

# Poems in a Time of Coronavirus - Issue No. 7



This anthology contains prose and poems chosen by a group of friends from St Paul's Church Grove Park Chiswick on the theme of 'Music and Culture', read to each other via Zoom on 14 May 2020.

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## ***Don't Let That Horse Eat That Violin* by Lawrence Ferlinghetti**

Don't let that horse eat that violin  
cried Chagall's mother

But he kept right on painting

And became famous

And kept on painting  
The Horse With Violin In Mouth

And when he finally finished it  
he jumped up upon the horse and rode away  
waving the violin

And then with a low bow gave it  
to the first naked nude he ran across

And there were no strings attached

**Chosen and read by Shelagh Allsop**



The Horse with Violin in Mouth - Marc Chagall

## ***The Time of our Singing – an excerpt by Richard Powers***

The fear coming over her isn't stage fright. She has drilled too long over the course of her life to doubt her skill. Her throat will carry her flawlessly, even through this ordeal. The music will be perfect. But how will it be heard? Bodies stretch in front of her, spirit armies, rolling out of sight. They bend along the length of the reflecting pool, thick as far back as the Washington Monument. And from this hopeful host there pours a need so great, it will bury her. She's trapped at the bottom of an ocean of hope, gasping for air.

From the day it took shape, she resisted this grandstand performance. But history leaves her no choice. Once the world made her an emblem, she lost the luxury of standing for herself. She has never been a champion of the cause, except through the life she daily lives. The cause has sought her out, transposing all her keys.

The one conservatory she long ago applied to turned her away without audition. Their sole artistic judgement: "We don't take colored." Not a week passes when she doesn't shock listeners by taking ownership of Strauss or Saint-Saëns. She has trained since the age of six to build a voice that can withstand the description "colored contralto". Now all America turns out to hear her, by virtue of this ban. Now color will forever be the theme of her peak moment, the reason she'll be remembered when her sound is gone. She has no counter to this fate but her sound itself. Her throat drops, her trembling lips open, and she readies a voice that is steeped in color, the only thing worth singing.

But in the time it takes her mouth to form that first pitch, her eyes scan this audience, unable to find its end. She sees it the way the newsreels will: 75,000 concertgoers, the largest crowd to hit Washington since Lindbergh, the largest audience ever to hear a solo recital. Millions will listen over radio. Tens of millions more will hear, through recordings and film. Former daughters and stepdaughters of the republic. Those born another's property, and those who owned them. Every clan, each flying their homemade flags, all who have ears will hear.

**Chosen and read by Simon Surtees**

**Latin & Soul by Victor Hernández Cruz - for Joe Bataan (African-American-Filipino Latin Soul Salsa Musician)**

**1. some waves**

a wave of now  
a trombone speaking to you  
a piano is trying to break a molecule  
is trying to lift the stage into orbit  
around the red spotlights

a shadow  
the shadows of dancers  
dancers they are dancing falling  
out that space made for dancing

they should dance  
on the tables they should  
dance inside of their drinks  
they should dance on the  
ceiling they should dance/dance

thru universes  
leaning-moving  
we are traveling

where are we going  
if we only knew

with this rhythm with  
this banging with fire  
with this all this O  
my god i wonder where are  
we going  
sink into a room full of laughter  
full of happiness full of life  
those dancers  
the dancers  
are clapping their hands  
stomping their feet

hold back them tears  
all those sentimental stories  
cooked uptown if you can hold it for after

we are going  
away-away-away  
beyond these wooden tables  
beyond these red lights  
beyond these rugs & paper  
walls beyond way past  
i mean way past them clouds  
over the buildings over the  
rivers over towns over cities  
like on rails but faster like  
a train but smoother  
away past stars  
bursting with drums.

**2.**

a sudden misunderstanding  
a cloud  
full of grayness  
a body thru a store window  
a hand reaching  
into the back  
pocket  
a scream  
a piano is talking to you  
thru all this  
why don't you answer it.

**Chosen and read by Carolyn Ashford-Russell**

### ***I Am In Need Of Music* by Elizabeth Bishop**

I am in need of music that would flow  
Over my fretful, feeling fingertips,  
Over my bitter-tainted, trembling lips,  
With melody, deep, clear, and liquid-slow.  
Oh, for the healing swaying, old and low,  
Of some song sung to rest the tired dead,  
A song to fall like water on my head,  
And over quivering limbs, dream flushed to glow!

There is a magic made by melody:  
A spell of rest, and quiet breath, and cool  
Heart, that sinks through fading colors deep  
To the subaqueous stillness of the sea,  
And floats forever in a moon-green pool,  
Held in the arms of rhythm and of sleep.

**Chosen and read by Catherine Jessop**

### ***Piano* by D H Lawrence**

Softly, in the dusk, a woman is singing to me;  
Taking me back down the vista of years, till I see  
A child sitting under the piano, in the boom of the tingling strings  
And pressing the small, poised feet of a mother who smiles as she sings.

