

Lyrics

Kurt Elling



Edited by Richard Connolly

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THIRD EDITION



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Kurt Elling Recordings:

- Secrets Are The Best Stories - 2020
The Questions - 2018
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Passion World - 2015
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The Gate - 2011
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- Nightmoves - 2007
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Flirting with Twilight - 2001
Live in Chicago - 2000
This Time It's Love - 1998
The Messenger - 1997
Close Your Eyes - 1995

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For Jennifer, to whom I owe everything.



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INTRODUCTION

These lyrics grow out of an obscure branch of composition unique to the Jazz idiom called *vocalese*. The word was first used by the critic Leonard Feather to describe the work of Jon Hendricks (1921-2017) when he set words to lyrics that was composed, arranged or otherwise intended for instrumental orchestras like those of Count Basie and Duke Ellington. Jon’s lyric writing (along with Dave Lambert’s creation of multi-part vocal arrangements) made it possible for the groundbreaking trio “Lambert, Hendricks & Ross” to sing the compositions with clever and rhyming words in swinging, multi-part harmony. Their example paved the way for groups like The Manhattan Transfer, Les Double Six and New York Voices (as well as for university-based Jazz vocal ensembles around the world). Jon Hendricks remains unchallenged as *the* Jazz lyricist—a Jazz poet *nonpareil*.

Although the word vocalese was first applied more strictly to Jon Hendricks’s work in big band arrangements for multi-voice settings, it quickly broadened in common Jazz parlance to mean any vocal application of a lyric applied to solos improvised by or originally arranged for instrumentalists. The work in this idiom and its enthusiastic embrace by audiences led to the opening of an entirely new territory of rhyming, verbal syncopation and storytelling. By setting and singing lyrics to instrumental solos—a feat that could have happened only with the advent of recorded sound—the early composers of such lyrics essentially invented a new art form.

Annie Ross (b.1930), the third partner in “Lambert, Hendricks & Ross,” had her own short streak of great lyric writing in this style. The words she wrote for “Twisted,” “Farmer’s Market,” and “Jackie”—based on solos improvised by saxophonist Wardell Gray—are all in regular rotation in the set lists of hip singers and hipster wannabes the world over. They are also still performed by the great lady herself, who continues to appear in concert at age 90.

Jon Hendricks and Annie Ross were in turn inspired by the work of King Pleasure (1922-1982). Born Clarence Beeks, King Pleasure was the first to gain broad acclaim for writing and performing words to instrumental solos. He had a string of hits performing lyrics to the solos of Lester Young, Charlie Parker, Gene Ammons and the like. However, his most famous recording was a lyric written by Eddie Jefferson to fit a solo James Moody improvised (playing alto saxophone) to the popular song “I’m in the Mood for Love.” The lyric Eddie Jefferson wrote and King Pleasure recorded has since become a proving ground for just about everyone who has ever attempted Jazz singing. Until his passing, Moody himself sang this lyric at every performance—delighting audiences everywhere.

Eddie Jefferson (1918-1979) recorded his own string of minor hits by penning and singing lyrics for “Body and Soul” (Coleman Hawkins, soloist), “Parker’s Mood” (Charlie Parker, soloist) and “Filthy McNasty” (Horace Silver, composer). In spite of the word vocalese being first applied to Jon Hendricks’s work, Jefferson appears to have been the first to experiment successfully in this style. Jefferson spent the latter part of his own (tragically shortened) career engaged in lyric innovation, penning and performing intricate and hilarious rhymes to the solos of Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis and Cannonball Adderley.

In a more recent vintage, the protean artist Joni Mitchell (b. 1943) went through a phase of Jazz and vocalese work when she was drawn into the orbit of bassist and composer Charles Mingus. Not only did she become one of a score of notable singers to cover Annie Ross’s aforementioned “Twisted,” she created new vocalese standards by writing and recording lyrics to Mingus’s “The Dry Cleaner from Des Moines” and “Goodbye Pork Pie Hat” (John Handy’s tenor solo).

There is one much earlier example of recorded vocalese worth mentioning—that of a largely forgotten singer named Bee Palmer (1894-1967)—co-writer of the classic, “Please Don’t Talk About Me When I’m Gone.” In 1929 Palmer recorded lyrics written to fit Bix Beiderbecke and Frankie Trumbauer’s solos on a recording of “Singin’ the Blues.” It’s a strange little number, and it waited more than seventy-five years for broader distribution. In addition to being hampered by Palmer’s quavery vocal delivery, one can only surmise that the Jazz zeitgeist simply couldn’t conceive of vocalese without the jive-y context of Bebop, zoot-suited hipsters, and the innovative slang that culture *machers* like Cab Calloway, Babs Gonzales, Lord Buckley, and Joe “Bebop” Carrol created in post-war America.

While many of the lyrics included in this collection are not vocalese lyrics, strictly speaking, that school of writing (if one can finally call it that) has been my training ground. I also owe an obvious and overwhelming debt to the instrumentalists whose solos and songs provided the bases for the lyrics in this collection. These melodic improvisers and composers are properly credited at the back of this book.

It is a challenge on multiple levels to bend and fit the English language to the shapes, gestures, and rhythms of modern and contemporary jazz music. I am grateful to the artists I follow for the ingenuity, wit, and vibrancy of their work and to the instrumentalists whose recordings inspire and provide platforms for my own writing. When I have written well, it has been because of them. The clunkers are all my own.

*Kurt Elling
New York City
March, 2020*

ORANGE BLOSSOMS IN SUMMERTIME

When winter is on again fragrance ends
And the withered leaves drift down from the dying trees
As they find release.

But I'll remember it:
The sweet perfume of orange blossoms in summertime.

And when we are far apart and my heart
Feels a winter chill, I've got to lay down and cry
But I know, by and by,

That I'll remember it:
The sweet perfume of orange blossoms in summertime.



