

An aerial photograph of Central Park in New York City, showing the park's greenery and surrounding skyscrapers of Midtown Manhattan. The Hudson River is visible on the left, and the East River on the right. The sky is hazy, suggesting a sunrise or sunset.

JASON KAO HWANG

VOICE

featuring
Thomas Buckner and Deanna Relyea

Lifelines

Music by Jason Kao Hwang

Poetry: Lester Afflick, Patricia Spears Jones and Davida Singer

Musicians: Deanna Relyea – voice, Piotr Michalowski – soprano saxophone/bass clarinet with

EDGE: Taylor Ho Bynum – cornet/flugelhorn, Andrew Drury – drum set, Ken Filiano – string bass, Jason Kao Hwang – violin

1. **nocturnal**, poem by Davida Singer 7:19
2. **vertigo**, poem by Davida Singer 4:05
3. **Someone**, poem by Lester Afflick 6:51
4. **Days of Awe**, poem by Patricia Spears Jones 6:48
5. **I Raise Myself**, poem by Lester Afflick 8:13

Words of Our Own

Music by Jason Kao Hwang

Poetry: Lester Afflick, Fay Chiang, Steve Dalachinsky, Patricia Spears Jones, Yuko Otomo

Musicians: Thomas Buckner – voice, Joe McPhee – tenor saxophone/pocket trumpet,

William Parker – string bass, Sang Won Park - kayagum/ajeng/voice, Jason Kao Hwang – viola

6. **Charles Gayle Trio @ Knitting Factory 7/20/92** (Vattel Cherry – bass, Marc Edwards – drums)
poem by Steve Dalachinsky 1:30
7. **What You Know**, poem by Patricia Spears Jones 2:40
8. **I Dream About You Baby** (for C.H.), poem by Lester Afflick 4:14
9. **Father**, poem by Fay Chiang 3:01
10. **in the wind there is a presence #2**, poem by Steve Dalachinsky 3:44
11. an excerpt from **a rose is a rose (for Bruce Weber)**, poem by Yuko Otomo 12:16
12. an excerpt from **In Like Paradise/Out Like the Blues**, poem by Patricia Spears Jones 3:18
13. **Gypsy Prayers**, poem by Lester Afflick 6:59

—71:40—



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VOICE

Each of the poems I chose had a personal resonance. They felt like my voice speaking words of my own to express essences that I could not bring to consciousness before. I also heard music in them. All the poems have an inherent and unique flow of rhythms, textures and colors that would challenge and engage music. Aware of this dynamic, I composed sonic spaces that allowed each poem to fully resonate. These spaces created were always infused by improvisations, orchestrated for the unique voice of each musician & vocalist, and developed in direct correspondence with the poems' evolution. Throughout each poem's sonic architecture Deanna Relyea and Thomas Buckner were fully empowered to improvise so that the poems would truly become their words, which they chose to sing or speak. In this recording, each word is a sound and each sound is a poem. I am grateful for these indivisible vibrations that offered me lifelines to grow.

– Jason Kao Hwang

There are voices that speak our thoughts, emotions and needs. They vibrate the air to deliver the contents. We speak and talk. We hear and listen. And there are other kinds of voices that are alive but mostly unheard. Some loud and intense, some soft, almost mute, all saying something that needs to be heard. Although heard by no one yet, they are definitely and clearly *there*. Poets give them actual voices using their instrument: words. Poems come alive, when written, to be heard by all, including poets themselves. Every poem speaks a different story, creates a different landscape and brings in a different idea since everybody is unique.

And then, there are musicians and vocalists. They do a similar thing to what poets do. They hear unheard music, alive and well, but not yet shared with anyone. They make music to cause the unheard music to come alive using their voices and instruments, alone and collectively. The music they create gives out vibrations to the air by dispersing the actual particles of sounds in it. This way, they deliver the story, the landscape and the idea once unheard to us as a living breath.

