Against the Grain

music, memory & the 'merican way
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for Claire Daly
A Love Supreme

A note of thanks:

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“Watch Out for Obscure Publications”
AGAINST THE GRAIN

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KIRPAL GORDON

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What Does Not Change/Is/The Will to Chains

I/ God Is Alive, Magic Is A (Variable) Foot

Times are tough, baby
& the hustle is really on.
Prices are high now, darlin'
& all the good jobs are gone.

-H.E. Owens, “The Hustle Is On”
as sung by Johnny Nicholas & The Texas All Stars

Music was magic. From the get. From the word go.
Earliest memories of being alive remain inextricable from ubiquitous radio waves washing our humble home in eternal summer: Doris Day singing “Que Sera Sera,” circa ’55, “whatever will be,” the song, “will be,” a schlocky re-take of a hit 20 years before, pulled from the Hitchcock film in which she starred with Jimmy Stewart, The Man Who Knew Too Much, itself a schlocky re-make of the original thriller Hitch directed 20 years before with real deal Peter Lorre.

“The future,” Doris sang/sighed/might have meant the past, “is not ours to see,” but it would fit the general pattern, “que sera, sera,” of what pop-schlock music would be along our lifeline: on the one hand, Chronos (the Titan) eating his children & so birthing time, some incessant Hit
Parade, demographically driven, cash addiction, "stoking the star-maker machinery behind the popular song," from dumb-shit dead show tunes, re-treaded fake glamour & putzy cornball Tin Pan Alley re-hash; & on the other: the Great Mother Memory whose nine daughters with Zeus (the Olympian who destroyed the rule of the Titans) produced the Muses, which inspired everything epic & grandly classical in American sound that made us take heed our soul, what a thing of wonder, this yearning within us that would have us playing *Kind of Blue* & *Abraxas*, *Glassworks* & *Trane's Transition*, *John Wesley Harding* & Allman Brothers *Live at the Fillmore* over & over & over again on albums the hi-fi automatically repeated.

A "New World" opened for navigation, from elegant Edward Ellington & gay Billy Strayhorn making a completely unique American music to (way before Teddy Wilson & Hamp joined Goodman & Krupa on the bandstand) black Louis Armstrong recording alongside white Jimmie Rodgers, who would die of TB way before he hit a hundred, but whose centennial CD Dead guitarist Jerry Garcia would play on the day before he died. There would be hundreds of making-it-new examples reaching us later: King Pleasure wailin' James Moody's "Mood for Love" solo, note for note, thanks to Eddie Jefferson; Ella, Queen of Scat; Sassy like an alto; Billie & Prez in telepathic sympathy; Al Jarreau & Bobby McFarin in the upper register; Betty Carter breakin' it down & still it swung; Oscar Lee Brown, Jr. wingin' words to Mongo's "Afro Blue," Kurt Elling syllable-slingin' "Resolution" from *A Love Supreme*; Helen Merrill bringin' an eerie new rendering to "Summertime"; Lambert, Ross & Hendricks makin' a hit outta the ultra-hip "Twisted," then vocalesin' Basie's book; Mark Murphy joinin' Kerouac's *Subterraneans* to "Parker's Mood"—all to show us what Ezra Pound kept tellin' us, that lyric & music were two sides of the same song, inseparably yin to yang, like the Provencal troubadours & the operas of Puccini.

But back then, barred-in-playpen, cuffed-to-curfew, put to bed to Pat Ballard's "Mr. Sandman" & waking to Pat Boone crooning "Love Letters in the Sand," life seemed to early eyes & ears a sickly breeze, barely a
bossa nova & then just Edie & Steve (not to argue with suck-cess, but Jobim’s Brazil reached us only after the bleached-out imitators cashed in).

The local jig, however, was up a couple years later, listening in church basement to kid-Irish tenors from the parish singing “Danny Boy” & us tough guys crying from longing & so ashamed of the tears. Later, on a Sunday morning six o’clock TV, one could weep without fear (the family asleep) as a ballerina sat at her rainy window remembering her love & Ravel (Daphne et Chloe?) or Debussy (Afternoon of a Faun?) or Fauré (Pavane?) played in the background, & one knew music was the closest thing to heaven going.

It had power. If there are only two kinds of power—power to join & power to prevent—this was about joining. It was a power in being human, wild, awake, open, fragile, free. Made the prevent-mode of guilt, fear & church power a sad joke.

Great music is a gift from the other side of the veil. It needs nothing but to be played & heard. It expands & reveals. It cannot be reduced to a program of obedience or propaganda. Great music deranges the senses, inspires the revolution of the brain waves, whispers our invisible union with the cosmos & each other—underneath all appearances to the contrary. Music seams a truer, realer life.

As for the mystical side of Yeshuwa’s ministry like the Beatitudes, the world seemed afraid to inherit the earth if it required expressing love or unity, especially if either included sex or blacks. So everyone wore a wide brim hat or pulled the wool deeper over their eyes, that was life in the 1950’s. Records were put in containers called “race” music, but it reached even into our home by radio & record player & broke the container.

Later the diocese caved in & “gave” us the Folk Mass where crew-cut Ivy (seemed bush) League wanna-be’s strummed chords to “Kumbayah” (my Lord!), the same base sentimental piety pander, talk about a one note hustle & pass the collection basket. We didn’t go. Next thing we knew the church hired professionals to play rock music backwards & hold classes for our parents so it could tell them which bands advocated the
use of drugs (reefer is a drug? 'shrooms illegal?), but that was the 1960's. Everyone's a secret agent. The RC Church, certainly among the oldest con games on the planet, would learn too late the wisdom of Herbert Marcuse: last year's revolutionary bastion is this season's must-wear fashion.

But even way back, sitting in the back seat, sussing out sounds from the Chevy's AM radio, the battle could be heard in how the industry approached our tastes: deaf dumb middle-of-the-road blind bland buckshot, agents anxious how their acts would play in Peoria, so took few chances in public, pumped up the hokum, okey-dokey “I'm a Yankee Doodle Dandy" flagpole Kate Smith & Ethel Merman beltin' out “There's No Wiz Like a Sloe Gin Fizz,” Hollywood's own drug-ruined Judy Garland stoned & over the rainbow. An old story, we would come to find: the intent to water down, the smell of white-out, what took a bit of the jizz out of jazz when it went upriver Nawlins to Chicago, Paul Whiteman for the dance hall. Not a churnin’ urn of burnin’ funk, ya’ll.

