

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Take the Mask Off to Dream Under Polka-Dot Stars

Mike Sonksen · Friday, August 18th, 2023

Foreword for *Dreaming Under Polka-Dot Stars* by Cory Cofer

Cory Cofer aka Besskepp is a poet, educator, husband, father and community ambassador. The HBO Def Poet takes the mask off and makes the personal universal with his new book of poems *Dreaming Under Polka-Dot Stars*.

When I say 'Now what!'
You say,
'Raw cut!'

"Now what!"
"Raw cut!"
"Now what!"
"Raw cut!"

This call and response chorus within his poem "Rewind Time" epitomizes his effusive spirit. On a cold January night two decades ago I saw him rock this and shake the core of many into one solid frenzy at the long gone Luna SoL coffeehouse on 6th Street.

Cofer was co-featuring with Saul Williams when the power went out. Nonetheless, nobody went home. The two poets went round robin, yelling poems in the dark, and the crowd hung on every word. Cofer got the crowd involved. His immediate poems grabbed the audience and wouldn't let go.

One of the first qualities a reader/listener picks up from Cofer is infectious energy. His poetry invites you to chant along. Cofer uses crescendo and repetition to build energy. The energy builds to an epiphany and a deeper truth through the poem's trajectories.

One cannot help but submit to the ride he's initiated through the piece.

Take the piece he uses to close out his open mic, A Mic and Dim Lights, for the last 20 years. Whenever the list of readers is finished and Cofer closes shop, he recites it and by the end of its twenty lines, almost everyone in the room is joining in unison. The last four lines go like this:

I'm tired of fist fights
Just like I'm tired of gym tights

I'd rather be in a cafe or something
With a mic & dim lights!

Cofer's open mic A Mic & Dim Lights in the Pomona Arts Colony was weekly for 14 years, and monthly the last six before concluding in late 2020. Hundreds, if not thousands, of poets came through the space. He has mentored more young writers than he can count.

Before coming to college in Southern California, Cofer spent most of his formative years in Stockton. His short, slice of life poems about his rite of passage demystify the city:

**Not a day in my life
I didn't smile**

Broke folk got good times too
Soul City Crew
uproked at the Civic
The Waterfest had fireworks, had to live it
Hieroglyphics and E40 blast through speakers
Pro-wings and Reebok Pumps, the sneakers

Cofer's poetry takes the mask off and finds time to laugh about the incongruities. He owns his own story by being vulnerable—then laughing his way through it. Here's another one:

transitions

Single-parent household

Still got the scars

Momma found a new man

She feeling like a star

Compared to my real dad

He wasn't up to par

40 cent bus rides

He didn't live far

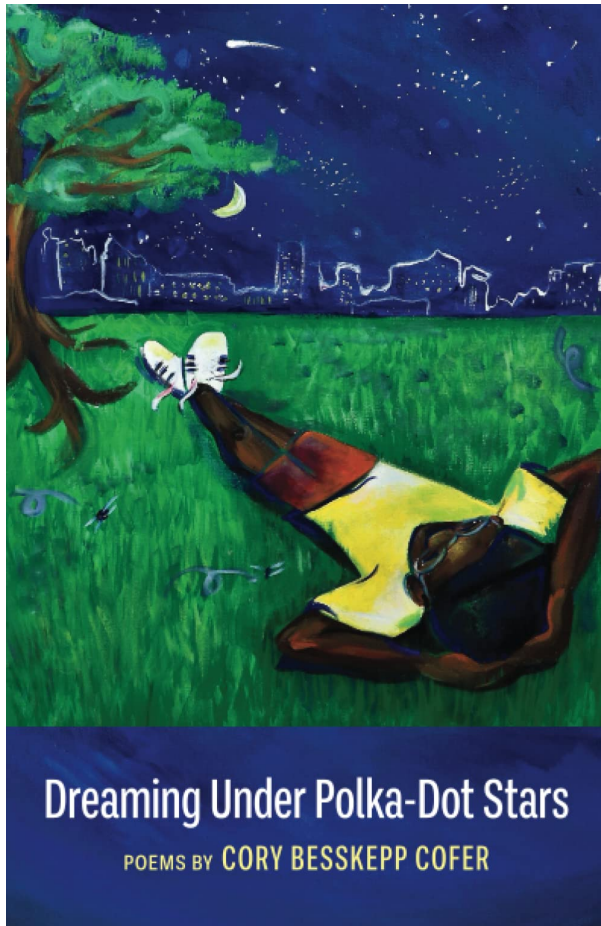
I wish my parents stayed together like the Cosby Show!
Both parents in the home watching seeds grow.

One of Cofer's best known poems is "Trinidad, Texas." The poem juxtaposes social differences, breaks down his family history and captures small town America:

Take me back to Trinidad Texas
Where the north part of the tracks is all white
And the south part of the tracks is all black
The only time the blacks would go up north

Was for school, the post office, or to mow lawns
 The only time that whites would go down south
 Was to arrest somebody or recruit somebody
 To play football or basketball

Cofer breaks down Trinidad with X-ray vision like Richard Pryor. He shows the reader the messy reality. Hits punchlines, unites the heart and mind, and raises our vibration while *Dreaming Under Polka-Dot Stars*.



Dreaming Under Polka-Dot Stars by Cory Cofer

Purchase *Dreaming Under Polka-Dot Stars* by Cory Cofer

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