

Direct Address: Poems

Contributed by Chuck Calabreze

An Introduction to Tonight's Performance

A chattering in the eaves.Â A forceful muttering.
 Words carefully chosen, then smeared with beargrease.
 Not the language of flurry and ease.Â Not the song
 of the defrocked vigilante.Â Not the hemmed and attenuated.
 The truculent minnesinger.Â But the harried flight
 of the marauding crow.Â Missile sprung from the desert.
 Catapulted vixen.Â Acrid linguist.Â Cartwheeling Taoist.
 It's rumored they could fly, watch you eating your rice—
 your ineffectual chopsticking and long-grained beard—
 hover above you, disembodied, then return before dawn.
 That they were not given to gossip was a godsend. Â
 But what about this sputtering saxophone?Â How to explain that
 to the moderate drinkers gathered seatward this evening?
 Ladies and gentlemen, the modern attention requires
 disjunctiveness, ballistics, contortions.Â Requires
 that we drive this tractor-trailer filled with tortured geese
 through the Holland Tunnels of your ears.Â Forgive us,
 we can neither fly nor cartwheel effectively.Â Therefore
 we have chosen the screams of wounded animals as our theme.
 That there will be more wounded requiring more such
 compositions is a given.Â That ticket prices will reflect this trend.
 That you should use the exits positioned at the foot of the stage
 and not burst unannounced through the corrugated steel.
 The management would like to remind you that one hails
 a taxi, one does not ambush, derail, or otherwise interfere with
 or impede such commuter-oriented vehicles.Â They are a
 privilege and not a right.Â If the perpetrator does not
 come forward, we will remain in our seats until we have
 exhausted the abuses we have planned for the various instruments.
 That you might wish to avoid this.Â That if the severed hand
 on the apron is any indication.Â That announcements from the stage
 shall be random and without merit.Â That our purchase on reality
 seems tenuous.Â Please welcome if you will.Â You may choose
 not to welcome, of course, but the performance will occur regardless.

Festival

Wank.Â Wank.Â Testing one two.Â The night, the organism.Â The rented trucks, the wired-up and jump-started, the
 minibuses.Â The highway clogged with what's happenings, with bongos and where the hormones tick tick tick.Â So we
 drove the vee dub into the ditch, leaped the fence, and hit drives with putters from the miniature golf course.Â He's house
 artist now at a local rock â€n' roll club.Â She had some skills, but the technology changes so fast.Â For a while, when the
 guitars filled the air with messages, when the giggling Viet Nam vet forgot he was driving and crunched Juicy Plantman's
 U-Haul, a voice told a dark story.Â He was backing up.Â Someone rolled off the roof, landed on his feet.Â Everyone
 cheered.Â America, freedom.Â A war somewhere.Â When he came home from Nam he tried to kill his brother who turned
 him on to acid and now he was driving into trees and trucks.Â Â Happy, he said, happy happy in this unexpected America.

Moving Freely About the Cabin

Unbuckled now.Â Seatback and tray table
 in a less-than-upright position.Â Who will say
 I am not the happy genius etc., riding
 thermals between Des Moines and Dubuque
 like an afternoon vulture.Â The woman
 with the infant at her breast, the man
 with his Wall Street Journal—I contain
 multitudes, my breasts enormous

and swollen with milk, my bank accounts
 unaccountably huge.Â I have kicked
 my habits.Â I have vetted my long-term
 investments.Â Look at me, moving
 freely about the cabin.Â Look at me,
 athwart the gunnels, my massive
 missive tucked beneath my arm.Â My flight
 attendant proffers a beverage; my captain,
 O captain, hopes I am enjoying my flight. Â
 While the miserable shudder at bus stops
 or risk gangland executions, while
 the complacent wade into honest back-
 wrenching jobs or cross out bank,
 movie store, grocery, I am engaged to recite
 to the assembled hobbyists and hopefuls,
 to the tenured and tracked, to the wan coeds
 matriculating by the fire exit.Â Then I'm
 island-bound to a conference on
 The Caribbean Sea as Metaphor
 during which I will declaim
 my fatuous "St. Kitts Ode," committed
 to secure the invitation, but which also
 demonstrates my unequalled grasp
 of the semi colon—"not since Wordsworth"
 the critics intone—and my keen eye
 for particulars:Â cabanas blooming pale
 in paler light, bikinis like hammocks
 for the sleepy breasts.Â Six miles up,
 I perambulate among the REM-sleepers
 and cellophane-crinklers, among the lap-topped
 and newly-pensioned.Â Tomorrow, I shall be
 their spokesman, their voice, celebrating
 myself, assuming what they assume,
 barbarically yawping in this language
 that mostly makes them nod and drowse.