The real story of American music remains a cosmic showdown worthy of Dostoyevski's Grand Inquisitor schtick in The Brothers Karamazov: Slick-'n'-Sick Show Biz versus Real Roots Grit, whether Bill Monroe or inimitable Doc Watson, fiddle & jug band, Anglo-Saxon sea chanty via Tennessee streams or Sun House scratchin’ out hardscrabble blues with Bukka White. The skeletons were hidden in plain sight: the mill work song, plantation call-'n'-answer, union hall ditty, migrant camp fireside, prison fatigues in the closet, Natives warehoused to the res or livin' under the radar of Manifest Destiny & casinos, the nation's continuity being murder & concrete, the auction blocks where slaves were sold paved over by the chamber of commerce & the local church. Bid 'em in.

The moans up out of the Delta spoke hounded & wounded, of being cursed, haunted & hunted, of ghosts, of strange fruit. When Jimmy Witherspoon asked, “How long will it be before I become a man,” it gave context to classical violinist & calypso singer Louis (X) Farrakan’s song, “The White Man's Heaven Is the Black Man's Hell.” The sense that
there was a deal on the table, what Robert Johnson kept referring to, something existential—everyday life in the wealthiest country in history scary as hell. Standin’ at the crossroads.

As for “once ya go black, ya never go back,” there was White Panther poet John Sinclair, manager of the band MC5 (who insisted on “Kicking Out the Jams”) busted, a joint planted on him by the Michigan narcotics circa ’68. By then the game had gotten rough, with no room to back down or re-arrange the mosaic. Tin soldiers way before any Tricky Dick-stah comin’. Ask anyone who went to Woodstock to compare what the papers reported to the actual event of being there. The battle lines weren’t gettin’ drawn; they were pre-existing. One look at those in-bred crackers in the Klan down in Alabama & how could anyone believe Ronald McRay-Gun when he later said in Death Valley cowpoke certainty that black leaders had created racism?

The real struggle has remained about fascism & the fear of a) being free; b) a black planet (as Public Enemy would decry); c) the pelvis (Elvis asked us).

Until the British invasion, it looked liked the Nazis had won the Second World War. Millions of conspicuously consuming boomer kids became a captive audience to the politics of Top 40 Play Lists, which ruled what got on-the-air. If the record company didn’t pay, the dj didn’t play. How else could someone as square as Dick Clark make it without bellying up to the payola? He still came out sleazy clean when the dimes dropped & the feds popped real-deal Alan Freed while that shaygetz Murray the K submarine race-watched in Brooklyn, his brown nose dyin’ from tryin’ to become the Fifth Beatle & “ride the gravy train, boy,” Cousin Brucie sugar-coating WABC with bubblegum junk & my joy lollypop. (Didn’t make anyone’s heart we knew go giddy-yap.)

But on the other hand & only a few years later: FM, hail Atlantis, & an entire album side coming through the rye with no commercial interruption & Allison Steel, The Night Bird on WNEW, playing a line right out of Yeats: “White bird in a golden cage on a winter’s day in the rain” by a band called It’s a Beautiful Day, they with violins, Spanish
guitars, polyrhythmic beat & swirling harmonies more akin to the music of the spheres than anything Lawrence Welk ever bubbled up.

Bill Graham might have missed the point about music-money- &-kulcha in the Haight, but his Fillmores West & East brought musicians from many genres & generations to the same dressing room backstage. Rock was all of three chords, the red-haired bastard of the blues, but when notes were compared after hours, the history of abuse American musicians had gone through began to get better known. From Joe McCarthy-era blacklists of Pete Seeger & the Weavers to the cabaret-card dilemmas of Lady Day & Monk, the latter-day gangster shenanigans in Vegas, Philly & Atlantic City compared to New Orleans, New York & Chicago. Talk about Howlin’ Wolf’s “had to take Christmas in my overalls,” Jim Crow was all over Satchmo (ditto the mob) & Basie & Billy E! The Army dishonorably discharged Lester Young for being himself! Miles Davis got roughed up & arrested for helping a white woman get in a cab on the very street Bird made famous!

No matter one’s outlook, it looked like our own musicians were being played for schnooks: no hospital for Bessie Smith nor copyright for John Lee Hooker nor Ledbelly parole, Kenny Clarke in Paris, Bud Powell in the booby hatch & Chuck Berry behind bars, Bob Wills & the juncture of jazz & hillbilly washed away, Hank Williams down the tubes, all these American Van Goghs gettin’ suicided by society. ‘Round midnight. Get an earful.

Musicians aren’t Marxists or accountants, & no take-over of the means of production & distribution ever really materialized. The Beatles, bigger ‘n Jesus, tried but couldn’t get the worm out of Apple. If Creedence, Zappa & the Stones could briefly run their own labels by the early 70’s, or sharp guys like Geffen or the Arteguns proved performer-control of “the product” worked, there was plenty of historical precedent. Modern Jazz Quartet certainly made it clear to promoters that theirs was music to be listened to, took it out of noisy nightclubs & got paid well to play the concert hall. Duke Ellington, however, may be the most excellent example. He not only delivered a symphonic masterpiece like
Black, Brown & Beige Suite to a Cotton Club world that wanted “jungle music,” but by keeping his orchestra together, he & Sweet Pea could write & arrange music that made use of extraordinary players.

The larger world was transforming as well. Call it a universal negritude. Writers like Chinua Achebe in Nigeria & Gabriel Garcia Marquez in Colombia, leaders like Ho Chi Minh in Vietnam & Jomo Kenyatta amongst the Mau Maus were stealing headlines, ones that Lenny Bruce, Dick Gregory, Lord Buckley & Malcolm X used in their stand-up routines. Meanwhile, the adhesive that marked music classical, jazz, rock or whatever became undone. Miles & Gil Evans had collaborated on Birth of the Cool while restless classical maestro Lenny Bernstein broke new ground with West Side Story, slummed with David Amram, befriended Brubeck & Pops & made What Is Jazz.

One didn’t need an English teacher to figure out that James Joyce had freed up language & syntax as much as African-influenced Picasso had turned two dimensions cubic. Sure, F. Scott Fitzgerald had written about jazz, but bop-drenched Kerouac wrote his novels in jazz, On the Road being a tribute/blend of Bird & Joyce. Ellison’s Invisible Man: a Kansas City jazz story through & through. How far was change spreading? The folks at the locally-owned bookstore loved books, held monthly po’ reads & music nights, displayed New Directions, Grove & City Lights that gave us our first tastes of Artaud & Ionesco, Borges & Chuang Tzu, Amos Tutoula & Thomas Merton, Isabelle Eberhardt & Kobo Abe, Genet & Beckett, Dylan Thomas & Colin Wilson.