THOSE CLOUDS ARE HEAVY, YOU DIG?

Once upon a time a cloud (a little cloud)
Gathered her friends together and began to say aloud,
“Friends, we can’t find God. Isn’t it odd?”

And they all agreed it was very odd, indeed,
To blow about the sky like a brainless seed.

“Something’s really gone awry when older clouds oversimplify
When they say that it’s just another day.

“It’s imperative we be somewhat more truly demonstrative
In becoming provocative.
Our parents neglect God, it’s true. All their world is askew.

“They go about bickering and scheme of possessing things
As though they own us, too, and own all that we do.
Yet they can’t understand
Just how foolish it is to build a house on sinking sand.

“And when we cry
They say, ‘Oh my!
You’ll grow out of it soon
And start singing a grown-up tune.’”

So the clouds made a vow,
Since the grown-ups had lost God, somehow.
They would pick something out that would keep them aware
That they could take with them anywhere (like a lock of hair, or a pear).

Not an animal, or too big.
So the little ones looked around and up and down and in and out
And came up with a list:

They had a feather, erasers and string
Penknives and pencils and pieces of things
That they found in their pockets to spare
(and which they began to compare).

But the shiniest object (when looking them over) the thimble was brightest
And so they decided the thimble was rightest
For taking along and for knowing God was staying long and in their every day.

They knew where to find
Their peace of mind
Playing a game of tag or “fame”
They simply had to call out the thimble’s name.

Then, one day, the smallest
Cloud took a big fall and
Dropped the thimble from her hand.
And God turned to sand.

Just then, a wise old woman cloud happened along
And she asked the little cloud, “What’s wrong?”
And the little cloud replied, “God’s gone.”

But the older cloud knew right away,
So she said to the little one, “Here’s your thimble. I found it today.”

DOLORES' DREAM

The white, electric skillet of a day
Threatened to sear us all away
Fat frying, spluttering rank Chicago smeltering along
Smothered in heavy, wooly sweat.
The city knew a sad regret
For staying long in summer's heavy.

No escape. Delirious.
So I went subterranean.
Maybe I'd dream about Dolores'
Kinda' auburn hair & hazel eyes.
Looking at her made chills go ■ ■ ■ ■ ■
Even if she wasn't even there & so I tried.
Put Wayne Shorter on to hide
And slept, completely mystified.

"Honk!" went a taxi cab outside to remind me night time was dawning.
Then Laurie & Guy call—say, "let's go dancing & romance perchancing.
Summer times are sweeter at night.
The music is swinging all the night."
I put a bowl of coffee on. I took a hit.

What with the daytime on the lam—jumped in my car, Uptown to scram.
Popped in a great Von Freeman jam and the coffee hit.
Bam! We hit a Jazz club called "The Mill."
Dig it—my second domicile.
We had a great time hanging, until

I saw Dolores sweep into the room.
And then my head began to swoon.
I got a yen.
She came right up to me & when
She spoke my sweat broke. No joke.

Then came on the thrills.
And came on the chills!
She got me to dance.
I took a chance replying.
Although she was kinda' shy.
I stole a sweet kiss on the sly (to simplify).
And when Dolores sighed a sigh,
You know, it got me kinda' high.
She hit me right between the eyes!

If there's one girl I've gotta' remember, it's her.



THE WALTZ

Am I?

Am I?

Step into my heart.
Shoulder a heavy hope for the world.
Dance, like a flag, through battles, unfurled.
Walk out in my shoes.

Come into my house,
Mindful of silence calling aloud—
Body on earth, soul lost in a cloud.
Waltz into my life.

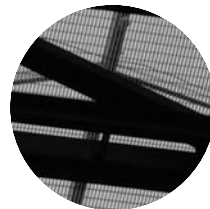
Like the deepest places where we go to behold—
Growing in us, huge and ripening, like a tree—
Knowledge of what's known as breathing now
Is only a stepping-stone.

Break into living!
Sing, and your life will never be the same.
And understand the power when you say:

I am a man.

I am.

I am.

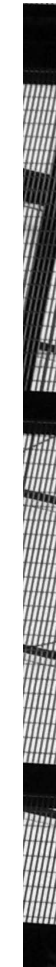


THE MESSENGER

See both sides clearly.
Understand who you are. For once, really, truly see me.

Lose your fear. Master the art.
Know the secret deep within your heart.

Find the strength of your conviction.
Bridge the contradiction.



TANYA JEAN

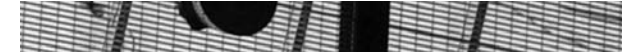
Hips swayin' to the beat / lip smackin', honey-sweet.
Magnolias in the street / dust under Tanya's feet.

Dig with me this chick lording every clique, name of Tanya Jean.
Even in the thick she'll never miss a trick. She's a royal queen.
Swingin' down the block, stoppin' every clock, wiggin' every scene.
She's got a flock / a man in every dock / diggin' Tanya Jean.

But if she ever would think, for once, she would see that she has been a dunce
Never digging her brains and her beauty are more than the usual front.

She could be swinging *ad libitum* 'stead of just acting like she was dumb.
Up and running to run all the savages no more than just a stunt.

"Come dancing with me in a little dream, Tanya Jean," said Prophet-Man-With-One-Hand-Put-Away. "And we will seek together the stolen vision (vision that was hidden by lovers gone and poets buried). Time, swing over: gonging and banging late-in-life clock assembling a three-ring, peddling a new thing. Telling time, telling tales, telling sighs, filling pails with alabaster springing. Here's your life upon a plate regarding its fate. Senility's rumored."



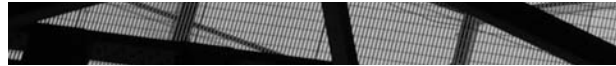
"How can you eat that," asks the girl, with a smirk. "Don't you see how every day, come what may, it's growing? You jerk, you. And thirty centuries of sleeping won't make a dent in giving the time that it's needing. Flipping to appendices, Demosthenes, won't bring about the stumbling of a beast with weaker knees. This I tell you. So dig it.

