



NMJ
V.4

Editor | Janice Worthen

Night Music Journal | nightmusicjournal.com

Submissions | nightmusicjournal@gmail.com

Cover | *Echo* by Janice Worthen

© Night Music Journal, 2018

Copyright belongs to Night Music Journal and the authors in this volume. This volume may only be circulated in its entirety. Use or circulation of parts of this volume is forbidden without written consent from Night Music Journal and the authors. Night Music Journal and Janice Worthen are not responsible for any views expressed within this volume; all views belong to the authors expressing them.

Contents

Featured Writer: Khaty Xiong
3

Matthew DeMarco
10

Mary Ann Honaker
13

Ricky Garni
18

B.A. O'Connell
22

Kirby Wright
25

Catherine Keller
27

Shamar English
30

Contributor Bios
32



Khaty Xiong

**Other Words for CRY, AFTER, BAD,
ALWAYS, GOOD-BY, and DARK**

Say after me *Hello good light hold your slow fire*

By morning this is simple language
Our lessons sown and bare

Felling your own wounds in April we protested
Then it was June and we kneeled long before them

Remain after me *Before us there was a flood*

Bad luck in a simmering pot
Of pork cuts & mustard greens

Begging of us the parts we must throw away
Conceited love pale as noon informing us to stay

Behave after me *Laugh it off in time*

My heart thick as summer jerky
The ring around the sun

Currents of the Afterworld

after Ken Chen

To what end would she have me see?
Houses still standing. No one bleeding
emphatically. The overgrown bypass
no doubt the same bone I realign
year after year in search
of *Tus Tswv Ntuj*.
Black vapor tearing
in the horizon. The lone peaches
twisting on their branches.
What record would I have to set?
Tormenting ever the accompanying hare
neither common nor mythological.
Just a story of this rumoring death
golden-eyed with a white set of ears.
How absurd every twitch of the nose.
The flick of its silky whiskers.
So pink I imagine its mappable insides.
My mother keeping her eye on me
like the work of worship beating over
the blandness of fabled memory.
Horned rays entering
the amassing body
pieced in gardens. Beside the wrist
the focus on a star that moves
right above the meaty ground
fixated on the weapon of her skin.
The bed of mercy alighting
in half moon vessels distorting
my view of this place.
Always the view of her.
Burden the ulna and I may arrive
to spare the radius. What would she say?
Have I mentioned the hands?
Unnaturally human though quick
to land the first blow
on a trespassing mouse
who dares to hunt even here.
The blow forcing fracture
upon its right tibia.
Not enough to kill the sorrow.
Though nothing left of the artery.
The evenings tell me more.

Tidings

The house centipede makes the first move.
Grooming tenderly
each of its legs
instilling in me
a fallen era
a deep fight like the body
translucent
a window no less
my very sight.
To translate in this darkness
its speed along the wall
the calculated scurry of impending threat
to whom really?
No one to answer that.
I lose myself and age
almost as quickly.

Do I love anything near me
or in this house?
Am I growing under
the right conditions?
My fury suspecting.
My forearm pressed to my neck.
The back of my hand in position.
My heart free.
An outstanding meal for the lone arthropod
my dear wretchedness
gone home in kindness.

Lunar Notes: An Interview with Khaty Xiong



Why poetry? What pulled you in, and who was the very first poet you read/heard?

Although I get asked this question a lot, I find it humbling and important because sometimes in this busy and hellish world, I forget the reason. When I do remember, the chest always burns a little. So, why poetry? Poetry has long been a form of honesty for me, a space that helps “understand the clutter” as a friend and poet once said. I find poetry as sacred as the language of my parents, Hmong refugees whose grief has taught and continues to teach me very much about the world we live in. They are the very first poets that lit the torch and taught me how to listen. I continue to hear their voices.

Your first full-length book, *Poor Anima*, was the first full-length book of poetry published by a Hmong American woman in the U.S. What was the experience of this first book like? Do you still approach poems the same way? Has your focus shifted, and how so?