Looking back, music’s Old Guard was losing control by the early 60’s. A new Aurora had spread tentative, rose-colored tentacles. It was toodles to tin-eared A & R goatees like Mitch Miller who had strangled Bird with insipid strings & say hey to hep cats like Quincy Jones, fresh outta Hamp’s band, callin’ the shots. By the late 60’s, time had—goddam but the Chambers Brothers told it—come today! The Moody Blues, a nowhere pop group one-hit-wonder (“Go Now”), went into the studio with the London Symphony Orchestra & out came the amazing Days of Future Passed which us former juvenile delinquents listened to endlessly in
Mike Depraida’s psychedelic dungeon in our factory-funky outer borough along with Pink Floyd’s intergalactic Umaguma. The Jefferson Airplane, a shaky commune of uncertain talents, got the good nod from SF’s jazz critic Ralph J. Gleason, so RCA got out of the way & out came the sublime Surrealistic Pillow. That black Cherokee, Jimi Hendrix, emerged from the chitlin curcuit, made a splash in London, then shook off those shaggy-haired knuckleheads & delivered Electric LadyLand.

“Genre liberation” wasn’t just intra-musical but inter-cultural. The Grateful Dead ran with Neal “Dean Moriarity” Cassady, Ken Kesey & hoopster Bill Walton! Steely Dan borrowed (Horace Silver’s bass line on “Song for My Father” for “Rikki Don’t Lose That Number”) their name from a Burroughs’ reference for a dildo! “Heavy metal thunder,” that Steppenwolf (named for Hermann Hesse’s novel) line that went on to describe a sub-genre of rock, was also lifted from Naked Lunch. Lou Reed studied with poet Delmore Schwartz before forming The Velvet Underground. “Mama” Ginsberg helped many get started, like ex-con Gregory Corso (who gave him that nickname), Ed Sanders who created The Fugs & Leroi Jones who became Amiri Baraka. Who went to Harlem to co-create the Black Arts Movement, which included, thanks to LBJ’s Great Society & Sergeant Shriver’s anti-poverty programs, gigs with Coltrane & Baba Olatunji. One of the bands who came out of that project was the Last Poets. Who inspired Miguel Algarin & Mikey Piñero to proclaim a Nuyorican independence.

Gil-Scott Heron said the revolution would not be televised, & once we got away from TV’s, the revolution showed up on its own. Wherever folks gathered—college quads, communes, camp-outs, prisons, picnics, foreign countries, marches, parties in the woods—the common musical language spoken was the blues. Someone might know a Beatles tune, but everyone, whether classical pianist or occasional harmonica player, could add something to the blues jam. As otherworldly as the music might have seemed in the yoga ashrams & meditation centers in the experimental 70s, its foundation was the blues—and if you wanted it to swing, invest in percussionists. A poet like (Byron’s own) Jim Morrison (whose “Doors”
borrowed Huxley’s phrase on mescaline perception which borrowed a remark William Blake had made) knew that if he was going to “break on through to the other side,” he better have a jazz drummer who could play like Elvin Jones.

Even enigmatic Miles, who rode a middlebrow through Eisenhower years & who now had all these young bucks in his band, took his cue from Jimi & Sgt. Pepper’s & Sly Stone. The Prince of Darkness must have grown tired of those crush-lovely, modally arranged ballad blossoms & released Bitches Brew, which mixed everyone & everything electric (which became a code word to describe the punch): India, Africa, Stockhausen, atonal, reverb, tape loops, weird feedback, funk & futuristic ensemble while still resembling a 40’s jam session at Small’s—and would knock us out & usher in a Weather Report’s Return to Forever.

Charles Lloyd mapped out a new territory with Keith Jarrett, Tull brought flute classical & jazzy to progressive thick-as-a-brick blues, Joan Baez released Any Day Now, a country album of favorite Dylan, & he, more encyclopedia of song than folkie-patsy poet laureate, sang an off-key duet with the Man in Black & it was now no longer hillbilly bluegrass boplicity, just ‘melican music. The Allman Brothers changed our minds about Southern whites & what went down below the Mason-Dixon line. Santana gave us ears to hear not just Tito Puente anew but recalled Dizzy in the day touring the world with Chano Pozo, made us remember the cool couples in the neighborhood who danced the mambo over at Roseland with Killer Joe Pyro. Oye como va, mulatta: God ain’t only Judeo-Christian but Afro-Cuban, too. Then Carlos studied with the Bengali mystic, Sri Chimnoy, added Stanley Clarke, Airto & Flora Purim, Leon Thomas & Tom Coster to the line-up & out came Barboleta & Moonflower, gems from a Hindu jazz heaven. George Harrison worked traditional ragas into the Beatle oeuvre, which helped John McLaughlin work them into Shakti, which helped DJ Cheb e Sabbah work them into a Sanskrit “house music.”

Django-lovin’ Willie Nelson left right-wing Nashville & started a whole new thing with old friends outlawed around Austin. The Band
emerged from the shadows of Ronnie Hawkins/Dylan back up, played tubas, accordions & calliopes, actually traded instruments on every song, tunes that elegized an America of rocking chairs & old medicine shows, Spike Jones & “The Darktown Strutters’ Ball.” Pop-schlock’s category restrictions, which (if one listens to Herbie Hancock’s *Gershwin’s World*) go back to the beginnings of recorded music, seemed defeated at long last.