"Don't wig it. Come along with me and envision the vision. Maybe then, you will feel. Like the rumbling of a train on tracks a hundred miles away, you can hear pretty clear / like the echoes of the footfalls of childhood in rooms / like a fire, sire, like a pyre; a singing out of desire. Dark angelic bodies in a flying circus come bombing over Flanders Fields.

"And what if darkened drummers who can play just like Elvin never escape the mandibles of their mothers / keeping silence? When / screaming upwards from deep within his inner voice / crying into the vortex of night / subtle terrors make writing a scrawling of dying-wish notes. Time to make another adversary list up to the sky as you travel by.

"Suddenly bidding is asking. And then it's wishing. You can't stretch your arms out like a lord enfolding thousand stars. So dig it. And loneliness is rolling over levees like a suicidal tidal surge—upending illusiories, strong, of living as defensive. Meanwhile, intimacy calls us into dangers with a siren song of loving long in luxury-to-be (secret, unnameable surgings of love into what must always be). It's spilling over infinity to become Behemoth: everything, everywhere, everyone, every time. The kingdom comes from ancient, howling cries of mother gods.

“Screaming across the open plains of nothingness comes everything that might have been, like great comets blasting through every dark sky. So what if L.T. Dexter’s swinging has rarified Mid–Atlantic sounds of Jazz in silk scarves and all fall–colored Paris nights? And Charlie Parker’s with him, blowing on his “over-grown pitoodle stick” and reaching through the thicker places in our heads. (Intelligence was never, ever, surely, this hard to find.) Dig what I’m saying: just because we’ll never know The Secret doesn’t mean that we should find that we have sold ourselves, like Joseph, into bondage again, time and again until the end.



“My friend, take your practiced powers and stretch them across the void until everything living has a chance to ponder every contradiction. That might be everyone’s doable mission. Just like when Herbie’s playing piano—then you can hear it. Cause he can play it. You don’t forget it. Cause Herbie said it when he spoke like a child playing jacks on the floor of a kitchen. And Hermann Hesse said it: You’ll search for truth among the planets and never find a truer voice than that voice which is calling it out to you—calling you to at least become a human. Instead of being confounded by being. Instead of surfing in the dirt like a serpent, go dance in the whirlwind. For those who have heard it, God becomes a silence, huge and glowing, flowing from the deepest inner places inside of your heart.

“It’s saying, ‘Go moaning and groaning, alone-ing. Go rolling on the breast of earth. Report you truly all the lives you see there, like a song growing golden-ripe, like the wheat. Take it! Take this cup I’m passing to you. Drink it. Think it way down into the entrails of your thinking.’ What moves in secret is not ever nothing. If gateways of seeing were opened, then we could see that everything is just as it always is: infinitely infinite.

“But now, you see? Time is growing short for me.”

Pow! Poof. The dreaming was over. But Prophet-Man had put mind into motion: Tanya Jean was then, hereafter seen to be the queen of what we later called the scene in which a body *haverim** careen like on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Wow.



THE BEAUTY OF ALL THINGS

There is something within you.
There is something in everything that is:
Unbelievable beauty, flowing from deep inside.
Don't be shocked or surprised if I lift your disguise.
Realize that I can see it in all things, all, but especially you.

There is something we carry,
Like a rhythm that tells us who we are.
It's the rhythm of living. Hear, and we'll come to see
Who we can really be-fore time erases time.
It's sublime. And I can see it in all things, all, but especially you.

The time is upon us to lose our indifference.
For time isn't holding us anywhere. I declare:
Life gives *savoir-faire*.
Clean the windows of your inner star
And see things as they are:
An infinity of light like a torch in the night.
For the Sun and the Moon and the Stars
Are living within you.
You are shining in everything that is.

Here's what I see in your eyes right now:
Ten thousand lives over many years like leaves on the vine of this morning's glory
The determination of years coming to fruition
In the ever-present now of your life, unfolding now in the flowering of days.

The constellations of stars in the sky are like a fugue of light in velvet hands.
The melody never ends, echoing again and again.
Nearer still sounds a melody leading through darkened rooms,
Playing like the Sun on the water; like its reflection in your downcast eyes.

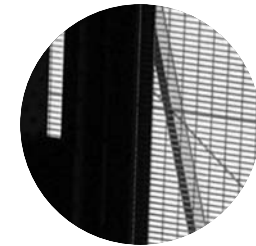
When will you come to see you like I do?

And know you like I do?

And hear you like I do?

And love you like I do?

There is something within you.
There is something in everything that is:
Unbelievable beauty, flowing from deep inside.
Don't be shocked or surprised if I lift your disguise.
Realize that I can see it in all things, all, but especially you.





PRAYER FOR MR. DAVIS

Yesternight heard the song of the Blackbird
Playing bittersweet-ness through the bell of a shimmering horn
In hosts of hundred-colored tones.

In the tones you could hear sacred stories.
You could hear Mr. Davis was smiling his ironic smile at life.

Feeling no shame, though feeling comes with fear
And fear mingles with trust in what may be a dream.

But still, it seemed to him he'd traveled down the path
Of hope and loss and work and pain
And all that's straining
To become itself in time for a breath
Before the death of sound.

Taking hold of a gift from the gods,
Measuring odds,
Making love to a sound with a voice of its own.
May the tone never end.

Amen



MINUANO

Day comes slowly, absorbing the darkneses softly.
Night leaves gently. Her beauty is spent and she rises.
I step into the lightness. I hear you.
You're calling me out of my sadness.
Your flowering wonders are calling me home.

