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The National Storytelling Festival: Words, Music, and Memories

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The National Storytelling Festival: Words, Music, and Memories

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poetry & performance

The Poet's Voice

NESTING DOLLS

Oksana, my Russian daughter-in-law gave me a set of nesting dolls last Christmas.

There are five of them. They nestle inside one another, enveloped by the largest doll. I take them out and line them up. I put them back together inside their large outer shell. This week it occurred to me that they are a metaphor for my poetry writing and reading life.

While an epiphany of ideas was rising, I read *The Asheville Poetry Review*, year 2010. Near the end is an interview with poet, Michael S. Harper. (His most recent book is *Use Trouble*, 2009. Winner of Guggenheim, NFA fellowships, The Frost Medal for Lifetime Achievement from the Poetry Society of America, numerous national book awards, Pulitzer in 1993, and professor at Brown University.) The interviewer, John Hoppenthaler, asks, "How has your poetry changed during your forty-year journey?"

Michael Harper responds by telling how he began with a rhyming dictionary given to him as a child, how he had to learn everything the hard way. He tells about neighborhoods loved and lost, studies, (including pre-med), and "biding time." He mentions musicians and writers who have mentored him.

What I learned from this interview is that nothing we learn or do is irrelevant. Harper says, "For myself poetry still burns in the residue, for I have still failed of a certain parlance, a certain elegance and tonality of phrase and nuance; to add what musicians knew: "Don't Explain" and don't fear being too personal, too idiosyncratic, too bizarre, too (Monk) "straight, no chaser," too rigorous to modify impeccable phrasing, genetic inheritance."

Reading about Michael Harper's life and musing over my nesting dolls, I discovered a synthesis. Michael Harper's writing life, like my fifty-two-year writing life can be put in order when I discover the hollows



inside myself where poems and writing reside.

My love for words started with my tiniest self. In utero, I heard my mother sing. With the light that followed, I listened to my father read and quote English Romance poets. When he died I was sixteen. I began to write.

Over the years, poems have found me: "Dover Beach," by Matthew Arnold, was one of the first to claim me, especially the line, "Ah love, let us be true to one another." T. S. Eliot's "Four Quartets" enriches my life. When I play Bach Suite No. 1, I hear "Burnt Norton."

FROM POEM V

Words move, music moves
Only in time; but that which is only living
Can only die. Words, after speech, reach
Into the silence.
Only by the form, the pattern,
Can words or music reach
The stillness, as a Chinese jar still
Moves perpetually in its stillness.

Liesel Mueller's book, *Alive Together*, and her poem, "Brendel Playing Schubert,"

BY CAROL PEARCE BJORLIE
- THE POET BEHIND THE CELLO

is a revelation that someone else understands what it means to make music. Not only the audience, but the players retreat into a "nowhere where the enchanted live."

I discovered this poem after I left a 30 year career in a symphony orchestra. These poems live in doll #3.

BRENDEL PLAYING SCHUBERT

We bring our hands together
in applause, that absurd noise,
when we want to be silent.
We might as well
be banging pots and pans,
it is that jarring a violation
of the music we've listened to
without moving, almost holding
our breath.
The pianist in his blindingly
white summer jacket bows
and disappears and returns
and bows again. We keep up
the clatter, so cacophonous
that it should signal revenge
instead of the gratitude we feel
for the two hours we've spent
out of our bodies and away
from our guardian selves
in the nowhere where the enchanted live.

BY LISEL MUELLER

Where I live influences what I write. My Minnesota poems fill Doll #4 with snowstorms, clouds and sky. My North Carolina poems reside in the largest doll. In this space, mountains become choirs, clouds, shrouds, and October, an Appalachian tapestry.

This morning my nesting dolls are contained in their proper spaces. They don't fit any other way, like poems that claim me in time, some written by me, most written by others, belong to me in their time. I take out old poems, and am "there."

I read the oldies. I read them in order. They remind me of two things:

1. My writing is a testament of survival;
2. "i am not done yet." (lucille clifton, from *good woman: poems and a memoir*, BOA 1987.)



Web Exclusive



Read the poem "Dear John, Dear Coltrane" by Michael S. Harper online right now by going to www.rapidrivermagazine.com

I want to meet you all, writers, dreamers, readers and listeners. We need each other. Contact Carol at thepoetsvoicerr@yahoo.com

THE NATIONAL STORYTELLING FESTIVAL Words, Music, and Memories

Anyone who shares an appreciation for the telling of stories should note that the world's oldest and largest festival dedicated to celebrating that ancient art will take place a short drive from western North Carolina on October 4-6, 2013.

Held each autumn since 1973 in Jonesborough, Tennessee, and produced by the Jonesborough-based International Storytelling Center (ISC), the National Storytelling Festival — called by *USA Today* "the leading event of its kind in America" — will feature compelling performances by some of the world's most interesting and entertaining storytellers.