Here’s the chronological score: for every “Purple People Eatin’ Yellow Polka Dot Bikini” in the 50’s, every Vic Damone Sinatra-clone & Frankie Valle stand-in puked up on the pube charts, every talentless Fabian & couldn’t-hold-a-note teen idol, every conked-&-cleaned-up-for-whitey oreo girl group like the Supremes, every Kingston Trio button-down rip-off of Woody & the Cisco Kid, every false-etto Roy Orbison imitation or No Other Than Brother Ray Charles or Dead Elvis sound-alike or live Perry Como mellow tone to de-fang the bite of love, every dim-witted “Eve of Destruction” copycat of deep-dark & scary-assed Dylan, constant Fab Four parody from Hermann’s Hermits to the Monkees (what fear of human intimacy drove these promoters of endless tripe & merciless hype to sell records with lip-synch jive—& if ya think that’s over & done, take a look at Art Garfunkel’s uncle, Lou Pearlman, making millions on teenybopper show-stoppers like ‘n Sync, itself a carbon copy of his own Backstreet Boys, which was a market-sampled replica of the original, New Kids on the Block), okay: but nevertheless, for every Johnny Come Lately con perped on the virgin ear of America, there’s been a Johnny Cash, Johnny Winter, Johnny Rivers, Johnny Hodges, Johnny Angel, Johnny B. Goode, John Prine, John Klemmer, John Phillips, John Lennon, John Mayall, a Sloop John B Johnny Appleseed original. A JJ Cale, a Stevie Wonder, Ry Cooder, an Arlo Guthrie half-an-hour long-play “Alice’s Restaurant Massacre,” a band like Cream or Traffic! Ravi & Yehudi triple-billing with Jean-Pierre Rampal.

Dial M for Marvin Gaye, a mojo risin’ Muddy Waters, Joni Mitchell mixin’ it up with Mingus, a Moondog, a Melanie, a Taj Mahal, a Mothers of Invention, a Hugh (grazin’ in the grass) Masakela, Bob Marley singin’ “Redemption Song,” a Gerry Mulligan, Mose Allison, Curtis Mayfield or
a Miriam Makeba kicking ass. Look at a monster like Van Morrison whose own career illustrates how talent overcame the machine: he from Them & AM’s “Brown Eyed Girl,” stepped off with Moondance to call his own shots entirely, from Astral Weeks & Tupelo Honey, & later Poetic Champions Compose which didn’t just say it all but opened the mystic rose wider in Avalon Sunset & Hymns to the Silence, then to gigs with The Chieftains, & once Georgie Fame ran his band it only got better; go to Live from San Francisco for the best concert ever recorded or the more intimate show at Ronnie Scott’s, How Long Has This Been Goin’ On.

Where do ya put a Pat Metheny? Or a Buffy Saint-Marie singing Leonard Cohen’s ultimate communion to a new way of walking, “God Is Alive, Magic Is Afoot,” for magic loves the hungry. It was William Carlos William’s variable American foot in which the Canadian novelist, like a host of his contemporaries, wrote. A phrase like “long-hair music” blurred in ambiguity & the wall between high & lowbrow, lit crit & street wit crumbled.

Once out of its container, ‘s not gone back in. Like Vonnegut kicked it, Ice-Nine.
II/ Daddy, Let Your Mind Roll on

Can I take it to the bridge?

-James Brown, "Superbad"

The Rooftop Singers sang: walk right in, sit right down, do you wanna lose your mind? Like the Greek root, \textit{ecstasis}—ecstasy means ya gotta lose your mind to find it.

Dancing abandoned the primacy of mind to the call of the drum. The dance floor of the 60's was the hidden truth of Jeffersonian America: we're all out of Africa, every human gene. Dancing re-claimed what was ours. A return to origins. Papa got a brand new bag.

Dancing leveled the playing field. Elevated the body.

Compelled a \textit{participation mystique} while—like the music—each voice sang/danced a distinctive flavor. It was Walt Whitman's \textit{Vedic} "Song of Myself," a democratic vista, epic enough a multitude to contain its own contradictions. A silent & unmistakable gesture of revolution. A power in joining, not in preventing. Get on the good foot.

We didn't go in for the fox trot or the waltz, that Euro thing about hierarchies, cotillions & debutantes. Our parents said that without the man leading the woman there was no romance in our "jigaboo" free style, that even the jitterbug "the colored" did back in their day had class. But we found the Whole(y) Circle, that underneath the Twist or the Cool Jerk, lurked a universe of Alvin Ailey, Martha Graham, Isadora Duncan & Bob Fosse-esque possibilities. The beat was primitive & ancient,
already in the blood. One could isolate shoulder or hip & not only mirror a partner’s Watusi but dip into what the couple next to us was doin’, the Frug & the Monkey. It went beyond even putting names to the unspeakable (dance) visions of the individual.

It was adios to Astaire-Rodgers duet perfection, hello tribal connection.

What a connection it seamed. Instead of human over nature, male over female, life over death, white over black, U.S. military over everything that moved, the thousand-petaled lotus chakra at the top of the head over the anal sphincter, heaven over hell, bully god over weak sinner, personal salvation at all costs over the idea that “we’re in this thing together,” the dance circle said: all 28 phases are crucial to understanding the moon’s mystery. James Brown wore a cape but played Pandora, & once outta the box, the harbinger slouched toward Bethlehem the shape-of-things-to-come. He asked if he could take it to the bridge, but he led us over to the other shore. Gate, gate, parasamgate.

A year after high school, we would live communally & study Sufi dancing as taught by a student of Sufi Sam, a/k/a Murshid Samuel Lewis (the man who inspired R. Crumb’s Mr. Natural cartoons). We learned the dances, with their turns & Arabic phrases, at the same time we were passing around Don Allen’s The New American Poetics anthology. Reading Charles Olson’s essay on Projective verse, everything connected, an at-onement with the breath. Life as composition-in-the-field, a jazz motif, a way to wholeness revealed. It all counted, as long as one stopped counting; for the word maya, or illusion, derived etymologically from the Indo-Euro root to measure.

This spelled redemption & then some. The sum of what we had been until then—like any divided colonial fighting in Angola or confused in Cuba or killed in Vietnam at the time—was the measure of our own fears. The path to recovering our own sanity in a world spun out of control was through re-claiming the body. Having grown up afraid of sex tenderness, animal joy, human incarnation & thinking with one’s skin, the path to the de-colonizing of our own minds was dancing.
It was an invitation across the nation.

Like we found with rock’s blossom from jazz & blues roots, dance told an old tale about origins, & likewise, one with a moral about apartheid. Maybe because we saw the artists bringing us these ideas as pioneers, not “stars,” we invited Vijra Vitra to tea, like we had done with Ravi Shankar & Alla Rakha. She showed us her Kathakali dance lineage combined both Indias: light-skinned Arayan with dark-skinned Dravidian, why Shiva Nataraj, Lord of the Dance, is blue!

