

The Broadkill Review

A Journal of Literature

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Record Number of Submissions Mark Dogfish Head Poetry Prize

The reading period for The Dogfish Head Poetry Prize continues through Labor Day. Chapbook-length manuscripts of poetry by residents of the Delmarva Peninsula may be submitted electronically at dogfishheadpoetryprize@earthlink.net through midnight of Labor Day Monday. There is no fee. Winner will be notified by October 20th, and agrees to participate in the presentation of the Dogfish Head Poetry Prize in December. Winner agrees to maintain the fact of their winning as a secret until that time, and to provide a photograph of themselves (head shot preferred) for the publication of the winning manuscript in chapbook form. The Dogfish Head Poetry prize itself consists of two cases of Dogfish Head Craft Brewed Ales and a check from Dogfish Head Craft Brewery for \$200.00. The Broadkill Press will arrange for the publication of the winning manuscript. Winner will receive ten copies for personal use, and a deep discount for any future copies he or she may decide to purchase later.

The Welcome Disturbance of Equilibrium

Equilibrium to a writer can be an opiate. I'm thinking of the daily routine of life; job, household chores, planning meals, breathing. All necessities. Living with enough, however, isn't enough for a writer. Part of the writer is always struggling — within him- or herself — with words, with characters, with dialogue — so when the rest of the world operates in its proper manner we tend not to think too much about it. But the imposition of a limit or deadline, or an assignment for a writing workshop, can, in fact, be good for your creative flow.

The reason for this is that we seem to need an occasional rapid in the streams of our lives to make things interesting, to stir things up. I remember anticipating assignments from workshop leaders eagerly because they often solved the immediate problem of focus. Just as a poem in form requires the stripping away of extraneous material as a result of the limitations imposed by the form, so too an assignment to write about x, y, or z may provide the necessary point of departure. I recently learned that a poem I wrote in response to just such an assignment is to appear this fall in

The Delmarva Review. The assignment was to write a poem about the moon in a brand new way. I took the assignment itself as a challenge, and wrote a poem about the moon using as many of the cliché about it as I could, taken to their logical (or so it seemed to me then) extreme. I did it in fifteen minutes, in class.

We are currently gearing up for the second natural phenomenon in a week, the first being that rollicking 5.8 or .9 earthquake centered 3 miles under Mineral, Virginia, and the second being a little storm called Irene. The car is gassed and tuned, the flashlights all have batteries, supplies of bottled water have been put in, and the hurricane approaches.

What do you do when everything you can do has been done? You finish the July/August issue of *The Broadkill Review* in hopes you can get it out before whatever happens happens.

This issue is a weighty one, with seventy-six pages of the best contemporary writing. We hope you and yours survive the passing of Irene.

The Broadkill Review is a member of the Council of Literary Magazines and Presses (CLMP), the Delaware Press Association (DPA), and the Independent Mid-Atlantic Publishers (IMAP), and is listed in *Dustbooks' International Directory of Literary Magazines and Small Presses* and the *Writer's Market* and *Poet's Market*

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Hospitality, Okra, and Solidarity Peace, Love & Poetry at Wilmington's French Quarters Under the Wedgehorn By Phillip Bannowsky

Hospitality abounds at *Peace, Love & Poetry*, a monthly cabaret produced by Franchon 'Suitefranchon' Roberts Beeks at Wilmington's French Quarters. My wife Joanie and I attended one this past May. The featured poet of the evening was to be the revolutionary and indefatigably touring Talaam Acey.

In part, I wanted to express solidarity with new friends. Solidarity is essential if we are going to knit up the unraveling fabric of our nation. I also hoped to experience some good poetry and good cheer. What I got is sometimes called "decentering," a healthy undermining of comfortable assumptions at a somewhat Africentric venue.

Suitefranchon Beeks, billowing in a white, off the shoulder dress, greeted us personally as we found our table. DJ Lisa Love was at the turntables, and the band, Best Kept Soul, was setting up.

Having been the majordoma at the Wild Child poetry readings over on Fifth between Market and Shipley, Suitefranchon has blossomed into an empresaria of a new model of music and poetry, born of these times when Wilmington is struggling to re-establish itself, and rooted in the city's traditional artistic heritage.