In spite of myself, the insidious mastery of song  
Betrays me back, till the heart of me weeps to belong  
To the old Sunday evenings at home, with winter outside  
And hymns in the cosy parlour, the tinkling piano our guide.

So now it is vain for the singer to burst into clamour  
With the great black piano appassionato. The glamour  
Of childish days is upon me, my manhood is cast  
Down in the flood of remembrance, I weep like a child for the past.

**Chosen and read by Peter Capell**

### ***If Bach had been a beekeeper* by Charles Tomlinson**

If Bach had been a beekeeper  
he would have heard  
all those notes  
suspended above one another  
in the air of his ear  
as the differentiated swarm returning  
to the exact hive  
and place in the hive,  
topping up the cells  
with the honey of C major,  
food for the listening generations,  
key to their comfort  
and solace of their distress  
as they return and return  
to those counterpointed levels  
of hovering wings where  
movement is dance  
and the air itself  
a scented garden

**Chosen and read by Katharine Makower**

### ***Everyone Sang* by Siegfried Sassoon**

Everyone suddenly burst out singing;  
And I was filled with such delight  
As prisoned birds must find in freedom,  
Winging wildly across the white  
Orchards and dark-green fields; on - on - and out of sight.

Everyone's voice was suddenly lifted;  
And beauty came like the setting sun:  
My heart was shaken with tears; and horror  
Drifted away ... O, but Everyone  
Was a bird; and the song was wordless; the singing will never be done.

**Chosen and read by Victoria Lynch**

## ***The Floral Dance by Katie Moss***

Based on an old Cornish folk song. The Helston furry Dance is held on May 8th each year

As I walked home on a Summer night  
When stars in Heav'n were shining bright  
Far away from the footlight's glare  
Into the sweet and scented air  
Of a quaint old Cornish town  
Borne from afar on the gentle breeze  
Joining the murmur of the summer seas  
Distant tones of an old world dance  
Played by the village band perchance  
On the calm air came floating down  
I thought I could hear the curious tone  
Of the cornet, clarinet and big trombone  
Fiddle, 'cello, big bass drum  
Bassoon, flute and euphonium  
Far away, as in a trance  
I heard the sound of the Floral Dance  
And soon I heard such a bustling and prancing  
And then I saw the whole village was dancing  
In and out of the houses they came  
Old folk, young folk, all the same  
In that quaint old Cornish town  
Every boy took a girl 'round the waist  
And hurried her off in tremendous haste  
Whether they knew one another I care not  
Whether they cared at all, I know not  
But they kissed as they danced along.  
And there was the band with that curious tone  
Of the cornet, clarinet and big trombone  
Fiddle, 'cello, big bass drum  
Bassoon, flute and euphonium  
Each one making the most of his chance  
All together in the Floral Dance

I felt so lonely standing there  
And I could only stand and stare  
For I had no boy with me  
Lonely I should have to be  
In that quaint old Cornish town.  
When suddenly hast'ning down the lane  
A figure I knew I saw quite plain  
With outstretched hands he came along  
And carried me into that merry throng  
And fiddle and all went dancing down.  
We danced to the band with the curious  
tone  
Of the cornet, clarinet and big trombone  
Fiddle, 'cello, big bass drum  
Bassoon, flute and euphonium  
Each one making the most of his chance  
Altogether in the Floral Dance.  
Dancing here, prancing there  
Jigging, jogging ev'rywhere  
Up and down, and round the town  
Hurrah! For the Cornish Floral Dance!

**Chosen and read by Jackie Rayer**

### ***Musée des Beaux Arts* by W H Auden**

About suffering they were never wrong,  
The old Masters: how well they understood  
Its human position: how it takes place  
While someone else is eating or opening a window or just walking dully along;  
How, when the aged are reverently, passionately waiting  
For the miraculous birth, there always must be  
Children who did not specially want it to happen, skating  
On a pond at the edge of the wood:  
They never forgot  
That even the dreadful martyrdom must run its course  
Anyhow in a corner, some untidy spot  
Where the dogs go on with their doggy life and the torturer's horse

Scratches its innocent behind on a tree.  
In Breughel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away  
Quite leisurely from the disaster; the ploughman may  
Have heard the splash, the forsaken cry,  
But for him it was not an important failure; the sun shone  
As it had to on the white legs disappearing into the green  
Water, and the expensive delicate ship that must have seen  
Something amazing, a boy falling out of the sky,  
Had somewhere to get to and sailed calmly on.

