

to a lighted baton

held by a short man in jeans.

He knows the score.

After standing ovations, the conductor nods,
Bravo! Bravo! But who are you?

Mozart bows,

dons black shades, leaves.

Next day he rides a Citi-Bike to

the Juilliard Bookstore,

buys candy wrapped in his portrait.

Same image

of him on coffee mugs, key rings, wallets.

He's puzzled. Do I really look like that?

The composer waits for a horse
and buggy ride in
Central Park, jots down ideas
for a new composition
with car horns, sirens, clip-clop of horses.
He will add
subway rumbles, call it
“Serenade of New York.”

Mozart was last seen surrounded
by record executives,
autograph seekers in the Film Forum
movie line for *Amadeus*.
He heard the acting is excellent, especially
his old frenemy,
Salieri. And the music? He knows
that will shine.

Richard Spiegel

Play It Again

The cities are occupied.
The resistance is armed.
Anthems are sung
as refugees march past
signs of “No Vacancy.”
Passports and credit cards,
tumbling out of pockets
of privilege, are lost
and retrieved and lost again.

Our Geography of Poets

Colorado

Robert Cooperman

New Jersey

Gilbert Honigfeld

Minnesota

Mary Belardi Erickson

New York

Mary K. Lindberg

Richard Spiegel

Virginia

William Corner Clarke

West Sussex

Marilyn Braendeholm

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