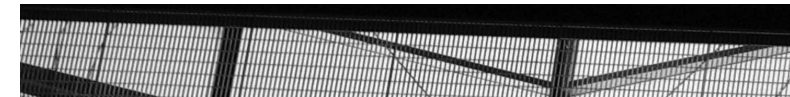
Darkness lingers, but always surrenders to loving.
Darkest midnight is swallowed in oceans of laughter.
I follow into lightness. I hear you.
You're calling me out of my sadness.
Your flowering wonders are calling me home.

Dancing along a dawn that leads to you.
Singing a song that blossoms in a fugue as morning settles on.
Dreaming into a sky of brilliant blue.
Noticing clouds are whispering that you will dance with me very soon.

Already been as high as Kathmandu.
Willing to go as far as Timbuktu.
Nowhere's too far away. I may catch up with you today.
Maybe today will finally be the day.

Flying along a dawn that leads to you.
Singing a song that makes itself anew; a music magic wand.
Reaching into a sky of brilliant blue.
Eagles are calling out to say that you will dance me very soon.

Already been as high as Kathmandu.
Willing to go as far a Timbuktu.
Nowhere's too far away. I may catch up with you today.
Maybe today we'll make our getaway!



Like light from the stars made ten thousand years ago
Comes love, like a gift of sight
Growing stronger every moment on the way home.

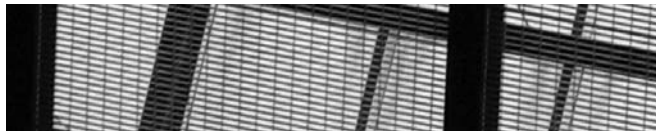
WHERE I BELONG

I hear the woman like a song
Dancing down a long corridor
Reminding me I belong where I am.

I see the singing in the rain
The rhythm at my windowpane
Reminding me I belong where I am.

There is a light in the silence of loving things.
And when I look in my baby's hopeful eyes
It's like the sound just before every morning horizon:
Light comes alive.

It's like a magnet of loving sound
Turning me right side down
Keeping my two feet firmly planted on the ground
Reminding me I belong where I am.



MY LOVE, EFFENDI

In the night, city comes alive.
Lights come on. She'll return.

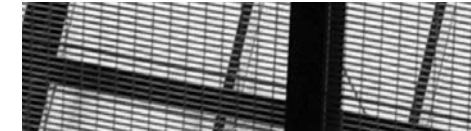
There—dancing among the crowds—
It's her. I'm not mistaken.

Pictures taken soon reveal to me
My love, Effendi.

Track her down, chase all over town
For a look or a smile.

She's got me beside myself.
My God. I've got to have her.

Got to tell her how it really feels
To love Effendi.



FREDDIE'S YEN FOR JEN

Love is wild in her. I confuse her love with the sea.
She is a rare and emerald fantasy told to me
And to me it seems that she lives in a mystery.

But her kisses! I dig her kisses.
While washing the dishes or feeding the fishes.
It's her kisses. Her k-k-k-kisses.
It's her kisses. Kisses that'll make you holler loudly
That you're glad enough to be a man.

And in the evening—later—after dark
She quietly reveals to me all her miracles
Flying all up around me everywhere,
Just like a fountain springing up around my eyes—a love!
I'm in a shower of a lovely one.
She makes the sun rise and set for me.

Oh, gotta' make her stay.
Because she's got a wiggle that'll make a clock stop.
I dig her even when we're apart.
Digging on my baby's really getting me high
& making me sigh & helping me fly
Back to the woman who could tease old Frankenstein's suture-boy to living.

Moxie is as moxie does
& she is moxie with the kind of moxie love she's giving.
And I know she'll never ever need forgiving



With kisses that will make you say you're glad enough to be a man.

And she giggles when she talks.
And she's happy simply reading the papers on Sunday—or not
And she squeezes all the living daylights out of me.
And if I ever should sever the tether that keeps us together
Forever where never a tear or a sorrow could weather
The amorist passion that flashes from in her eyes
I'd be a dunce
If I should ever try to walk or try to stray into any other woman's arms.

Because I dig her kisses—
The kind that I like because they're warm & tasty
And they're good and chewy and I like 'em.
And you would dig them too, if you could ever get
A kiss from my sweet miss.
But we will be kissing and kissing & so you'll never ever
Get a taste of heaven that I know & guarantee that you will never see.

A bucket of loving is what she brings to me. She is my sweetie.
With kissing loving hugging that'll make you glad just to be a man.

Love is wild in her. I confuse her love with the sea.
She is a rare and emerald fantasy told to me
And to me it seems that she lives in a mystery.

Because I dig her kisses
I dig her kisses
They're never fictitious—and always lubricious.
It's her kisses. Her k-k-k-k-k-kisses
It's her kisses. Kisses that'll make you holler loudly
That you're glad enough to be a man.

It's in her kiss.

SHE'S FUNNY THAT WAY

*Once she dressed in tweeds and lace, owned a Rolls-Royce car.
Now she seems quite out of place, like a fallen star.
While I worry, plan and scheme over what to do
I can't help feeling it's a dream: She's just too good to be true.*
(Richard A. Whiting & Neil Moret, 1928)

Whenever I've loved—it seems now so long ago, back in the past—
It always seemed like love was a morning star, fading fast;
Drowned out by noontime in daylight's trivial sky.
Love was a mirage that you could hold with your eye
But as you came upon it, it would dry up.

Wondering, finally, whether true love would come at all.
Watching each affair pass without a lasting word except "goodbye." Taking the fall.
Counting sorrows like raindrops falling from above.
Wanting, somehow, to find a love
To share with me a shelter against the storms of living
Someone who was giving
Kisses from her joy and not her fear.

I have seen before how sometimes people speak of love and think of pain.
The very thought strained all their insides out so you could see fear was like a nail
holding them to their past, keeping them distant from their future,
living in sadness, robbing every day of what could be. Knowing it was madness
I would leave them, hungering for what they'd take, but couldn't give at all.
It's rare in life you come as close to losing all your skin.