**Chosen and read by Sheila White**



The Fall of Icarus – Pieter Bruegel the Elder

## ***Henry V – Act 3, Prologue by William Shakespeare***

Thus with imagined wing our swift scene flies  
In motion of no less celerity  
Than that of thought. Suppose that you have seen  
The well-appointed king at Hampton pier  
Embark his royalty; and his brave fleet  
With silken streamers the young Phoebus fanning:  
Play with your fancies, and in them behold  
Upon the hempen tackle ship-boys climbing;  
Hear the shrill whistle which doth order give  
To sounds confused; behold the threaten sails,  
Borne with the invisible and creeping wind,  
Draw the huge bottoms through the furrow'd sea,  
Breasting the lofty surge: O, do but think  
You stand upon the ravage and behold  
A city on the inconstant billows dancing;  
For so appears this fleet majestic,  
Holding due course to Harfleur. Follow, follow:  
Grapple your minds to sternage of this navy,  
And leave your England, as dead midnight still,  
Guarded with grandsires, babies and old women,  
Either past or not arrived to pith and puissance;  
For who is he, whose chin is but enrich'd  
With one appearing hair, that will not follow  
These cull'd and choice-drawn cavaliers to France?  
Work, work your thoughts, and therein see a siege;  
Behold the ordnance on their carriages,  
With fatal mouths gaping on girded Harfleur.  
Suppose the ambassador from the French comes back;  
Tells Harry that the king doth offer him  
Katharine his daughter, and with her, to dowry,  
Some petty and unprofitable dukedoms.  
The offer likes not: and the nimble gunner  
With linstock now the devilish cannon touches,

And down goes all before them. Still be kind,  
And eke out our performance with your mind.

**Chosen and read by Father Michael**

## **Hey Mr Tambourine Man by Bob Dylan**

Hey, Mr Tambourine Man, play a song for me  
I'm not sleepy and there is no place I'm going to  
Hey, Mr Tambourine Man, play a song for me  
In the jingle jangle morning, I'll come following you

Though I know that evening's empire  
Has returned into sand  
Vanished from my hand

Left me blindly here to stand but still not sleeping  
My weariness amazes me  
I'm branded on my feet

I have no one to meet  
And the ancient empty street's too dead for  
dreaming  
Hey, Mr Tambourine Man, play a song for me  
I'm not sleepy and there is no place I'm going to

Hey, Mr Tambourine Man, play a song for me  
In the jingle jangle morning, I'll come following you  
Take me on a trip upon your magic swirling ship

My senses have been stripped, my hands can't feel  
to grip  
My toes too numb to step, wait only for my boot  
heels  
To be wandering

I'm ready to go anywhere, I'm ready for to fade  
Into my own parade  
Cast your dancing spell my way  
I promise to go under it

Hey, Mr Tambourine Man, play a song for me  
I'm not sleepy and there is no place I'm going to  
Hey, Mr Tambourine Man, play a song for me  
In the jingle jangle morning, I'll come following you

Though you might hear laughing, spinning  
Swinging madly across the sun  
It's not aimed at anyone, it's just escaping on the run

And but for the sky, there are no fences  
facing  
And if you hear vague traces of skipping reels  
of rhyme  
To your tambourine in time, it's just a ragged  
clown behind  
I wouldn't pay it any mind, it's just a shadow  
You're seeing that he's chasing

Hey, Mr Tambourine Man, play a song for me  
I'm not sleepy and there is no place I'm going  
to  
Hey, Mr Tambourine Man, play a song for me  
In the jingle jangle morning, I'll come  
following you

Then take me disappearing through the  
smoke rings of my mind  
Down the foggy ruins of time, far past the  
frozen leaves  
The haunted, frightened trees, out to the  
windy beach  
Far from the twisted reach of crazy sorrow  
Yes, to dance beneath the diamond sky with  
one hand waving free  
Silhouetted by the sea, circled by the circus  
sands  
With all memory and fate driven deep  
beneath the waves  
Let me forget about today until tomorrow

Hey, Mr Tambourine Man, play a song for me  
I'm not sleepy and there is no place I'm going  
to  
Hey, Mr Tambourine Man, play a song for me  
In the jingle jangle morning, I'll come  
following you

**Chosen and read by Sam Hearn**

## ***Another Reason Why I Don't Keep A Gun In The House* by Billy Collins**

He is barking the same high, rhythmic bark  
that he barks every time they leave the house.  
They must switch him on on their way out.

The neighbors' dog will not stop barking.  
I close all the windows in the house  
and put on a Beethoven symphony full blast  
but I can still hear him muffled under the music,  
barking, barking, barking,

and now I can see him sitting in the orchestra,  
his head raised confidently as if Beethoven  
had included a part for barking dog.

When the record finally ends he is still barking,  
sitting there in the oboe section barking,  
his eyes fixed on the conductor who is  
entreating him with his baton

while the other musicians listen in respectful  
silence to the famous barking dog solo,  
that endless coda that first established  
Beethoven as an innovative genius.

**Chosen and read by Sue Hearn**

## ***Mozart's Horn Concerto* by Flanders & Swann**

[Youtube clip: Flanders and Swann's Mozart's Horn Concerto](#)

**Chosen by Mary Barnard**



From Chichester Cathedral - Marc Chagall