People at the Festival will be privileged to sit and listen to the magical word-weaving of Bil Lepp, Syd Leiberman, Ed Stivender, the legendary storyteller Donald Davis, and storyteller/ballad singer Sheila Kay Adams. While they have developed markedly different performance styles, all five storytellers have in common an uncommon ability to entertain large audiences with stories that are at the same time deeply personal and profoundly universal.



D. Edgecomb



Charlie Chin

BY TED OLSON

Other acclaimed masters of the spoken word scheduled to appear at this year's Festival include David Novak, Minton Sparks, Joseph Bruchac, Milbre Burch, and Jackson Gillman.

Each year the Festival seeks to represent storytelling from a range of cultural traditions, and this year is no exception. Rev. Robert Jones and Diane Ferlatte will present stories and music relating African American experience, while Festival attendees may also see and hear performances by Yiddish storyteller Shonaleigh, Chinese American storyteller and musician Charlie Chin, and Brazilian performance artist Antonio Rocha.

Several special events will be held in

Jonesborough just before or during the Festival. On Wednesday, October 2, Donald Davis will present a pre-Festival evening performance, sharing stories about growing up in western North Carolina. The next evening (Thursday, October 3) will feature musicians Tim O'Brien and Nora Jane Struthers. On Friday and Saturday evenings at 8 p.m., Festival attendees can hear ghost stories in a memorable setting — Jonesborough's Mill Spring Park.

Other activities include showcasings of amateur storytelling talent at the Story Slam, the Exchange Place, and the Swappin' Ground.



Donald Davis
Photo: FreshAirPhoto



Joseph Bruchac



Diane Ferlatte

continued on page 38

RAPID RIVER ARTS & CULTURE MAGAZINE

17th Annual Poetry Contest

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Enter any unpublished poem 35 lines or less.

Deadline January 31, 2014. Winning poems will be printed in the March 2014 issue.

Reading fee: \$5 for three poems; \$1 for each additional poem. Details at (828) 646-0071.

Send poems to: Rapid River Poetry Contest, 85 N. Main St., Canton, NC 28716

unique shops

Points of Light

Points of Light crystal and mineral gallery, located just two minutes north of Asheville on Merrimon Avenue, is a wonderful source for fine crystals, gems, minerals and living art.

The gallery, which boasts an amazing collection of huge Quartz crystals, as well as a seven-foot tall Agate geode, is much more than just another rock shop. Points Of Light's collection includes many unique Quartz clusters and Amethyst Geodes in



Rare Bolivian Amethyst Clusters.

addition to healing stones, mineral specimens and a wide variety of books on stones. They specialize in breathtaking interior design pieces and one-of-a-kind pieces for decorators, collectors and healers.

Every single item on display has been carefully and lovingly hand-picked for quality, beauty and energy. The gallery works with a renowned group of internationally acclaimed crystal and mineral artisans, and as



Points of Light carries a variety of Quartz clusters and Amethyst Geodes.

a result carries some of the finest cut and polished pieces available anywhere in the United States.

Points Of Light is also home to one of the largest selections of crystal singing bowls on the east coast, as well as a comprehensive and truly beautiful group of crystal healing wands, including cuts by world-famous lapidary artist, Lawrence Stoller. From museum pieces weighing more than a ton, down to the smallest of their tumbled stones, the quality and scope of their inventory is unsurpassed. Points Of Light is a "must see" destination in Asheville!

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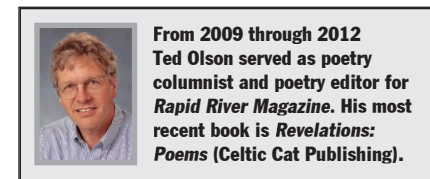
'Storytelling Festival' cont'd. from pg. 30

At 10:30 p.m. on Friday, October 4, Elizabeth Ellis will tell stories at a "Midnight Cabaret" performance, while the next night at that same time Kim Weitkamp and the Broken Bucket Band will present a program combining storytelling and music.

Annually attracting approximately 10,000 audience members from across the United States and around the world, the National Storytelling Festival is among the most beloved regularly staged cultural events in the U.S.; devotees return year after year to hear stories told in large tents situated along the streets of one of Appalachia's most picturesque towns.

If you do attend the National Storytelling Festival in Jonesborough this October, be prepared to enjoy stories regardless of the weather. And be prepared to be both charmed and, in some sort of quiet way, transformed.

IF YOU GO *The National Storytelling Festival takes place October 4-6 in Jonesborough, TN. For more information, call the International Storytelling Center at (800) 952-8392, ext. 221, or visit www.storytellingcenter.net.*



From 2009 through 2012 Ted Olson served as poetry columnist and poetry editor for *Rapid River Magazine*. His most recent book is *Revelations: Poems* (Celtic Cat Publishing).

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PG. 44
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