But now I've fallen in love and an angel's fallen in there with me (in love).
She checked her wings in at the door.
Now, raindrops are diamonds falling out of Jennifer's pockets.
And every kiss is July 4 rockets.

What was I thinking of?
Angels never fall in love
With men like me.

But still, every morning I awake to find my angel's still asleep—
Right there in my arms—and life is complete.
When she wakes, she smiles and whispers that she's crazy living over me.
What am I to do but to thank the other angels above?

She's stuck with me.
I'll never let her go now.

With Jennifer I dig love
And she can dig it, too.

She's funny that way.



JOHN COLTRANE'S RESOLUTION

God—king above all other gods—lead us now, so we can walk wherein
the prophets said that we would trod.

Buddha—tell a sutra like a spell—teach us well to answer silence
with the calling of bells.

Allah—bring us to a good alarm—subjugate our wills to answer you like a mighty arm.

Elohim is a pillar of light in the dark and leading all his people to light
(for he's the king of the fire).
He brings the fire into everything that's living on earth, in the sun, in the stars.
Take a spark of it / deep within you / put it to the test / it will do the rest / I confess
It will be like climbing up Mount Everest / I can't express the view from there /
but it's for you to follow through.

Lama—show the Power's bright array—bless the climb, and settle peace
upon the universe's dark display.

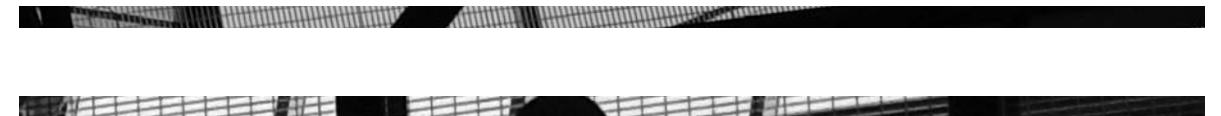
And Jesus—remember every promise made—present yourself in the middle
of the prayers that we say.

Vishnu—preserve us all along the way—keep us clear of the final thunderbolt
of the judgment day.

Hear me. Hear what I / what I ask for today / Fathers.

Way off at the far leftern shelf of the world—up in a house right on the edge of everything
Where the time is tumbling in a vortex / the nexus of timetable tides / in the final
Lighthouse at shining earth's ending / at the spinning of the finishing of sweeping time
Driving silence like a stampeding careening wash in charging advance / digging the sound
Of passing everything away into the secret of eternity's pivot dance / breaking down crashing doorways
Bashing through dream place / smash, unleash, efface /
Everything goes to the open mouth of Kali Ma / where the vault of heaven opens

A witness as lonely as forgotten tears keeps up a vigil watching all—even light—go out.
One witness / one child digging the slaving wheel of meat spitting out—taking up—
Everything / by the roots / pulling out the lot of what has passed into the past, like a dream.
She knows what is gone—gone over—everyone that is done and unbegun and starting
From the super-microcosmic no bug all the way to super-huge galactic suns. And she knows
The beginning is coming in the sweep at the end of all. Even gods have passed over, away.
Then one day the shadow of a priest on the horizon appeared.





He wasn't taken up into the swirling.
He walked with purpose all the while digging his heels into the bedrock like a man.

But as he came into view the witness saw his eyes were crying.
Tears like blood fell to earth / as he watched heaven disappear in the void—up the drain
into the paraboloid / realizing it all / everything / everywhere / into his eyes / seeing that all /
he had beloved went out of itself and away / here in this last ever surge of a day
tearing all meaning away. And to the witness's indifference he had this to say:

"I know about birth. I know about death, and how the light goes out of men—
the life departing—powerless giving it up. But in the vast indifference
I invent a deeper meaning:

"I'm the one who will say, use the will every day or go mad trying. Go to war against the
impotent side of living.

"Use every power you're given to stand and act like a man.

"And pray every day to every god. Strike the bowl of heaven and the ringing will become a law.

"Build bridges where you need to go. Bring the fire of enlightenment here to life below.

"Speak mercy to the things you meet. Listen up to hear the whispering of the blood you bleed.

"Stay awake—no mistake—dance the dream awake. And awake."



ESPERANTO

There’s a secret that never dies like a dance of hidden meanings that we never apprehend.
There are questions just as old as time and the answers that come never quite make amends.

Even so, when you look at time you can get a subtle feeling of the way it ought to be.
Take a good look at your own real life and you will see if you want what you’ve gotten to be.

It’s a hope, a sign, a measure of quiet rapture, of love and what might come after.
It’s letting go, and letting no answer be an answer.

*How did smoke learn how to fly?**
Where do birds go off to die?

Why does coal sleep in darkness?
Do dreams live in apart-ness?

Is a number forever?
Where’s the soul of the water?

How old is old November?
No one here can remember.



* Pablo Neruda's words in italics.

If I die, where does time go?
Do the bees feel vertigo?

To get love, is there potion?
Or is love only motion?



Holy lift, holy reading—holy gift, holy needing

Holy sound, holy waiting—holy spark, animating

Holy food, holy breathing—holy light, interweaving

Holy night, holy handwriting—holy flight, holy insight

Holy sun, holy brother—holy moon, holy mother

Holy dream, holy vision—holy scheme, holy mission

Holy one to another—holy me, holy other

Holy lives, holy blending—holy start, holy ending.

NIGHT DREAM

Lonely, the roses of Avondale / sing as though somebody still may care.
They live only for the dream of living / so come follow where / they will take you there.

I once was apprenticed / to a man who was living
in the eye of the hurricane / to know despair.

He knew all the dreams by heart / just like sailing in a boat of crystal silence /
seeing visions / of the world / of life within a life.