This VOICE project is a very personal one in the most profound sense. It is a “first person” experience not just for Jason, but for everyone involved. That is why I prefer to call all the participating artists by their first names here. Jason heard his own voice that he could not express in words in the poems created by Davida, Patricia, Fay, Lester, Steve and myself. When something “personal”

VOICE

goes deep enough to a certain degree, it reaches a tipping point where the “personal” changes itself into the “universal”. He heard the voice and the music in these poems. So, he composed a sonic space inspired by his personal experience and invited his musician friends, vocalists, Deanna and Tom, instrumentalists, Joe, William, Sang, Piotr, Taylor, Andrew and Ken to share his experience. And this was the last recording his EDGE quartet (Jason, Taylor, Andrew & Ken) did before going on hiatus. How amazingly beautiful it is to see our personal voices once unheard being shared as universal voices with others in such an organic and empathetic way despite different backgrounds and personal histories!

VOICE has its own unique history. First created and premiered as “Words of Our Own” for Larry Ochs’s Words and Music series at the Stone NYC in March 2010, it was later performed again at A Gathering of Tribes in April 2010 and for the Interpretations series at Roulette in January 2012. “Lifelines” came into life soon after inspired by the Roulette performance. Commissioned by Edgefest, it premiered there in November 2012 and again was performed at the Stone, curated by Min Xiao-Fen, in December that same year. “Words of Our Own” was recorded in 2012 and “Lifelines” in 2014. VOICE is the resulting creative development of these projects.

VOICE is also a community project. It grew out of the shared garden called New York City. Like a tree or a wild flower, it grew out of our commitments to our creative lives. As for the poets and musicians involved here, we’ve all known each other one way or the other over the years through joys, struggles and a shared spirit to make the world a better place. Some of us met at various creative spaces such as Basement Workshop and A Gathering of Tribes, crossing the borders of genres and cultural differences. We all are extremely happy to have our beloved friend, Lester Afflick, who passed away much too young, as an integral part of this project. The poems included here are from his book of poetry: “I Dream about You Baby” edited by Marci Goodman and published by Steve Cannon’s Fly By Night Press posthumously with the support of his close friends.

Now, the voices, once unheard and impossible to reach, are here with us, welcoming us all to listen to them with open arms. Let us listen to them from every corner of our streets, memories and dreams. Here VOICE speaks to us in the most humble, personal and genuine timbres and tones, as we walk together or alone in this landscape called LIFE.

– Yuko Otomo

nocturnal

by davida singer

in sleep
ravens with metallic sheen
flutter near her eyelids
she's read
they have more calls/
adaptability than any animal
legendary
controllers of weather
prophets of calamity
but eskimos believed
ravens created light
flinging mica chips
into the sky

in dreams she flies

relentless as ravens
sleuth like
the scent of night
the sword edge glint of moon
in her hair
five houses from the beach
the earth cants cold
she hovers for a close-up
barely upright tipsy
chasing after shadows

so now she asks
what healing sonant
what measured notes
rite of augury
set of numbers
deck of cards
what book of runes
what kabbalistic sign

what incense burned
what candle lit
what planetary purl

she flies in dreams
trailing forecasts
ciphering time

what stroke what speed
what mantra/meditation
air or ocean filled
what overflow
what holy fissure/destination
mode of transportation
then what port
what port of call
can reshape/harbor destiny
before all sleek horizons
sink and fail

vertigo

by davida singer

in a flashback
she's high
higher than sequoias
ephemeral
that raven thing again
she passes glaciers
global scan
or divination
willing them to cleave
in the faltering 'scape
she ducks free fall
a spread of clouds
like cards
all read september 9th/

10th in spades
hoist before the plunge
toes taut pre dive
(pre birth pre bomb)
lynching holocaust
fever on the run
earth about to waffle
at the brink
cosmic rift
kaleidoscopic
last give of springboard
blink before the rifle pull
pinch of a grenade

the telepathic ripple
the uneasy step
before judgment
the startling instant
of choice

SOMEONE

by Lester Afflick

Someone,
rising up,
giving off smoke,
blatant fire,
showing us his doom,
showing off –
a meaningless gyp,
a pox on him,
burn down his house,
if there is any,
burn it down

someone,
rising up,

cursing,
tertiary articulations,
too much tongue,
cut out his tongue,
his tongue must be
cut out

someone,
somewhere else,
leaning on allusion,
a bevy of beasts
being led on,
& how they continue,
these clods

someone,
sifting through shivers,
cleaning his plate,
he will not come to a good end,
no matter what they say,
he will not come to a good end

someone,
not particularly anyone,
drowsy, duped,
leers back at himself,
sees what he hates,

& can't go on –
& that's always a story

someone,
rather ordinary this someone,
lips made of stone,
slabs of it,
drones his way
through the windy evening,
winching,

winding down,
more!
he semaphores
more!
& he'll get it,
if they let him
he'll get it

someone,
like any of those
who worship darkness,
following the woe
kneels inside
every empty temple
as he goes,
encountering
no hymn on the road-
gives himself back
to the black

someone,
in a cage somewhere
not knowing anyone else
believes
he can plainly see
the swank,
deep-&-getting-deeper depths,
where dutiful angels spar
over nebulous carrion-
fever food-
then the night
& the night,
for a long time

the night

& then, someone...