Poor Anima entered the world quietly. Because Hmong American poetry is still taking shape, I don't think the publishing world knew how to talk about or celebrate this book's release. I myself continue to not really understand what space I occupy besides the fact that I am Hmong and I am writing poetry, which, as I mentioned above, is still a very new literary landscape. There's a lot of doubt on my side because I'm not sure where I belong in the spectrum of things.

Back home, I had a little book launch in Fresno, CA, that was hosted by California State University, Fresno and Hmong American Writers' Circle in 2015. Although the makeup was largely family and friends, it was the first time in my life where my audience was Hmong. My parents were in the audience. I read in English because all of my poetry is primarily written in English. I still think about that experience often. I wished that I was able to read or convey those poems to my parents in Hmong, but that's every immigrant struggle, isn't it? Language. At the podium, I remember apologizing, in English, to my parents that they would probably not understand what I was going to read. Prior to the launch, however, I had explained to them the gist of my book. They were quiet but proud because they understood one thing: that they were in it. I love my parents deeply. Their burden. Their sacrifices and trauma carried from the Secret War in Laos. I stood before my friends and family and read my poems, something that I had never done. The emotions I felt that night tugged at me in every direction.

Approaching the poems in that book was like facing all these uncomfortable truths—in my life and in the lives of my parents, the Hmong diaspora—and giving them the room to grieve, and in a way, permanently in the archival sense. Hmong history is still not known very well. The poems in *Poor Anima*, which discuss my anxiety of being bilingual and bicultural, are a little different than the ones I am writing today. I suppose the focus hasn't changed too much. I'm still in the same forest—just taking a different trail, which is filled with regret and grief over the sudden loss of my mother and other members in the family. Every poem is hard. Every poem feels like a test. The biggest surprise of this journey is that I am still writing. Grief did not take poetry away from me. It brought me closer.

Are you working on a second full-length book right now or just moving poem by poem? You write so movingly, so viscerally, about grief. Would you consider that your work's center right now?

Thank you. I am definitely working on a second collection of poetry, which deals with my grief as stated above. I suppose you can say that grief has always been at the center of my work, even before I wrote *Poor Anima*. As for the second book, I received a two-month residency at MacDowell Colony in 2017 that helped materialize a huge chunk of it. Still no title—though I have ideas. Since my return, progress has slowed, but I'm content with the time I'm taking to write these poems. Besides, I still have a lot of research I'd like to do before putting it out there in the world.

I have been applying for grants to help fund a trip to Laos and Thailand with my father, since he knows where much of my family lives/lived in Laos, where the dead are buried (unmarked gravesites), where the refugee camps are in Thailand, and so on. Because Laos is the missing piece in my relationship with my parents, I am desperate to see the landscape that scarred them and the families of others. It would also cement in me a kind of truth I've long been searching for.

I am grateful that my father has always been open and transparent about his life. When I was a kid, he spoke freely, though in fragments, about his time before, during, and after the war. Sometimes I prodded him with questions, but only when he was sharing. Seldom did I ask for these stories out of the blue unless I was trying to connect some dots in my own research. I understood that his stories were full of hurt, so I trod carefully. Many families choose not to talk about the war because of similar reasons, but I also think it's because they don't know or understand that they can talk about the trauma. Rather, they don't know how. For Hmong children in this kind of household, they end up learning about the war later in their life and wonder why their parents never shared. Of course, it's hard to conduct these kinds of projects because you never want to exploit the traumas of a people, especially when the trauma is also your own.

My father, however, has always been supportive of my work, even though he doesn't understand poetry or the act of writing poetry. Because my father was an orphan, where his life was dictated for him by the men in his family, living under communist rule in Laos, which set him on the path as a boy soldier, he really values the freedom to speak and to create. In many of our conversations, he has asked me to make sure the world would not forget him. It is such a burden and a privilege to be in this position, to be his daughter.

If you were the last person on earth, and you pulled the last book from a pile of ash and cinders, what do you hope it would be? Why?

Oh, this is difficult. There are many books that I hold dear, and certainly many more I have yet to read. Let's see, I need to imagine this as if I were walking through a poem. If I were the last person on earth, and I pulled the last book from a pile of ash and cinders, it would be *Frankenstein* by Mary Shelley. The answer is complicated because the book is complicated, and it would match my despair about life, death, and the responsibilities and consequences of creation. But also, very simply, it's one of my favorite stories of all time.