She described the Wild Child Café as a place where folks sat around on old couches wearing jeans, but now, at *Peace, Love & Poetry*, "we are glamorous."

There was homecooked food and, behind a Dutch door, a bar where one could order a "Suitefranchon martini."

After a while, Suitefranchon took the stage to address the crowd "We welcome you," she said warmly, "so we must treat you properly, and we say, *Namaste*." She hoped that folks had come to be "entertained" but would leave "full of the blessings of health, prosperity, and love."

Best Kept Soul laid a bed of funk arpeggios behind her

monologue. It reminded me of some sermons I've heard. Suitefranchon evinced a spirit of entrepreneurship. She said she wanted to support microbusinesses, especially those owned by African Americans, and she offered an "Ujama Card" that provides discounts for local businesses associated with delawareblack.com.

With expert MC skills, she built anticipation that the poetry was about to begin and that Talaam Acey would soon be up. Not opting for pure open mic with a sign up sheet, Suitefranchon prefers that prospective poets audition first. With her own poem, "Morning Ritual," she established the erotic/spiritual groundrules: "I want to wake up with the sun and you inside me after yoga, meditation and prayer."

After that, there was a long wait for more poetry, fortunately filled by the jazz-funk sounds of Best Kept Soul with Miss Anne and Kyra vocalizing out front, backed up by Boogi on base, Joe on drums, and Keith on the keyboard.

After we had downed a couple Guinneses, the poetry began. A sampling:

Lady Lyric began with "Why Should I Stay," a mix of torch song and challenge to husbands' prerogatives.

Ed Lucas shared a poem he composed in college, "Never My Soul." It traces Black history from the Middle Passage, through slavery, sharecropping, the northern migration, and the urban economic struggle. At each stage, each generation asserts in response to oppression: "They'll never get my soul, not ever my soul."

Nyeela read from her smart phone, what she called her cheat sheet, a poem of romantic rivalry in the digital age: "She ain't nothing but a downgrade."

Mingo, discarding the Microphone, traced the Africentric spiritual history of Black folks from Egypt to today's poetry.

Finally, it was Talam Acey's turn. Let an excerpt from his "Market for Ni\$\$az" demonstrate his take on the black/white divide:



Suitefranchon Beeks entertains and builds anticipation at *Peace, Love & Poetry*. Photo by Phillip Bannowsky



Crowd at *Peace, Love & Poetry*. Photo by Phillip Bannowsky

Y'all. Y'all should buy my CDs 'cause I used to sell crack.
 Y'all should buy my CDs 'cause I got shot three times;
 I did a three to nine and all that.
 See? There's a market for niggas.
 There's a market for niggas that target figures which purchase 100 thousand dollar jewelry, and 200 thousand dollar automobiles don't fool me.
 I know pain when I see it
 and he would probably give it all away
 if he hadn't signed his life away.

...
 It's not that Black people don't like positivity but it's simply that we often don't have the disposable income to purchase tons of CDs
 but little rich white kids buy CDs 10 at a time
 and the more ignorant the nigger the more they get to piss off their moms
 so if this song calls his mother or sister a bitch or says he's willing to kill his brother in order to get rich
 it makes it even better.
 The bigger the monkey the bigger the money



Best Kept Soul Band. Photo by Phillip Bannowsky

So here in this environment where folks are spending hard earned cash for a “glamorous” night out, Taalam Acey is not averse to using poetry for a little cultural and economic education. Or for a raunchy bout of eroticism, as in “Marbles”: “They say if you drop a marble into a bucket in the first year of a relationship every time you have sex and you take one marble out of that same bucket every time you have sex after the first year, there will always be marbles left.”

After that poem, and having won the audience over, he challenged them: “Do you want me to go deep?”

“Yes!” they replied.

And Acey read a poem that I can't find the words to but I remember at one point he was saying to this demographic of which most still support Obama that the man who won the same Nobel Peace Prize as did Martin Luther King was now waging wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. He allowed, however, as I remember, that one presidential term cannot make that much difference since corporations are not on a “four-year agenda.”

