Cultural Daily

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Memory Lane, John Yamrus's Jazzy Memoir

Mish (Eileen) Murphy · Wednesday, February 28th, 2018

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"[O]ld Time is still a-flying: / and this same flower that smiles / to day, Tomorrow will be dying" (Robert Herrick, "To the Virgins, To Make Much of Time").

John Yamrus's new memoir

John Yamrus, jazz fan and prolific poet, compares writing his new (and only) memoir *Memory Lane* to making jazz music. The memories poured out, not in chronological order, but in a riff, sometimes following a prior theme or train of thought, sometimes dancing ahead of themselves. *Memory Lane (*Epic Rites Press 2017) reads melodiously and begs to be read aloud. It is a post-modern non-fiction piece adopting narrative techniques, full of irony. Yet, walking a fine line, it never becomes cynical. It keeps the reader wanting more, building suspense, but it's short enough to read in a single gulp. *Memory Lane* grabs the reader by the throat—and never lets go.

And, like many jazz tunes, its mood is bittersweet.

John Yamrus is the author of 28 books and over 2,000 published poems. Selections of his work have been translated into eight languages. In *Memory Lane,* he steps out of his trademark poetry boundaries, writing about himself as a boy growing up in the 1950s and 1960s in a poor coal mining community.

John Yamrus's group of boys

John Yamrus's impoverished, Polish Catholic boyhood was spent roaming the neighborhood with a group of boys, on his second-hand bike, when he wasn't trying to retrieve the out-of-bounds balls from a nearby professional baseball field, hiding the balls in piles of coal debris to save for later. Or the gang might have been playing stick ball, or "amazingly epic" football. "We held absolutely nothing back. If somebody got tackled real hard and got the wind knocked out of him it was a cause for celebration."

The Greeks

One of the most exciting, but terrible scenes in *Memory Lane* is when the Greeks gave their yearly party, and a pig got loose. “[W]e dropped whatever it was we were doing and started to give chase…The neighborhood was in an uproar…kids were yelling…moms and dads were out on porches….we chased that pig all over the place, getting our hands on it…diving…sliding…having it get away….”

Yamrus’s father had big league baseball aspirations. He even had a tryout with the White Sox. Later, his father drove a coal truck. However, the coal mines were slowly disappearing. Coal became harder to mine, and people turned to other energy sources. Then, disaster struck.

Reaction to John Yamrus’s memoir

In last week’s *The Reading Eagle* (Reading, PA), feature writer Don Botch describes John Yamrus’s home town: “It could have been Anywhere, USA, except that it was a coal town, which meant it had more than its share of characters: rough-and-tumble joes like John’s uncles and dad; men who smoked cigarettes, worked the mines, popped black bits from under the skin of their hands and coughed up coal dust with an air of pride.”

John Yamrus’s *Memory Lane* is more than a memoir. It is a meditation on time and the fallibility of memory. It encapsulates the experience of a generation. Readers will enjoy holding John Yamrus’s hand for a short, but memorable walk down *Memory Lane*.

Connections:

Cover of John Yamrus’s memoir Memory Lane

Memory Lane may be purchased at *Amazon.com*. Here is the link: https://www.amazon.com/Memory-Lane-John-Yamrus/dp/1926860616/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1519567218&sr=1-1&keywords=memory+Lane

John Yamrus’s website is http://www.johnyamrus.com/

The publisher’s website for *Memory Lane* is http://www.epicrites.org/

Featured photo of John Yamrus is courtesy of photographer Bill Uhrich of *The Reading Eagle*

For a good article about John Yamrus and *Memory Lane,* written by feature writer Don Botch of *The Reading Eagle* (Reading, PA) (newspaper costs $1 to read), see: http://www.readingeagle.com/life/article/john-yamrus-of-spring-township-steps-out-of-his-poetry-zone-with-a-new-book

Photo above of *Memory Lane* cover is by Mish (baseball photo on cover property of John Yamrus).

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