Who are some poets you're really excited about right now? Is there anyone who makes America in 2018 a little more bearable? Who do you have on your shelf/in your ear/on your mind right now?

America is buzzing right now. Of course, there's also a growing stack of "to-read" books in my office, both by living and dead writers. Right now, however, I am incredibly excited by Victoria Chang's work, Don Mee Choi and her translations of Kim Hyesoon, and very recently Nabila Lovelace. I just saw Nabila at a reading here in Columbus. I was completely entranced. I can't wait to dig into her debut poetry collection, *Sons of Achilles*, which was just released in June from YesYes Books.

If you could go back and say anything to your teenage self, what would it be?

"Have patience. Be ready. Find the strength to keep going."



Seasonal Trends

The year moves on without me.
It takes its leaving from the piles
of outstretched hands that litter
the lawn, whose spread-apart palms
flake fleshily onto the moistened earth.
While they wait raw and flecked
with cavernous pocks, they scale
my calves. I wish I was cool. God,
so help me. I wish I was cool some days.

Coterminous

Routines of washing settle
as steadily as the dust collects

but are fought against
with less diligence.

We find, again, the flickering light
in which we lose our hands

while we cast lines down
our wet and hungry throats

to hook our hearts,
hoist them skyward,

drag them out our mouths
and hurl them hastily toward the roof

that seals the alcove where we lay.
Our hollow chests then resonate

in concert with invisible waves
and with the steady tremors underground.



LOVE POEM TO GLENN DANZIG

I.

When I was fourteen your picture was on my wall:
you know, the shameless one, with the golden throne

and your hands resting idly upon its arms,
a god or ancient king, Gilgamesh-lovely hubris,

tapping the dark wells of our own unknown histories.
Your chin is tilted slightly down, but not in shame,

rather in gathering the taproots of night. You pull
them from earth's ravaged belly through your eyes.

And of course no shirt. And of course muscles made
to shame the old gods, which I imagined accidental

perfection rather than hours and hours at the gym.
Your face a gift from hidden parents, boyish,

jaws tight with suppressed rage.

II.

Now that I'm an adult I can see the cunning of it.
It's even more impressive, how you chiseled

yourself out of obscure geekiness, a stonemason
working only the most unforgiving elements

to produce this seduction
that echoes the first of all seductions,

you the Hades to millions of teenage Persephones.
I too have wanted to channel that story,

I have worked and loved it, sown it in my garden,
watered it with words, words, words, and still

the center of it holds tight, the petals clamped
shut, and I can bring it neither to dark nor light.

III.

Christians are told to embody Christ.
"You are the only Jesus many people will know."

Be the light, don't hide it under a bushel,
and when it shines out the world will be new.

If there exists a Yin and Yang, Night and Day,
Winter and Summer, then another office too.

Somebody must embody the shadow, must
carry night not in his pockets but upon

his brow. I dreamed you carried me away
and laid me down in an open grave,

in a silken casket, and bid me silent
with your finger on my lips. I dreamed

you opened the abandoned mine
and we ran through endless innerness,

through the closing throat of the silence
before the Big Bang,

fleeing.

IV.

You are necessary, or the mask that you wear.
Hold your secret selves, the ones where stars

and fireflies show up to make the night
glittering and safe. Hold them away from us:

we need you not as you are but as you sold
yourself to us. We meet ourselves in that image,

so even though your waist rounds and no dye
can keep covered the gray fringing your temples,

even if you seem to some the fool, never change,
o my mirror, my bass dredgings, my thunder

on the horizon past the one I let myself see.
You have, you see, a sacred calling.

Someone must stand in the abyss
between self and self.

A CAR IN RAIN

A car in rain is a close thing, dappled, dripping,
shadows of tears on the dash, the upholstery,
ghosting down your face as you confessed
your greatest fear: dying alone.

I admitted I shared that fear, raindrop
lobbed down my window with a world
of muted colors imprisoned in it. The wheel
before me, waiting for hands to steer.