And to this audience of whom were likely a good number of Bible believers he recounted the story of the Council of Nicaea when the Roman Empire saw that Christianity could be hijacked and all the stuff about sin and hell could be highlighted to keep their subjects in line.

Taalam Acey's resumé includes numerous awards, television and radio appearances, a dozen CDs, four books, and thousands of performances of slam/spoken word. Among 36 books he cites as "helpful to [his] grasp of the history of Afrikan peoples" are *A Peoples History of The United States* by Dr. Howard Zinn, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* by C.L.R. James, and *The Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison.

But his heart's bio is expressed in "Five Women," which I found on the DVD I bought, *Talaam Acey Live*. He traces the legacy of his maternal grandmother ("whose library had over a thousand books and her bedroom closet was cluttered with guns"), her mother (a black woman with a college degree in the nineteen thirties and forties long before these underachievers came up with excuses), her mother ("a rider [who] like a general . . . raised her daughters to only roll with soldiers"), Acey's paternal grandmother ("a social worker . . . who bought a house for her siblings and her parents and raised her two sons to either get educated or get busy"), and his mother ("a black nationalist . . . who's been programming computers since before they had keyboards").

Taalam Acey's works can be found at <http://taalamacev.com/>.

Entrepreneurship, personal responsibility, and hedonistic self-affirmation mixed with black nationalism and a critique of capitalism: not the archetypal left-wing or liberal analysis, but you got to admire it. Here we are in the banking capital of America, where mortgage schemes were hatched that stripped millions of Americans, especially African Americans, of their accumulated wealth, so African Americans now possess one-twentieth the accumulated wealth of whites. You can only admire the drive of a talented woman like Suitefranchon to make a little bread and provide a little work for artists like Taalam Acey, Best Kept Soul, and DJ Lisa Love, not to mention a glamorous evening for a hard pressed community. The Great Recession is the New Depression in urban America, so you may see how precarious is Suitefranchon's consumer base, and how much faith is required to make a go of it.

Now what I was welcome to with such hospitality is just a slice of life, but it is a sample of the energy that, united with others, may lead to the transformation of America. I am reminded of hospitality running in the other direction—white southern, that is—addressed by the African American poet Auset (Marian Lewis) in her poem, "Okra."



Taalam Acey asks audience if they want to go deep at *Peace, Love & Poetry*. Photo by Phillip Bannowsky

The scene is a South Carolina picnic on "a long day with sentences dragged out, . . . hats flapping over sundresses, . . . and [white] women baked in the toil of potato/salad and sweet tea." When they spoke to her, not only did they seem to ignore her color, but also the "disdain and plain lack of/politeness" typical of the North. A bit anxious, the poet says

I uttered a reply, my mouth curling around the edges of a smile, waiting for the backslap of 400 years of slavery that nobody seemed to notice.

In the end, she reports that

South Carolina was kind to me
knowing me when they didn't know me

I carried fresh, garden okra home;
my smile faded but the memories and the
fine taste of an okra stew lingered on

How those southern values, so deprecated in the left-right death match, may contribute to the transformation of America, is a theme worth pursuing. I do know that there was a sort of taste of okra stew that Joanie and I carried home from Suitefranchon's *Peace, Love & Poetry*, too.

"Okra" was from Auset's latest book *Wings* (\$4.95 at http://www.blurb.com/bookstore/invited/1715655/461c83dae7427770dec343af2be4337e?ce=blurb_ew).

Singer Rolando Devine will be performing at the next *Peace, Love & Poetry* on August 26th. In addition to all the PLP family, they will also feature Poet David (Native Son) Ross and Avondale's hip hop talent CamRock. Two special editions of *Peace, Love & Poetry* are in the works at World Café Live November 3 and December 1. The French Quarters is at 1512 N. French St. in Wilmington. See <http://www.peacelovepoetry.com/>.

Another Wilmington cabaret with music and poetry is the *Wednesday Jazz Jam, Poetry Slam*, hosted by the Alfie Moss/Dexter Koonce Project from 6 to 9 p.m. Wednesdays at the Paradise Palms Restaurant, 901 King Street in Wilmington.