In a turning / like a burning / came turning /
out of everything stirring / and what had begun before

but all wrapped up / in one great godly becoming

tumbling / and fumbling / and stumbling
into bumping / and rumbling along

whirling it / and swirling it / and twirling it / and hurling it /
and overturning it / and burning it again.

I shared a whirling dervish out on the side of a hill called *métaphore vivace*
swinging en route to a nascent solar / with the scissored visored blizzard wizard /
gizzarding planets and secrets within / like an avatar.



While meanwhile / in turnstyling / and spinning over him:
spells bespeaking kingdoms in the dark

calling me to yield / knighting me in a field / covered with armies
and with princes. All were signing / cannons shining / pennants flying.

And when he spoke to me he sang / and his words really rang
this child of the knowledge of the beauty of the night
he sang to me of masters passing on / of father after father after father
climbing up into the lotus bloom / upon the tortoise's back
and of grandfathers / who danced through their living a longer time ago.

He showed me a palace in time / in which all the talismans
from all the Zeuses / swing upon a pendulum of secrets
in a circle that remembers / and when asked a question will surrender
every secret key to every hero's message / given to every heart in time
but only known to but a few (or so it seems).



When I asked of them / what shall I do / to see the god?
They only said, “The goldenrod / which grows inside of
every secret dream you dream / while waiting for the god
it’s a symbol from the Man in the Fire.
It’s telling you the thing you desire
is a garment that covers the riddle of everything secretly wished for
and of the world of which you are an inheritor.”

Suddenly the chamber was flooded with light
hurling me skyward like a meteorite

When I fell to earth / I saw everything in a blur.
I saw that time was accelerating in a curve.

And the palace in which I had stood / it was flowing, like lava, on acres
of woodland like a Pompeiian mountain volcano / making archipelago
and destroying the planet / at *fortissimo*

Bulldozing everything down / to make room for what
was a Byzantine / a labyrinthine / knotty mess of
manifolding passageways / a tangle of confusion /
where the walls made / an asylum of baroque.

Like a joke / words were spoken
to provoke me / and to toss me
nude and empty / to the sea.

But I would have none of it.
I simply turned my back and walked out / of the dreamscape
into landscape / like a bedroom / where I heard that

Lonely, the roses of Avondale / sing as though somebody still may care.
They live only for the dream of living / so come follow where they will take you there.





WHILE YOU ARE MINE

In time we met / one winter night / and the moon shone with a mystic light.
It seemed the world was holding breath on her way to death
Pausing, so your adagio / played sweet and low / could grow into a symphony.
Every note played to me sounded clear and fine—in splendid time.

In time you slept, and every breath / every stillness and each sigh was mine.
I heard the sound of our two hearts / dancing in the dark
Lighter than air / the perfect pair / but it was there I knew
That if the world must pass / so, too, love's gentle flame.
So I'll sing your name
In splendid time / while you are mine.

ALL IS QUIET

Meet me in a shadow land of quiet.
Speak to me of loving. But speak low to me—in a whisper.
Whispers open magical doors if you let them
Opening to hidden rooms full of color
In shades like Marc Chagall.

These days, everybody speaks of love so loud.
They shout, as if love were something owed them—
Like something they can order around
Like something that comes when called.

Let your body fall away in quiet,
Knowing loving grows over time, like a tree in the forest.
Your face is as lovely as sleep—faint with stillness.
I can smell the summer there in your tangled hair.
It folds me in a dream.

The reverie of silence—here, in the hidden constellation,
Joining the twilight sky, like starry bright
We're soaring over everything, like birds in flight,
Into the quiet night.

We're allowed (aloud)
For all is quiet now.



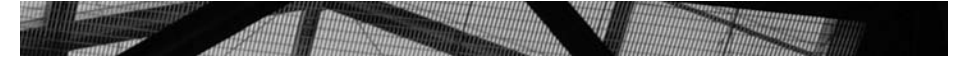
MOONLIGHT SERENADE

Understand the Night.
When she flashes her sparkling eyes at dusk,
She flirts with Twilight.
When the noise of day dies away
The Night and Twilight stay and stay,
Making quiet love up high over the town.
And the gentle Twilight gives his light,
Making a queen of Night.

If I could, I would write a sonnet of the Night
As a remembrance of your eyes.

And if you'd promise not to tell
I could whisper the words in the dark, like a lover.
We could count the stars—the shooting stars—
And talk of lovers through the ages who had lived out of their dreams.
Such will and courage they needed to live in a dream;
To burn, with every breath so serene—
As if they had been the first to find love at all—
Like Night and Twilight.
(They were the first of lovers ever.)
Could we be like them; hold on to one another until dawn comes?
Then, we'll fly off and dream until Night and Twilight kiss again.

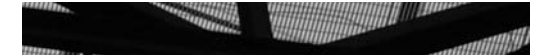
My love—my one and only love—let me take you out under the moonlight
And show how the Twilight loves the Night; why he lives for an hour
Of loving through lifetimes of longing and sings his moonlight serenade.



A SECRET I

Alone and I can see the moonlight and starlight
as they plant kisses on my dreams and thoughts
in moments passing by me
and the sound of laughing voices as they call me so softly,
“Come a little closer, Darling—won’t you?—and love me a little while.”

And, if it seems your whole life is spent blooming, it’s a miracle.
But it could happen.



I used to think death was just an ending, not a starting up.
But then a friend of mine, a man,
he up and died one Tuesday.

Now he lives inside of me and all his other friends.
And we welcome him into ourselves in a way that makes us more like him.
It’s friendly gravity we’re pulling on.

And the white moon told me it was so.

Alone and I will love the moonlight a little more these days.