I know we must have been in Everett,
in the driveway of your then-apartment,
but that's not inside this memory: a car
in rain seals off a scene completely,

makes us figures suspended in a snowglobe:
you, sunk in your seat, knees propped
against the glovebox, me with hand
hovering over the quiet gearshift,

when we turned to each other with wide,
disbelieving eyes, understanding
what our words implied,
how very long the road in front of us.

INSIDE A CLOUD

“A fog is a cloud that fell on the ground,”
Dad tells us, driving. The headlights mirror back,
useless, like how I now undertake to think myself
into love: my own searchlight blinds me.

“We're inside a cloud, kids,” he'd say.
We'd fling the wish out, thinking hard,
focusing to fuse those two thoughts together:
clouds, angels, God, heaven &
us, in a car, on the ground, in the present,

like me, now, striving to connect that
ethereal concept, *Love*, which does not envy,
does not boast, always forgives, etc.,
to myself and my boyfriend traversing
a thick fog in a small red car.

“It's like pea soup,” says my boyfriend,
repeating a cliché, but it's not, not even
slightly. It is not viscous, pebbled, green.
“Isn't it?” he pleads, as if my agreement

on this obviously inadequate simile
might pin us to that impossible word.
“No,” I say, thinking: skim milk, maybe?
although that's not it either—

It's not liquid; it cannot be poured
into a bowl or a glass; it is not good
with cereal; it cannot be mopped up,
when spilled, with paper towel.

It cannot be lifted aside like a curtain;
it conceals the far side of the field unevenly,
taking the trunks of the trees and sparing
only small glimpses of spring-birthered foliage.

We, blind, must drive through it;
while we can hope it will thin, not thicken,
somewhere in the next mile, it doesn't,
it won't. We skim through the night

only seeing cut-outs of the night,
odd collage on white posterboard:
mailbox, street sign, one branch
half-leaved. *I'm inside a cloud,*
I tell myself, *inside a cloud.*



OUTSIDE THE TYPEWRITER

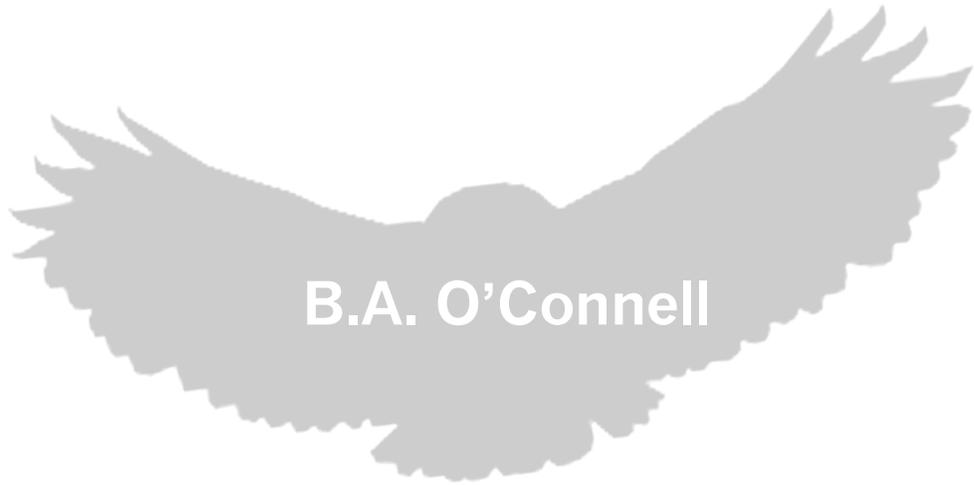
I like making lists for all the things I have to do and I like to include things like: don't open up the mail, watch out for that little dog on the corner he is a real nipper, don't get annoyed at the neighbor who hangs her underwear and swimsuit on the beautiful maple tree, don't yell, sing in a pretty voice, and be sure to remember that Pythagoras thought he once was a bird.

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING

The sun killed my grandfather.
Juniper and potatoes killed
my grandmother. My father
was killed by the blessings
of the West Indies, although
he never traveled there.
My mother – now that's
more complicated
and modern – we may
never know who she
welcomed into her life
in order to end it.
But that's what
such stories
are for – stories
that wear an
old straw hat.