Days of Awe

by Patricia Spears Jones

I feel as if my life were held together by wishful thinking
and crazy glue. Somehow it works.
Somehow all our lives work.
Full moons or Fridays the 13th, mysterious are the ways of the spirit.
Or the ways we dream ourselves awake.

Each morning a cloudless day revels in the impossible,
the dispensation of shadows. It is a ruse. God gives
and God thinks things over. And while the pondering abides,
each of us has time to act one way or the other.
Give, get. Build, destroy. Laugh and laugh some more.

Splendor in the heavens, ashes on earth.
Love conjured, love lost.
Out of the corner of my myopic right eye, I spy
a white van curving towards me, Sebastian at the wheel.
Face unscarred, but that's not the real story.
Out of the Bronx, into the modest comforts of Brooklyn,
he smiles the smile of a man redeemed in blood.

We do not stand still. The last of the roses open petulantly,
daring summer to end. Oh days of uncommon beauty,
when the knotted heart unties itself. As trees old and young
starve their leaves into gold, flame, rust.

- For Cynthia Kraman

I RAISE MYSELF

by Lester Afflick

From tides behind time
from planet heart
from dark blood-leaf
I raise myself

from the lice-cell
from deep inside the blood-curlicues
from the great glaciers of nothing
I raise myself

from stones that seep and seep
from those places I knelt at
from the memories I like to forget
I raise myself

from fevered psalms
from the places where light rust
from the ash ark
I raise myself

from the heat of the pits
from the pure heat
from what cauls and what cringes
I raise myself

from campaniles
from glass faces of God
from the leeching din
I raise myself

from the misguided compasses I use
from cracked empty kilns
from deep daylight thirst
I raise myself

from still plain without border
from rope of long arms
from tongues still tongues
I raise myself

from breath-ridges with hymn
from plain windows of hurt
from dust useless dust
I raise myself

from what I refuse as what I own
from winds that chisel this stone that this heart is
from sweet salves I cannot name
I raise myself

from these little temples my eyes
from what I thought was too silent and it was
from mountains that break hands
I raise myself

from bone harps
from blood harps
from icy icy music
I raise myself

from vast concrete
from out of this freed land
from this urn that is this body
I raise myself

I raise myself by myself
I am risen

Charles Gayle Trio @ Knitting Factory

7/20/92

(Vattel Cherry – bass,
Marc Edwards – drums)
by Steve Dalachinsky

deaf dumb blind cripple steeple
want to go scrape the secret off the wall

this is not now & forever
this is dis lo-ca-tion
this trial is no less a trial of peers
the walls sing with torture
the halls ring with faces of hate
 we came here yesterday
 & plan to stay for as long as
 there is

don't talk too softly of the coming
don't expect to be lead toward the door
 deaf dumb cripple blind
 drawn & shade
 pulled down so low
 the window no longer there

 this walk is a false perspective
 an oversized step in a small landscape
 there is nothing to blow out
 except the light

What You Know

by Patricia Spears Jones

It is not the memory I can conjure
daily destruction, daily dope,
Saigon in spring. In summer, heat too much.

What you give are your poems
each a piece of the stone
that was your heart

I have no way of finding
that point of pain,
crystalline as methedrine,
steady as a tropical rain.