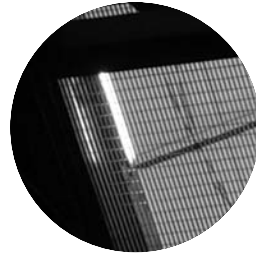
HIDDEN JEWEL

There's more to love than loving.
There's more to pain than pain.
And if diamonds take a million years
We must learn to overcome the same strain.

Wanting what's new means one thing:
Asking what's old to die.
And what's true before we move to grow
Passes over in a moment of sighing.

I knew a girl—she refused to come out fighting.
She could have moved the planets with her hand like
Counting grains of sand.
Dig her daily shuffle on down the street on slovenly feet.
Dig the love within her waiting with an undiscovered purpose.

You couldn't help but think about her as a missing person.
Someone important had taught her heart to fear.
So she withered like a raisin in the sun needing will, needing vision,
needing hope and not doubt, needing shelter from a loveless existence.



She'd mustered all her little courage just to face the day.
It was rainy and gray. And we all could see her, trying to free her
Looking out to find the person who had taken innocence and blessedness
and carried them away—who'd given all of it away to those who couldn't see her beauty.

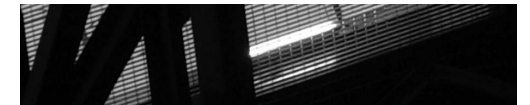
And Prince Charming never came.

And, if he had, she'd have spit into his eye
and left him wondering why anyway.
Charming princes never carry half as much as they can carry off.
I see it every day.

Pretty soon she drove us all away.
For her, there could be no other way.

There's more to love than loving.
There's more to pain than pain.
And if diamonds take a million years
We must learn to overcome the same strain.

There's more to love than loving.





MAN IN THE AIR

Reclining in a chair at the edge of elsewhere—
Maybe madness, or maybe understand-ness and full of wise—
The man up in the air keeps a very steady stare.
He can see you—can see right through you—with inner eyes.
The man up in the air!

And you'd never know it as he floats in the air:
He's passing through stars!
The man is a poet.
Imagine a mountain—
A fountain of free-flowing mind.

The man up in the air—he can fly off anywhere!

The man up in the air has a vision of everywhere,
Recollected and finally connected
To harmonize.

HIGHER VIBE

Higher vibe, live in me.

Higher vibe, set me free.

Meditating on higher truth is creating a living proof (in a peaceful way).

Everything I do

Everywhere I go

Everyone I know

Is alive and loved and shining in the mind of God.





TIME TO SAY GOODBYE

Something in the air was stinging the day
You came to meet me in Curie Park.

You came to tell me the sky was so blue;
that it was big and round, and it was calling to you.
You never knew a sky as blue could be—be so frightening.
And I knew it then: you would fly.

Light played upon your face like lace. It was time to kiss and say goodbye.

Our hearts would break; be folded in the ache of an early autumn.
Birds came alight from flight singing the opening skies of life
And made a sound like lovers crying.
And when you kissed me, you let a single tear say the very thing I couldn't hear:

The truest love resigns itself to everything. No matter how life tears it apart,
Love makes another start again.

And now when I think of that broken-hearted fall, I'd give my all to have that moment
To speak again—to thank you for chasing a bluer sky, and to kiss again
And to say goodbye.

Moments live in forever once they live. So we can give away our forever day.
And it's no regret to say, "That was yesterday," when we give away our forever day.

Time to say goodbye—and find what time can bring to love.
It's time for me to try to see what life is really of.
It's time to say goodbye.

A NEW BODY AND SOUL

My heart was misty-hued and lonely / from missing you.
Without you near-around me / man, was I blue!
My eyes would show what I could not say / while you were away.
Even so, my tears would flow in endless, hopeless replay.
Love was always only hearsay.

Yet, I'd drift around town with downcast dreams in my pockets
Stumbling every step
Trying to motion my frozen feelings in thick-set flop sweats.
My mind would echo with treacherous, senseless empty.
My head was inept.
Time was a pathway filled with regret.

Life was just a trial of wanting / things that are true now.
Now it's something I can say aloud—
Now that I know we two can make life anew & come shining through.

I'll make us a space / inasmuch as love can do—
A place safe from thunders / made by fearlessness and wonders—
Now that love has come / now that I have found you.

I watch the sun rise on you / and on the hour you wake—
Not knowing waking from dreaming or remembering.
Songs I sing you then / I hope you will hear
If ever you feel fear or coming to an end.

Love is the only thing to balance fearing—
Loving the deepest depths appearing.



Waiting too long for a sign you would come was what
nearly killed the spirit in the house within me.
And when you appeared you brought an answer after praying—
like a sailor sighting landfall on horizons of green—
or sunrise / after endless nights of burning scenes—
or having sense be restored to me.
Finally the music has a reason to be singing.

Hearing voices / calling out of every corner of the city
Glittering pretty / but it seemed like empty pity here.
Chasing them / feeling a stinging
searching to find a lasting thing
but always / following whatever was flashing.
People thought I had the mentality of a shambles
or a house deserted.

I remember stories of / Orpheus and his love / ruinous / Eurydice
spirited away / on their wedding day bitten by a snake upon the way
and Eurydice had to stay in under-day—SAD!

Just as bad / Orphie had / to stay up and lay up with us here / but without her.
Some Stun!
Can you just imagine / living without it / love that was destined to perfect
everything that was imperfect? But Orpheus went & played songs for the man

jamming a plan / sounding a span / taking a stand / burning in sand—
fanning the legend of the man who—playing music—made the sun to stand.
And sad though the ending was / I can feel it 'cause
I would do the same for you. 'Cause:

Knowing what we live is part of history—
A mystery philosophic asked a thousand years ago.
Living after living spent in killing or in giving or unwilling
Under-fulfilling—a cosmic freak show.
And in all the time that Shiva takes in closing one massive eye—
Darkening sight and sky
Hundreds of lifetimes we must try / hoping to break the cycle
And enter heaven's eye.
But heaven's here / it comes clear
When loving is living & understanding giving / power.