CANNIBALS

We are all made of stardust, but if you want to make a sandwich, you have to go to the store and buy a loaf of bread for your sandwich from a cashier who is very friendly and most likely made out of stardust. Truth be told, the bread you just bought probably has a little stardust in it, too.



I do not
know what I
am focusing
on when it
starts
raining.

I hear my
mother's
voice calling
me home,
but all that is
in front of
me is a
blooming
flower bush.

I do not
remember
when I
started



walking, but my feet no longer hurt and the flowers, so vibrant, so alive,
smell sweet against the sunny rain.
My tongue licks my lips as I inhale,
I am already wet from sweat,
but the light rain has begun to move through my
thin t-shirt.
I sit beside the flower bush,
wondering if I ever had a mother or a father.
I sit beside the flower bush and declare myself,
a product of the inhaled earth.

I take solace
in the night,
while the
yellow eyed
kittkat stares
back at me.

She is sizing
me up, as I
stalk her for a
picture, a
pretty picture,
to have as my
own--she is
wild, she is
free and she
doesn't like
being hunted.

The air is cool
around us,
early Fall has
wrapped us in
its bare wood
arms.

I believe
myself a
witch, she a
familiar--in a
dance we step
or in a game
we

play--pretty
little beastie
caught by my
camera for the
small price of
a bit of my
soul.





Ash Vacation

I'm hanging out at the Diamond Head Beach Hotel. Clouds hang battleship-gray on the horizon. I peel thighs off lounge chair straps and stand on the crew-cut lawn edged by *naupaka*. A sail bobs and weaves cutting its jagged path through the whitecaps. A wrinkled man emerges from the coconut shadows and unfolds his towel on a square of yellow beside the cinderblock wall. The sun vacations his back. I hear rolling. A conveyor belt feeds bodies into the flames of a shoreline crematorium, its pipe spewing ashes into the sea. The shallows cloud. A high tide rolls in, carrying the darkness past the breakers.

naupaka: lime-green shoreline shrub



Attachment

Is the cheap fluorescent streetlight that illuminated the parking lot
And her glassy eyes which reminds him how she locks her eyes on something insignificant to
keep her from crying and how she hated being called baby
because she was proud of her name but she reminisces his embrace as she
squeezes his hoodie and tries not to glance at her phone to look for his name
while he choked on words that scorched his throat
like when she walked in on him curled up on the tiled bathroom floor and how he
looked up at her and said he missed her because this winter
has been hard on both of them which tickled his gag reflex and he
felt fire in his esophagus like the flame he used to spark the problems
he would stuff in his pipe just to forget and when people ask him
how he's doing he responds and says he's fine he's always fine
because there's too much going on to pay attention to and
we're all plagued by problems we weren't prepared for.

Cold

His once bright blue eyes
Fought the gray that clouded them
Depersonalized and desensitized
He had the face of a boy
Who was forced to be a man too soon.

The taste of Camels and Black Velvet on his tongue
The tattoo of Raoul Duke on his forearm
As a reminder not to fear or loathe
The crucifix around his neck
His beautifully raspy, menthol melody of a voice.

He showed me the tattoo on his chest
Of the word 'family' in Chinese
Then told me how he hardly had one
Held at gunpoint at seven years old
With his father's finger on the trigger
On the streets at sixteen
And how hours earlier we snuck into a church at one in the morning
The open door to a needed safe haven.

Defeated and dopamine depleted
Recovery and relapse
An on and off again relationship
With his beloved heroine
A serotonin incinerator.
Grandma's trying to kill the wrong kind of pain
Forcing them both into early graves
With Munchausen by proxy and a half pack of smokes.

When he returned with no opium and scarce opportunities
He cut his hair and shipped himself off
Distracting with a self-enforced draft
Just as he started smiling again.
I thought my lips were his momentary fixation
Narcotic and nostalgic
But he was a gem, not a junkie
Blistered by heartbreak.

He was probably born
With goosebumps on his bones
And all I could remember
Was how I held him as he shivered.



A PICTURE OF STEREOTYPES

As a young black man in America you become accustomed to the propaganda disseminated about you. It's like the cornbread and coffee my mother and her siblings had to eat and drink growing up. Sometimes, you just have no choice but to stomach so much bullshit in life in the flavor of bigotry.