By then some of us had picked up tabla, ektara, flute, tamboura & harmonium. Like the blues, north Indian call-&-answer bhajan is a social music. It doesn’t require the virtuosity of the classical tradition. Moreover, we sang these poems both in native dialects that eliminated the caste divisions among Hindu, Muslim, Sikh & Jain as well as in English translation. Kabir, Nanak, Arjun Dev, Chaitanya & Mirabai had taken the authority of Sanskrit out of the hands of the priests (not a single ceremony of Indian life could be celebrated without payola to Brahmins who mumbled the Vedas & ran the meter) to sing of their union in godhead outside the official religious racket.

How could one not hear Bird’s “heads” signifyin’ on “I’ve Got Rhythm” & “All the Things You Are” in that, or wild Walt Whitman forsaking British meter to make long-lined verse in the American grain, or Allen Ginsberg playing Dylan & the Beat-les for Ezra Pound, telling the silenced old anti-Semite how his Cantos lived on in these electronic troubadours?
III/ Look What They’ve Done to My Song, Ma

& in this quiet place I own
Worlds are born

–Cassandra Wilson, “Run the VooDoo Down”

If the “porpoise” of art is to become more human, then let’s admit hyphenated constructions like mass-movement, counter-culture or world-citizenship are contradictions in terms. None of that was ever gonna happen for very long. There were darker forces at work way before Manson showed. A president got murdered by Nobody Knows Who. The minute Martin understood the struggle was international & objected to war in Southeast Asia, he took the bullet. Ditto for Malcolm once he found out what the haaj was really all about. By the time John Lennon got offed, it was by a fan, not by an infiltrating operative from the FBI/CIA/COINTELPRO.

Ya don’t need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows.
The gift is hand to hand, word of mouth, outside the law.

Consider a son of the President of the United States who fucks up enough to almost win the White House by himself. Is he a straight-up puppet to the petroleum swindle & its multi-national-auto-industrial-military-kill-plex or is he actually inventing all those lies on his own? From the first day of his reign, the New York Times has reported on his criminal activity, but not a single congressman has sought to impeach him. He opens his mouth, thumbs his nose & the stock market drops, denies the Bill of Rights to see if his ignorance outdoes his arrogance. He
got into power by running the same end run as Enron, same con as Worldcom. Ask Dick Cheney about those contracts in Iraq.

Talk about means of production & distribution, the Times is one of the few independently financed publications left in the country. If the American public doesn’t choose to read/know/act on how deep in the doo-doo W is puttin’ us, then any expectations about the power of art ought to remain on hold. Besides, politics & culture have always had a doomsday ratio: the more repressive the former, the more impact of the latter.

In USA only rock stars fill stadiums like Neruda or Mayakovsky. 

*Bound for Glory, Beneath the Underdog, Really the Blues, The Mansion on the Hill.*

Culture is not a quality-of-life issue. It’s a way of life issue.

To make “culture” is to make a raft, a vehicle for the soul’s journey. In the spirit of Pragmatism (‘merica’s only contribution to the history of philosophy), let’s use the term soul-making because that describes better what happens when we’re moved powerfully by art, music, poetry, dance. Like our own Bill of Rights, culture makers know it’s better to be open than closed, to care rather than harm, to forgive not begrudge, to connect rather than put down, to deepen our discourse with our own dream life, to enrich our encounter with “the other,” to feel color & contour & nuance more brilliantly rather than less.

Drive across these Dis-United States & see the speed with which innovation turns into cliche. Jazz, our only original American art form, will remain better heard outside its country of origin because it’s improvisational by design. It cringes when canned. It won’t work on TV, elevators or supermarkets. It can’t survive an audience that ain’t listening. Or dancing. It’s too nutty, too distinctively voiced, too American in spirit to be franchised.

It may play Vegas, but it won’t sell product.

“Getting” soul won’t measure in number of copies getting sold. For that matter, there’s little logic to playing music over & over for hours. Unless you are happy with the answer the “astral guides” gave William
Butler Yeats when he asked them why they had appeared at his honeymoon & talked to him through the medium of his new wife: to give you metaphors for your poetry, Charming Billy!

As for the heap of woe these knuckleheads in the White House are putting us through, “Times are tough, baby, & the hustle is really on.”

Like Rilke says: do not be bewildered by surfaces; in depth all becomes law.
Snow, Ice & Christ in a Whitestone Winter

This is the use of memory:
For liberation—not less of love but expanding
Of love beyond desire, & so liberation
From the future as well as the past.
—T S Eliot, “Little Gidding”

My love is like some raven
At my window with a broken wing.

—Bob Dylan, “Love Minus Zero/No Limit”

What a world of innocent wonder it was, winter in Whitestone in the bleak & dreary 50’s, when waking from sleep we saw asphalt streets & factory-blackened ground suddenly carpeted deep in coconut marshmallow. Walking the decaying seafront along Powells Cove, wobbling planks & gangrenous, half-sunk tugboats would disappear, & it
seemed snow-nature-heaven still ruled this ramshackle province of New York Harbor.

What an aftermath of black soot descended soon enough, along with car crash, rock salt & blood in the cold, & while it all slid to slush, we waited for the return of the flurry-rich. Down it came, a blizzard to blot out telephone wire & apartment brick & the slanted slate roofs of gabled mansions along Parsons Boulevard as well as our own humble bungalow on Burton Street up from where the big storm sewer spewed offal & rat meat into Little Bay. Snow so sweep-swirl in the Campbell soup can firmament that even the bridge spanning the oily East River to reveal Manhattan’s steel-scraped skyline & connect our sleepy hamlet to the Bronx got swallowed up from view entire. This suspension bridge would become part of the logo for the New York Mets, a bridge which buckled & pitched in winds severe & later had to be fixed after its similarly-constructed cousin, the Tacoma Narrows, fell completely into the drink. Back then the Bronx-Whitestone wobbled, threw panic in cub scouts who would have plenty to dream about, tucked in warm beds, full of minestrone runny noses, the sound of distant foghorns, shivering still with fingertips slow to return circulation.

But what a heaven of white would weep down in our seventh season under tubercular skies, thick enough to stick & rival the remark the great George W was said to have made traveling by boat on a clear day out of Fraunces Tavern in the Battery in 1774, up through Hell Gate by Wards Island rolling with the river’s current past Bowery Bay, looking at the white stone that ran the length of Boosters Beach just beyond what later became Tallman’s Island Sewage Treatment Plant. The gentleman farmer, elusive general & soon-to-be father of our country never slept here, but he outran the British beyond Fort Totten in that self-same boat that would later be painted crossing victoriously the Delaware, & his name for our town’s shoreline stuck—Whitestone—& old longshoremen still tell the tale in run-down gin mills like the Crew’s Rest.