Dead Squirrel

Â Â Â Â Â after Fred Frith

Possibly amidst the smashing glass. Â
 There amongst the tambourine marchers.
 Possibly before the door slams. Â
 Before the drummer stumbles.Â Before
 the scatteration of cymbal and tom,
 the crash and rattle of toppling snare. Â
 Possibly before the pharmacist staples
 the bag to the bag to the label
 to the receipt.Â Possibly there, among
 the ordinary gleamings in the silverware
 drawer, the wine glass coaxed into song. Â
 Possibly before the ambulances arrive, before
 the lumberyard truck starts backing
 and the geese lay their necks along the grass
 and emit the hissing blat we learned
 to call honking.Â Possibly before someone
 climbs tableside and attempts a ragged
 Mr. Bojangles imitation.Â Possibly
 before the dinner music.Â Before
 epistemology.Â Before the arrival of the latest
 tropical depression.Â Before Romanticism. Â
 Primitivism.Â Possibly before
 the fight song, the drinking song,
 the mystical ravings.Â Back there,

in the dawn of time immemorial
 or something rather like it.Â Before
 the baying hounds.Â Before the cartographers
 mapped even the darkest caverns
 of our collective psyche.
 Before blenders.Â Crock pots. Â
 Before the lap dancer tossed
 the man's drink in his face.Â Before
 lap dancers.Â Before drinks.Â Even before faces.
 Somewhere during the cacophonous
 ceremony we were beginning to commence
 to initiate, quite possibly the hysterical
 combatants were shouting
 over and over for no reason:Â Dead squirrel!
 Whether celebration or lament
 we cannot know, but the chant was,
 reports indicate, accompanied by much
 high-stepping and forceful vomiting, Â
 by smashing glass, door slams,
 and stumbling drummers:Â Dead Squirrel!

Letter to M.

Those troglodytes you ravished in the Tuillerie were never
 among my favorites.Â I had hoped you would avenge yourself
 with the pallid stockbroker who crimped my Pinto.Â Such
 callousness notwithstanding, I long still
 for the incandescence of your linguistic events. Â
 As for my nights, I spend them tooling along the plangent
 Avenida de Shitkickers here in El Paso, where the jackrabbits'
 incessant leaping and twitching reminds me of the
 by-now-famous "interpretive dance"
 you performed at Tommy's Show Club.Â Though what
 you were interpreting and for whom remains obscure,
 I don't begrudge you the peso-filled waistband or
 the festival of macho posturing that ensued.Â I do, however,
 wish that you'd assigned me a more suitable role.
 While appearing as a Minister of God satisfied some
 deep craving for a more virtuous existence, it placed me
 in a somewhat compromised position vis a vis those cretins
 who pursued you to the jukebox and then alternately
 cackled and swooned outside your dressing room door.
 You will recall you thought they were "sweet"
 until they hurled a dwarf over the partition.Â Might
 I suggest that you also misjudged me?Â You questioned
 my intentions.Â Fair enough.Â By now, it should be clear
 that your breasts were part of the attraction, as were
 your characteristic, if somewhat obtuse, syntactical procedures.
 Frankly, I never minded being called "Ralphie," and your
 refusal to recognize me on the street caused only a tremor
 of chagrin.Â If you will meet me outside the Three Star
 Desert Motel, I will return your pet nematodes, and perhaps
 we can share a Coruscating Camisole in the lobby bar.
 Remember how we used to set them aflame
 with your "Bugling Elk" lighter?Â I shall never forget
 the first time you raised your face from the fuming chalice—
 your singed eyebrows, your necklace of fire.Â If you will wear
 your velvet jodhpurs, I will wear my loin cloth
 and fashion my hair into the Evil Knievel upsweep,
 whose meaning remains obscure, rooted as you always said,
 in our age's "profound cultural myopia." Â