

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Poets on Craft: Dan Wilcox and Charlie Rossiter

Bunkong Tuon · Wednesday, April 28th, 2021

For this thirty-sixth post in the *Poets on Craft* series, we have Dan Wilcox and Charlie Rossiter, two of the three members of “3 Guys from Albany.”

Poets on Craft is a cyberspace for contemporary poets to share their thoughts and ideas on the process of poetry and for students to discover new ways of approaching the writing of poetry. In the face of a pandemic that is both viral and political, it is a resource for strength and creativity, friendship and beauty, love and rejuvenation. It is thus a celebration of the beautiful and eclectic minds of contemporary poets. This series is intended for educational purposes only.

The format is as follows. I emailed poets these questions: “Generally speaking, how do you build a poem? How do you start a poem? How do you move from one line to the next? How do you know when to end a poem?”

With the exception of length requirement, poets are free to respond in whatever manner they find appropriate to their styles and concerns.

Access to *Poets on Craft* is democratic. Generally speaking, anyone can have free access to these posts. With that said, please consider supporting our poets by clicking on the links in their bios and purchasing their work.



“3 Guys from Albany.” Dan Wilcox, Charlie Rossiter and Tom Nattell joined poetic forces in 1993 to form the performance poetry group, *3 Guys From Albany* with the grand plan to perform in all 18 Albany's in the US. They have performed their work around the country at major venues such as the Nuyorican Poets Café and the Bowery Poetry Club, NYC; Cantab Lounge, Cambridge, MA; the Green Mill, Chicago; Newport Beach Arts Center, Oregon; in schools and libraries throughout the land, on NPR and numerous state-wide public radio networks and in Albany's in 13 states (NY, VT, WI, IL, IN, KY, OH, PA, NH, OR, WY, MN and of course NY). In January, 2006, Tom Nattell passed away from throat cancer. Dan and Charlie still hope to complete the project with 5 Albany's yet to go (Georgia, Louisiana, California, Texas, and Missouri). The Grand Plan may seem a bit quirky, but the group has discovered that it has led to a unique brand of poetry outreach

that can sometimes bring readings to places that rarely have such events. The All-Albany concept has also helped generate good press for readings when they travel.



Charlie Rossiter, Tom Nattell, and Dan Wilcox as “3 Guys from Albany,”
in Saratoga Springs, 1996.

Dan Wilcox is the host of the Third Thursday Poetry Night at the Social Justice Center in Albany, N.Y., currently on hiatus due to COVID-19, and is a member of the poetry performance group “3 Guys from Albany.” As a photographer, he claims to have the world’s largest collection of photos of unknown poets. You can read his Blog about the Albany poetry scene as well as a selection of his poems at <https://dwlcx.blogspot.com/>.

My poems usually start from something I see, or hear around me, sometimes I get an idea from something I’m reading, like someone else’s poem, or a news story. I don’t usually start with a grand idea, but with an image, or a phrase, for example, “I thought I saw Elvis...” I don’t like using “prompts” & so I avoid workshops, although I did publish a chapbook titled *Poeming the Prompt*, of poems written during one of those poem-a-day for-a-month gimmicks.

From there I follow the image, or the phrase, one image leads to another. Again, I rarely plan a poem, but often a plan emerges from the writing. I don’t use rhyme, but do feel that some sort of repetition is needed in poetry, be it a word, or phrase.

& eventually the parade of images leads to the end — there it is — or not. Sometimes the poem just stops, sometimes there is a punchline. & sometimes I change it later.



Dan Wilcox and Charlie Rossiter in Albany, OK

Charlie Rossiter hosts the twice-monthly podcast, begun in 2015, at www.poetryspokenhere.com. His recent books, including *Green Mountain Meditation*, *Cold Mountain 2000: Han Shan in the City*, and more are available from www.Foothillspublishing.com. He has received an NEA Fellowship for his poetry and other awards.

Obviously the first task in writing a poem is determining a place to start and the key to that is awareness—noticing. More important is noticing that you are noticing. Here's a simple example. I was sitting outside the music building on Bennington College campus one summer afternoon taking in the mountain view when I heard some arhythmic plunking from behind me that caught my attention. That's the noticing. Then I realized that the plunking was odd so I paid closer, more conscious attention to it.

I quickly realized that the sounds were odd because they were actually coming from someone tuning a piano. Upon closer attention I noticed additional details about what I was hearing. Strangely, at least to my ears, what I was hearing sounded like an intentional avant-garde musical composition, even though it was not.

I began free writing what came to mind with that realization. Then I decided the original observation was not enough for a poem, and I so directed my attention to other aspects of my environment and let my mind wander with thoughts of music. Then, of course, I moved things around and made little word choice changes until I ended up with this poem.

(Featured image by Alexis Rhone Fancher)

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