What deadly, sleet-hoary winters, sleeping icy white quiet, vapor-trail a crystalline cold breath as we ambled the unpaved length of Cryders Lane
a winding mile home from second grade after Sister Helen Eugene declared it a snow day, kissing Michele Cappuchino by the coat closet where we put on ill-fitting ear muffs & woolen mittens out of mothballs, steel-buckled rubber galoshes that slipped on over Thom McAnn shoes, all to guard frail kid extremities against a wet gust that blew the sea frosty in every direction.

A worsted, shirt-wrinkled world of trying to look sharp it was, what with Chinese hand launders & steam cleaners at every clump of corner store & rotten watering hole. A rumpled world of beefy barkeepers streaming with brogues, cursing like troopers in apron & tie among crumbling courderoy, Brylcream, quarter beer & pipesmoke blue-gray, toothless stumble bums rum-soaked, shuffling shoehorns in greatcoats. & still the snow roared down.

A pre-gortex realm of cotton long johns, shrunken at ankle & wind-whipped wrist, frozen gypsy men unshaven, who sold freshly timbered evergreens dimly lit in front of Bohack's or Food Fair, our grandmas at home in gabardine, donning socks under lamp light, yammering in Old World dialects. Way down below the Le Havre apartment complex being built beyond the old hospital under the soon-to-be Throgs Neck Bridge which young George Krelidis would later jump from, he dead by twenty one, limousined ladies in furs of full length stepped out of tail-finned Cadillacs into doormen's waiting hands at Ripple's-On-the-Water, the swankiest restaurant on the whole north shore, formerly owned by Oscar Hammerstein, he of Broadway fame from an earlier era who bought it from Rudolph Valentino.

A world of pre-pubescent imprudence it was when we tuned a stolen radio, first transistor ever, to "The Wanderer" to hear Dion doo wop with his crew of paisons from Belmont Avenue. How ruined to a world of rag-tag romance we were even after we read The Call of the Wild & knew how easy it was to just lay down in the woods & die, especially after we grew out of being weblos walking interborough bridges into boy scouts camping in the snowy ridges along the Appalachian Trail next to the property of Whitestone's wealthiest Catholic family, the McInnerneys,
whose acreage upstate above Pawling was large enough to get Joey Turrisi lost in the hills, food stolen by predators Gayton Mauron wondered wolves, we to fall through ponds that taught our teeth to chatter, our clothes frozen to our skin, & we built reflector fires that failed to keep the tent warmer than the night.

We might have known what it meant, had our own carrot-dangled, snowman-making naïveté not shrouded us, when adults said Leonard Sinski’s family had been bled white by the bank & he came to school without a coat one winter day & ate banana sandwiches. We might have known hard-luck immigrants had grown pallid from fear or died from the cold on palettes in unheated tenements that grew up where the old train tracks ended in barbed wired apostrophe. We might have known ourselves in the white, as in unfinished like the furniture that came out of Pop Worsley’s shop on Murray Street, might have wondered at the sight of our own knuckles growing numb-white as we blasted down Suicide Hill, a wild ride in PF Fliers on sunless days when the temperature dropped & the snow iced over & we would descend an express, almost direct drop ninety feet, plunging sled into bridge-bound traffic below. That same hill where all that remained of homes which once overlooked the bay were front stoops scattered in the tall grass after Robert Moses parted the land & polluted the waters & made promises of a future beach which became instead the six lanes of the Cross Island Distressway. Down that hill where Utopia Parkway ended on the waterfront certain goodfellas, who made quiet fortunes in concrete & garbage disposal & electric appliances, built split-level homes of dark marble, tinted glass & porches of wrought iron.

This was the hill where everything happened: where hipsters from Greenwich Village would later come to toke reefer & drink Boone’s Farm apple wine under the stars; where Jamesie Arnone first held my sister’s hand before he murdered a guy & then hung himself in Sing Sing; where Billy Beyer first offered me a swig on a bottle of scotch; the hill that the Armenian Gary Apkarian starred in when we played tackle football, he breaking opponents’ fingers with courage to burn under tall turning
Norway maples, this before he was shipped off to Creedmore for the Criminally Insane for hallucinating in the gutter in the rain on LSD & Mrs. Whitman came out of her house with her highball & cigarette holder, she smoking like a chimney, & told the police, this after her own son Pete was sent up for a big stretch at Lewisburg for counterfeiting.

We might have known how fragile the bones we were trying to make. Had the reptilian brain of childhood cruelty not ruled us, we might’ve befriended Pamela Tillman, polio stricken, or retarded Patricia Fay or not run from mentally deranged Larry Krotowski, or how young Tommie Scandura would die so easily & without warning from a brain tumor. But winter’s a world both of death & of dream, & in between freezing & defrosting, there were seasonal chores to do or our knuckled heads would be met by a world of woe from mother’s leather strap or the backhands of jack-hammering dads in from the salt mines. So we put chains on tires, ran along the service road to dig out snowed-in autos, shoveled the sidewalk of Miss Kitty’s house, she who didn’t have kids, & we took her dollar because she insisted & waved “You’re Welcome” at the window of the Engels, the weird neighbors with bulbous-nosed Arthur standing there hands on hips, whose skull had actually been run over by a truck that spring when he slipped on a banana peel drunk in midtown & stayed in the hospital for months. No, the homes were owned by the parents & if we expected to eat dinner, all of us kids, we who owned the streets, had to do our part in the deal.