There are prayers, say some, strong enough
to shake blood from your hands
death from your eyes

You do what you can and, sometimes,
you make music

as volcanic as a boy's laughing fit.
Your walk is the walk of a man in need of gravity,
you smile. And back of your talk is the blues.

ancient, bold. Hellhounds on your tail?
Each one snarls a signature note from the man in Mississippi
who knew what you know, who could see straight
through the thick tobacco smoke, the club's
hard red-light glow,
to the lit-up forehead of a woman waiting to love

I DREAM ABOUT YOU BABY

(for C.H.)

by Lester Afflick

On that rocky coast
where
you were
we were
the house was stone

while the wind wild
and terrifyingly demented
hounded

the goats
quibbled like goats
high
on the mountain
and the one fig tree
grew cold

no sustenance there

and the sea said
see the sea
all
the
time
see the sea

and even the sea
no mantra
for what ailed me
kneaded itself
feeding itself
so I heeded myself

thinking I was talking about tone
thinking I was talking about quiet

and all the time
all that kept me alive

was you

FATHER

by Fay Chiang

his long tapered fingers
guide my young hand curved around
bamboo brush pen
to form my name in Chinese:
family name: chiang: from northern china, we came
south on tamed wild horses and became farmers

middle name: wei: shared by you and your sisters,
wisdom?
and your own ping: for peace or plains of green field

bits of characters:
grass, heart, three dots of water, woods, home

write again and again, your name,
that you may never forget it

september 1978

in the wind there is a presence #2

by Steve Dalachinsky

in the wind there is a presence
an unseen force that binds
us to the earth
an unheard force
that binds us to the trees
a forced presence
that binds us to the clouds

in the mouth there is an understanding of tongues
a hand-me down scene
a pastoral entangling
in the breath there is the wind that binds us

to the sky
that brings us toward the storm
& wraps us in the eye
that levels us to the ground
 & makes us even &
 beholden
 & humble & held
 in its
 presence

an excerpt from
a rose is a rose (for Bruce Weber)
by Yuko Otomo

1.

walking home
carefully
holding a tiny red rose
the size of a button
between the thumb & index finger

I thought of smell,
not fragrance

the smell of skin, thighs, hair, armpits
the smell of unkempt bed, rotten fruit, rotten meat
the familiar smell of childhood memories
conjured up to conquer my senses
but I could not tell
whether it was the smell of the sea
or the hill

so I kept walking

2

a woman loses herself
between the pages she is reading
for a second

a rose lay alone on the floor
a few feet away from her

she wanders around
with no purpose or aim
in a pool of her own melancholy

in the afternoon room

she is very alone

3.

a poet died
stung by a rose thorn

he watched blood flow from flesh
& thought it was charming
he observed the slow process
as if it were some poisonous nostalgia
he was familiar with
when the word "River" visited his mind

he all of a sudden
felt sleepy

so he laid himself down quietly
giving up his will & conscience
totally

to the sky
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4

a rose bud
does not talk
of silence

it breathes it

a vase is mute & obedient
in it's own shadow
holding a rose's breath

8

petals on petals
colors within colors
I live by the rose bushes in my mind -

an approaching storm
can only illuminate their profiled beauty
& I mirror my own profile on it
secretly

9

overflowing
overflowing
overpowering

virtue and vice

dreaming of rose-scented myths and legends
I eat a loaf of bread
sweetened with rose jam

10

a rose is a rose is a rose

when we bury ourselves
in roses
in a wheel barrow

we become a song cycle in a rondo

a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose
pink crimson, yellow, white & red

alone or in a bundle
cut or rooted

a rose is a rose is
always an abundance of luminosity

suggested

Excerpt from
In Like Paradise/ Out Like the Blues
by Patricia Spears Jones

2.

Stars are like flowers in the desert.
They shiver fresh in the aeon knowing
that they will become memory, hunger.
the core of dreams.

It is up to me, then, to bring back their beauty:
taut, seamless before the eyes of men and women
To amplify the vitality of their illumination
(righteous shimmer above melancholy clouds)
To remind humanity that without them
night would never come

3.

The death of a star like the death of a flower
is awesome, ugly, a relentless warning.

Artists make whole somehow the ways
in which dreams persist
Each of us turns to the hunger of stars
and wipes the crumbs from our mouths.

On canvas, they laugh like children.
In essence, they scream like children. And struggle
like children to eat, grow, copulate, then flash out.
A name perhaps. A body gone.

GYPSY PRAYERS

by Lester Afflick

Lantern Lord guide
this last light
that goes south

Speak to me not only from far
and I will kneel until
my skin has learnt
its own language from
its own memory

Love me O Lord
as you love my soul
and I shall be good for something

CREDITS

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