

Cultural Daily

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Tony Moffeit: All Blues—his blues control the weather

John Macker · Wednesday, February 24th, 2016

Tony Moffeit has finally joined that legendary underground Epic Rites Press roster of hell-bent word diviners like John Dorsey, Rob Plath, Todd Moore, Wolfgang Carstens and many others, with *Please Remove Sunglasses Before Entering* and now, 2015's blues stew of beautiful, raucous and elegiac poems, *All Blues*. It is Tony's enchanted fever dream chant of a book. As he does in his previous title, eulogizing friends and heroes, Bill Gersh and Kell Robertson, Tony's *All Blues* and jazz icons, John Coltrane, Chet Baker, Miles, John Lee Hooker, Howlin' Wolf and Leadbelly blow through his words like "the vibrations of a planetary pulse/unlocking the machinery of the psyche/and the riddles of constellations."

"across the need" is an amazing 16 line tone poem about listening to the blues in America:

*remember and imagine you are there
where the blues lit a fire in the grave
to make a dead man come alive again
where have all the guitars gone
lost in the abandoned rooms and
pawn shops, still alive in the jukebox
can I relive being the fool again
lost in the swirling jazz solo
coyotes gone crazy for a junk moon
lost between breath and thought
and the cracked sidewalks of small towns
dirt roads and stalled cars
empty gas tanks and flat tires
but the radio is strong
solid speakers for a big beat
and the wind is wild around the bend*

Moffeit is no stranger to this style of writing. Short, crackling lines with vital imagery and an outlaw's outlook on life. His own life pulsates with a musical accompaniment that animates everything he writes. He formulated the Outlaw Poetry Movement with his buddy and New Mexico outlaw mentor, the late Todd Moore, who shared (and perfected) his romance with the abbreviated firecracker lyric. Lawrence Welsh, of El Paso, also a friend of Todd's, has mastered the tumultuous rhythms and compacted clarity of the short line as well.

These bursts of lyrical energy found their way into Tony's live presentations of his poems. He accompanied himself on conga, dressed in leather, usually with a guitarist in tow. It's then that his

Chicken Man, his voodoo bone darkness, his blues chanting attains full-frontal poetic life. I can hear Tony's original voice in each of these poems. Some are more circumspect than I'm used to, gentler, maybe, more inward looking. Poems like "I dreamed the dark," "open to it," and "I talk with the spirits." Yet our imaginations are still haunted by their burning, churning soul. In "what's the use" the poet/bluesman reflects back on the isolation of his mission and realizes the sometimes dispiriting limits of its appeal: "back where/the mirror/dissolved/and we/tracked the/crimes of/time i/howled in/the alley/something/called the/blues and/like the/weather/no one's/satisfied."

In "miles davis played sketches of spain," maybe the book's most haunted poem, Tony reconfigures the trumpet master's signature work into an elegy for a violent world: "the man alone with the desert of his horn yields/something else the moment suspended a way/to enter deep song as a life is reduced to raw emotion/when the child realizes he has nothing left but himself"

In four of his poems, his dreams control the weather. In "I really don't know": "there's a ghost waiting outside/there's a clock no longer telling time/there's a way to get by/without looking again/there's a way to put it all away/and just let go/space gives way to place/when you're all emptied out/and ready for anything at all." In "ray charles sings lonely avenue": "and the blues drape over your shoulder/like a blanket of dreams that control the weather." His dreams control the poetry as well. His dreamscapes are the blues before they're made flesh. Through the blues he conjures his passion, his essences, his mortality, what makes him sing.

All Blues is just the most recent book of singing and conjuring that began years ago with *Pueblo Blues*, through the classic *billy the kid and frida kahlo*, and 2011's *Born to Be Blue*, published by Lummo Press.

You can find Tony's poems in houses of voodoo, cobra clubs, juke joints, in the "dark avenues of a strange world" where the poet is "becoming/more defined by those/who are dead rather than/those who are living," in alleys, on a french quarter balcony, "in the power of silence where there are no words." In the book's first poem, "smoke and diamonds," Tony conjures the blues of New Orleans as a kind of introductory travelogue to the book's more robust musical obsessions. It's last four lines are a benediction: "thinking/back to a jazz poet/who told me the/secret is in learning/to love everything"

Tony Moffeit's *All Blues*, never obstreperous, full of conjurings and auguries, another luminous animal.

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