In return we thought of toys, thoughts that started in late September with the arrival of the Sears, Roebuck catalogue, & we circled things, compared notes with neighbor kids & went along with the Santa Claus bit adults considered essential to the holiday, even going to Macy’s on Herald Square to have our photograph taken on the knee of some out-of-work actor or gone-to-seed wino disguised as old St. Nick. We stood frozen on all-day lines to gain admittance to Radio City Music Hall’s Christmas Special featuring the Rockettes even though it took us awhile to figure out what all their pretty leg raising was about.
We drew our Christmas funds out of the Chase Manhattan Bank above which the big blue dome & spire of the Greek Orthodox Church rose up eerily like a shot of Moscow, & we scoured the shopping center for everyone on our lists, buying gifts rarely used but which drew smile-nods of mock gratitude from the adult relatives nonetheless. Below us stood two-block-thick St. Luke's Roman Catholic Church complex complete with convent, rectory, grotto to Our Lady & massive school, cornerstone'd in 1896. But to get to any shops we had to walk north along the democratic vista that connected the hilltop Greek Orthodox to stately Episcopal Grace done in rugged alpine style to the hip-looking, Art Deco-designed Hebrew Center which surrounded the little red schoolhouse where everyone went to kindergarten, even our parents & old Mrs. Creemo with the ice-blue hydrangeas in College Point in the summertime, & further down toward the water, anticipating the huge funeral home at Gleason's, stood thorny Emmanuel Lutheran that would later become ensconced in concrete & crucifix. Turning west on 14th Avenue, we walked an oddly deserted block to the heart of hilly old Whitestone Village where once ran trolley & train track back in the day. There, above the town's major traffic light, hail King Kong, the Empire State Building loomed like a massive hypodermic injecting the sky with radio waves, eight miles to the west. Before us rows of cross-hatched store fronts told our local life & death: the news stand at the corner with the girlie magazines under the counter, the tiny all-brick animal hospital where they killed Rex but only told us he was put to sleep & the little library separated by Crawley's, the hole in the wall our dads crawled home from on Friday nights, & beyond that, just before the old firehouse: the three stories of dingy Odd Fellows Hall where the Pochahontas Society met on Wednesday evenings.

Though not a single Matinicock or Maspeth Indian remained by then to join—nor for that matter any of the original Dutch families who settled here 17 years after Peter Minuit bought Manhattan in 1624, & that $24 deal a steal & a mere hundred years after Giovanni de Verrazano "discovered" the harbor, & all this before the British kicked out the
Dutch--my two grandmothers were members, one from Ireland & one from Germany, & it was they who decided it would be nice if my mother & father met & married. For underneath their conversions to Catholicism, due to the no-one-starves-during-the-Depression program of Monsignor Dillon, hybrid vigor was the manifest destiny of these immigrants who held Old World squabbles to be forever over & done, even the one raging in Belfast & the other one that laid dead six million Yiddim. Though boycotts of marriage, botched last wills & petty disinheritances would follow both sides of the family like blotches of skin turned crimson, there was no turning back the interbreeding of brown-eyed & blue, dark hide & fair, shiksa & Jew.

We were all but WASP-less in Whitestone, everyone a minority then, though no one saw the profit in saying or displaying it, even when a wealthy Catholic bootlegger's son ran for President. There weren't enough options to choose from, either in product or seller, so we shopped the other side of that avenue where sat Italian masons, the Polish plumber, Greek roofers, the bagel shop, the Oriental fish market & the bow-tied florist. To the right: longstanding Harpell's Pharmacy, the fancy dress store, the modern beauty parlor, the old Woolworth Five & Dime, the butcher's shop with the floor in sawdust & meat hanging in the window where Klaus, the elderly Austrian, would sneak us freshly sliced bologna; & on the corner: the German deli that smelled of potato salad & cinnamon rice pudding.

Across the street a former bank became a saloon with a different name on it every year or so, & then Freddie's Pizza, which is still there even though my mother warned us they put dope in the dough & made you an addict, but then came Bertelsen's, the ice cream parlor with the tiled floors & old time lamps & the freshly made candies scrumptious under glass where girls in tight sweaters & too much mascara sat in the back booths & held the hands of handsome young hoodlums--their hair in a defiant duck's ass--while they shared a cherry lime rickie.

On the corner stood Stork's, the struddle-smellingest bakery in the buttered world that did so well they bought out Quick's, which everyone
said was good for nothing but a bottle of milk. Spreading further: the lawyer & realtor, wines & liquor, the shoe repair, post office, bridal shop & Landrum School of the Dance where the sexiest gal in high school came to teach tap. & further downhill was a worthless cardshop, the great Sicilian salumeria Mephisto's, the volunteer ambulance corps & a run of dingy bar-'n'-grills between homes & auto body shops & PS 193 & small factories that defied all zoning laws until you reached the armory where we learned how to shoot guns & finally came land's end owned by the Catholic Youth Organization with its two giant pools because the waterfront George Washington saw was now too contaminated to swim in. Every summer Buster Gallagher worked in the kitchen with his long-suffering mother, she who also sold candy at our school & he later as head bouncer would get us into the Ritz, this before he starred in porno flicks & went up for a Mafia hit but died in jail of AIDS, we didn't even know he was gay or into S & M or the mob.

So the shock of below-zero-cold would wake us from sleepy oxygen lack hitting the streets to hike home with plunder we'd hide under beds & wrap later in secret. If luck prevailed we would walk as much of the waterfront as we could, at least to the Tropicana plant where the big trucks came & went, & then stop at Uncle Henry's where icicles dangled from the gazebo & carp swam stiffly in a half-frozen pond. Later, his creek & hot house, mulch pile & rose garden & rows of vegetables & straw-black-blue-berries & red currants shaded by massive pin oaks housing whole families of squirrels would disappear under bulldozers, to be replaced by the ugliest rectangular pre-fab homes of brown brick imaginable.

But then Grandma Klessing would answer the door & take me down past the murky aquarium & wandering philodendron to the basement where these Black Forest Germans spent all their indoor time, & Uncle Henry in horn-rimmed glasses & his head-chef's hat from his Metropolitan Life gig would come out of the kitchen & invite me to help him bake fantastic pastries whose consonant-clustered names I couldn't repeat in German. Only then, belly full of milk & cookies hard & soft,
would Frieda tell me, she with kindly grandma smell & floor-length hair rolled in a gray bun who never bothered with a bra, to get in the car because Papa, her husband, had just got back from the Spalding factory now & would Buick me the few blocks home so I wouldn’t catch bloody blue hell from my folks.

What a pre-petroleum-spun, waste-not/want-not world we lived in then, when we never threw anything away, nor thought of clothes as hand-me-downs, nor old folks as underfoot or in the way, when tiny Italian grandmas fought wind & snow to kneel all in black at the altar rail, eyeing the sandal-wearing Father Murphy & his golden ciborium closely to make sure not a wholewheat crumb of the blood & body of Lamby Jesus fell to the floor in profane disgrace.

