Cultural Daily

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Arya F. Jenkins: Excerpts from Blue Songs In An Open Key

Arya F. Jenkins · Wednesday, June 12th, 2019

From “Don’t Threaten Me with Love, Baby”

A remembrance of difference coursed through her then. She must have been in the 5th grade and came home looking like a sad puppy, her nana said. Chan explained: “I tried to talk about jazz in Current Events class today, and Miss May shut me up, said it’s not current.”

“Not current?! It’s as current as the day, as the skyline, as the street we live on. Why, jazz brought us up. What is that woman talking about? What are they teaching you in school anyway?”

“Two plus two is four, and I already got that.”

“Humph.”

It was time to throw open the closet doors, far as jazz was concerned, time to throw them wide open.

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From “Like a Pigeon in the Park”

She closed her eyes against the brightness of the sun and the skyline, against too many people and their complicated lives of doubt and discontent, and blew her own version of jazz standards—”My Favorite Things,” “Body and Soul,” “Summertime,” and “Georgia On My Mind.” On the best days, as sun started to set and people began heading homeward, she spun out a most unearthly rendition of “Europa,” tenderly enunciating the special language of her instrument so strangers going home could own it too as they faded into the distance.

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From “Lulu and Me”

I didn’t know jazz then, save for the record my dad had bequeathed me at 15, Dave Brubeck’s *Time Out*, which I loved not so much for the music, which was unlike any I had ever heard to date, but because my dad loved jazz and because I loved him, I therefore loved it. I understand now, years after that time of gestation in Provincetown, that coming to love jazz has always been the journey to my father’s heart. In his absence I got into the music, slowly, through the years, finding in it the voice I had missed so much that Bird, Dizzy, Trane, Miles and others all

articulated for him so beautifully, the blues of solitary men, alone inside.

(Featured photo by Teresa Patrick)

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