So contrary to ridiculous beliefs, I knew my father and he picked me up from school every day. I hate watermelon. I do not like eating any type of fruit with a plethora of seeds in it. I only eat fried chicken on holidays.

I voted for Obama, but not just because he was black. If that was the case I would've voted Herman Cain and Ben Carson when they declared their candidacy for the White House, but then, I remembered their stupidity, values, and ignorance. Shouldn't the real dilemma be why it took so long to get a president of color in the first place?

I am not a thug. I've never seen the inside of a jail cell, and I don't plan on any future visits as far as the autonomy within my hands to prevent it. After all, I am a black man in America. Hispanics and Blacks make up a significant percentage of the penitentiary population.

It's true that I get indignant sometimes, but that doesn't make me an angry black man. It just means that I'm a human being. A successful African American isn't either a rapper or an athlete. All black people don't live in the inner city. All black men aren't thieves and rapists. Those are the zaniest notions to even conjure into your mind.

Focus on my character, not the idiotic things associated with my skin color. I don't have any superhuman strength, and I'm not a savage. Treat me with the same compassion that you would give a human being that looks like you. If I can recall, we're all god's children.

Contributors

Khaty Xiong is a Hmong American poet from Fresno, CA. She is the author of *Poor Anima* (Apogee Press, 2015) and three poetry chapbooks: *Ode to the Far Shore* (Platypus Press, 2016), *Deer Hour* (New Michigan Press, 2014), and *Elegies* (University of Montana, 2013). She has received a fellowship from MacDowell Colony and a grant from the Ohio Arts Council. Her work has been published in *POETRY*, *The New York Times*, *How Do I Begin?: A Hmong American Literary Anthology*, and elsewhere.

Matthew DeMarco lives in Chicago. His work has appeared on Poets.org and in *Columbia Poetry Review*, *Ghost City Review*, *Landfill*, *Jet Fuel Review*, and elsewhere. He also has work forthcoming in *Sporklet*. Poems that he wrote with Faizan Syed have appeared in *Dogbird* and *They Said*, an anthology of collaborative writing from Black Lawrence Press. He tweets sporadically from @M_DeMarco_Words.

Mary Ann Honaker is the author of *It Will Happen Like This* (YesNo Press, 2015). Her poems have appeared in *2 Bridges*, *The Dudley Review*, *Euphony*, *Juked*, *Off the Coast*, *Van Gogh's Ear*, *The Lake*, and elsewhere. Mary Ann holds a BA in philosophy from West Virginia University, a master of theological studies degree from Harvard Divinity School, and an MFA in creative writing from Lesley University. She currently lives in Beckley, West Virginia.

Ricky Garni grew up in Miami and Maine. He works as a graphic designer by day and writes music by night. In 2001, his poetry was subpoenaed in court, in order to assert that his testimony was not valid as he was “clearly not of sound mind.” He has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize on seven occasions.

B.A. O'Connell lives in Nowhere, Texas. Sometimes their life reminds them of a southern gothic novel. They have a black cat and have dabbled in witchcraft. They believe firmly in the power of words.

Kirby Wright's latest book is *At the Customs House*, a collection of poetry and flash set in Helsinki and Stockholm. One of his childhood stories is now in preproduction as a film.

Catherine Keller, born and bred in Buffalo, published her first poetry chapbook, *Sonder*, in June 2018, which is available on Amazon. She has also had poetry published in eight literary magazines including *Wilderness House Literary Review*, *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *The Stray Branch*, and *Hooligan Magazine* and editorials for the NeXt section in the *Buffalo News*. When she's not writing, she spends her time chasing sunsets, waterfalls and free food, which you can check out on her Instagram @catiekeller.

Shamar English is originally from Santa Barbara, California, but lives in Douglasville, Georgia. He has an Associate of Arts Degree in film from Georgia State University and is currently pursuing his Bachelor's degree at Georgia State University. He has pieces published in *literallystories2014*, *Better than Starbuck*, *the writing disorder*, *the mystic blue review*, *eskimopie.net*, *not your mother's breast milk* and *Susan/The Journal*.