It was a world where age still held a revered place among the living: Ashkanazi septuagenarians with Nazi concentration camp numbers printed on their forearms walking past us goyim killing ourselves in tackle football on Suicide Hill, they with grandkids like frizzy-haired Alice Weintraub to throw pebbles in the water under the bridge on the Day of Atonement; old Greek patriarchs like the grandfather of girlfriend Joanie Vassilokis sipping Ouzo on summer afternoons sitting in the tiny backyard vineyard hunched over racing forms with Cuban cigar; & wild old mick uncles Huey & Frank & John laughing it up, sloshed to the gills on highballs & egg nog whisky-rich, eating their fill of sliced turkey, chestnut stuffing, brown gravy & stewed onions in white sauce, candied sweet potatoes & mince-meat pies on Christmas afternoons over at Gran’s modest attached brick house next to Memorial Field where we marched every spring to remember the dead war vets & got free ice cream from my dad’s co-worker Val Doyen in his matinee-idol Clark Gable mustache, he who lived out-of-wedlock with Jeanne Leandro, a sexy-talking, monstrous make-up-wearing Guyannese in a bouffant hair-do who raised poodles.

Though our grandma was as much a Quinn as her brothers or her sisters Bella, Minnie & Nan, Cassie had married a Scotch-Irish Protestant Pinkerton & moved to England before crossing the Atlantic, & by the time she arrived at Ellis Island, she believed in hard work, a stiff upper
lip, FDR & La Guardia & the idea of a melting pot as long as it wasn’t too polyglot & she wanted only a Brandy Alexander to drink & that only on special holidays. Outliving her husband, all her siblings & even her son, she was among the last of that immigrant class to make Whitestone her American home.

So on snow-silenced evenings we loaded both grandmas in the Plymouth station wagon whose windows leaked & drove slowly through freshly ploughed streets to see the Christmas lights hanging from almost every home in the neighborhood: plastic Santa & his sleigh tied to antennae, gaudy tree lights flashing in living rooms, orange Chanukah candles in windows, huge Nativity scenes with flood lights on mangers & Three Kings spread across front lawns, multi-colored bulbs outlining roofs & front doors, hives of white lights winking on evergreens.

It was the only time these grandmas ever looked as wide-eyed as us kids, for they had left their homelands—one fleeing the Kaiser & the other the coal mines—& came here before electricity, maybe 1903, no doubt to see these same streets illuminating horse-&-buggy by flickering kerosene lantern, or later, Henry Ford’s model T under gas light. It was their eyes that spanned almost a century not of progress but of famine, Fascism & catastrophe, a century that announced God as we knew He-She-It no longer was there, a god of mercy & care & proportion who once could be called on for the price of lighting a candle but now had stopped intervening, quit making deliveries, & the proof was in the people who were more afraid than ever of life & death & sex & love & the good they strove for & the evil within them & the finality of their final judgment. In spite of their humility, they knew anyone waging war in the name of God made a mockery of God, world-wide-wars in which the average schmo was murdered by the millions right alongside the war freaks by fantastic killing machines & atomic explosions that were brighter than a thousand suns, so if the grandmothers missed the reference to the Bhagavad Gita or misunderstood Motown, the mini-skirt or the light at the end of that post-colonial tunnel, who were we to tell them to ban the bomb?
They all were tucked in graves, buried in Mount St. Mary's side by side alongside the Long Island Expressway, by the time the neighborhood received its first Muslims from Pakistan, Iraq & Iran, deader yet when Koreans moved in & took over Flushing. Though new tribes from the Caribbean have taken over Corona, & the remains of the Soviet Union & countries of the Pacific Rim continue to thrive in old Whitestone now, causing more languages to be spoken here than anywhere else in the hemisphere, they would have shaken their heads to witness what has become the wildest concoction of world religions along that same route of Christmas-light-spectacled Parsons Boulevard: Sunni mosque, Baptist store front, Sikh gurdawara, First City of Seoul Presbyterian, Taoist garden, Swami Narayen Hindu Temple, Mormon Tabernacle, Charismatic KungfuTzu Fellowship, Christian Science, Nichirin Shoshu Buddhist Meditation, Jehovah Witness, Taiwanese Evangelical & even St. Paul Chong Ha Sang Roman Catholic chapel.

They would certainly have scolded us had we insisted that Yeshuwa was not born of a virgin but illegitimate by Mosaic law & therefore denied access to the temple his own half-brother James would become a scholar of Talmud in; that he was more likely a student of mystic John the Baptist rather than vice versa; that his message from mix-blooded Galilee had more to do with reforming temple practices in Jerusalem than it did with Greek concepts like the Logos, the Way & the Light; that his crucifixion was real but the resurrection mythic fiction mixed from the mystery cults to Osiris, Orpheus & Dionysus; that December 25th was fixed as a birthday only after the Roman Empire with its Winter Solstice ceremonies appropriated the gospel of the guy who reminded us to render unto Caesar—& look what Caesar's little punk Pilate did to our illiterate rebbi & then blamed it on the Jews!

Raised on deprivation, wary of the depravity of strangers, certain of disaster, conscious how perilous was not just winter but the other three seasons in hell as well, yet voyaging across oceans for a freer existence, these immigrant grandmas wove together their tenuous strands of superstition & tradition to make in America a place for a savior they may
have never even believed in, a savior for whom, like them, there was no
room at the inn. It was their own salt-of-the-earth life story they narrated
to us silently every year like Buddha holding a flower, & like the man they
called Christ, their bones knew the catharsis that comes from
overwhelming crisis, inspiring their offspring to raise orphans from the
New York Foundling.

Perhaps they knew in that self-same marrow of their Lord that the
dead of winter holds an unfathomable dread, one that has little in
common with the cozy commercial gift-giving of today, a mystery about
the cold & the dark that perhaps the older religions of these newer
immigrants reflect, a pagan impulse—Egyptian, Persian, Chinese, Indian—
that round & round the eons of kālpa spinning, Our Little Something
arises from, & dwells in, a Vast Unknowable Nothing, a cosmic common
sense seeking to shake the terror of death out of us, the sheer yin
becoming yang of it that we may make fuller sense of the permutations
that enrich, yet never fully exhaust, the cliché of night’s darkest hour
before the dawn of a new year entire.

Could the ghosts of those old timers be winking at us in between
the falling flakes of snow, reminding us that the crying hungry baby
emerging between shit & piss, as Augustine called our human birth, is
not just Jesus but the world itself, & that whole worlds are indeed being
born tonight in every Bethlehem, a word that only means mill town in
Aramaic? Their graves tell us to make ready a place at our table for the
mysterious guest who arrives without warning, flying like some raven in
the snow, at our window with a broken wing.
Born & raised in New York, leaving & returning ever since, Kirpal Gordon makes his living as a ghostwriter & literary consultant. Catch him slinging lyrics with Hybrid Vigor, a jazz band that really swings.

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