Wonder when we'll get together or if life's a broken song
Just because we're so headstrong
And we'll never get along.
It seems like the throng meanders along—
But just as sad as just as sappy just as angry just as scared as sad.
You'd think we'd be happy just to be straight-standing
On the earth every new date—
Just to breathe in the air and to love every day away.

We're given a life to try all our breath to mend the tears over the world
where it is clear the world is broken.
But still the suffering and terrors go on. And every time I think
we may be coming to the brink / the glue on / something pushes us
and down we fall to shatter in pieces.

And that's why our teachers teach "The Itsy Bitsy Spider"
to the smallest ones:
We need a fight song to keep us moving along.
I should've sung it when thinking you gone.
You weren't lost / you were coming

I'll teach you / I hope to
Give you love that shows you wonders that only love can show.
And / more than you'll ever know / I do love you so.
You have got a light living in you / in, with and through you
& that's what a father's love should teach you.

My life a heaven you are making. You have got me in the bag.
You know I'm yours for taking home or for forsaking.
I'll . . . give my life up to make sure / you're lacking nothing.

That's the gist of it.
You're the north, south, west and Eden east of it all (I'm least of it all).

How come was I / pie in the sky / more do or die
sighing a cry / never a life / high?
I hope someday you will see just what I mean.
To take on such a classic / and write something massive / without seeming spastic
when I sing the song—or seem freaky, when I mean only to take what could
sound so old-creaky and make a marvel as a gift to you.
And in such a small way pay tribute to a man whose legacy gave birth to such melodies
as this one—(& that was Mr. Dexter Gordon).

And so my baby then perhaps (then) you will realize
I have found loving with you!

WHERE ARE YOU, MY LOVE?

Where is your heart, my love? I can't believe you'd forget.
I haven't finished with love yet, and I'm wondering where—
where can you be?

I still see your smile in my memories and photographs;
Pictures of hand-holding laughter.
I guess there's more that you're after—
but you're teaching my songs to cry.

Making love with you was easy—it was a thrill.
And I guess that's how it goes—hearts break every day.
I just thought you'd go just a bit more gently.
And I hoped you'd pick up the telephone if I called.

My angel, where can you be? You have flown out—
Out of time, out of love, out of my arms—
leaving me with a heart full of empty.

So where—baby where—are you?

And now—starting now—& my whole life through
must I go on just pretending? Where is my happy ending?
All I wanted to play from long ago was your true love Romeo.

I need you baby, but darling where, baby, where are you?



LEAVING AGAIN

Sleeping. Waking. Crying. Leaving again. It's morning. I have to go.
Though every night pretends—begins in quiet hoping that it never ends—
they're always ending again; breaking another dream—
a dream where we could breathe in the heavy curtained prairie air of summer night—
watching lightning over wheat fields through a bedroom window.
And the prairie gently rose up with a feeling and embraced us.

And when morning found us I pulled you to me and promised to stay.
But that was a dream.

And now, day.





WAKING THE DREAMCLOCK*

Come / sit by my side a minute
We've been walking in a waking dream / forever, it seems

Everything known is living and dying in equal parts
Everything that's light and dark is the heart of it / together

Even the saddest of endings / has in it seeds of another start
Another chance to make another mark in it
To begin in now and shoot upright / finding always in the stars

Stand your ground with me / hold on for what wants to be
You're empty now / right down to your favorite memory
Of long ago and far away / a lost and faded day

Sing your secrets out / the crying, laughing and lonely shout
I'll still hear your song / long after the crowds have come and gone

Why can't we just break free / free to be a wild new gravity?
Time can bend / just you wait and see
Hope depends on suffering fools like you and me

This longest night can never stay / day's just a dawn away

And what is light but the love we make?

**Written with Phil Galdston*

SAMURAI COWBOY

You dig / everything in life / everything you've seen
Everywhere you've been / you have been thinking all of the time

Everything that's happened to you / has been made or construed to brood
At least passively in the life of the mind

You dig / memory is such / nothing gets away
Everything you touch / finds a place / deep inside your inner clutch

And it seems gigantical scenes / pouring in from your outer dreams
Wrinkle mental stuff in your own skully hutch

And once you think it / naught you can do to stop / you've simply got to cop
Nevertheless the thought can really wig you

Like sometimes I'll / go for a run / there's nothing I expect to run to
When all of the sudden the thought begins / a feeling like in my brain there lives an alien / And it gets funky then

Then I think / maybe I am just a little man in a space capsule
Riding 'round in a balloon / deep down inside my head
(Some big old giant's head—dig?)

I'm driving the running / the motion sequence of running and pushing and
Pumping the oxygen deep in the plumbing / sumping on to some-way
Some-how keep on moving the giant / keeping him pliant



Right now an arch-typical synap-tically of light / a firing anatomical hit
Is right now getting down / dig?
Shooting a rapid-fire sparkle-chemical in the atmosphere, here

& thinking that I'm thinking of thinking / only makes me think a kink
In a way / that only goes to cite that Descartes was right!

You dig / everything in life / everything you've seen
Everywhere you've been / you have been thinking all of the time

Everything that's happened to you / has been made or construed to brood
At least passively in the life of the mind

You dig / memory is such / nothing gets away
Everything you touch / finds a place / deep inside your inner clutch

And it seems gigantical scenes / pouring in from your outer dreams
Wrinkle mental stuff in your own skully hutch

Such!



LATE NIGHT WILLIE

Late Night Willie said / Don't go home to bed
Give that day time head a rest / he said
When you're dead / then the earth can be your bed
Life's a child / he said / that's waiting to be fed
Life should leave the table full of bread

Late Night Willie said / Stars are overhead
Day is long / Night's unlimited
& you've got plenty of songs to sing
Bring that bad thing / you bring

Your holy soul is a foal or a pony & / ponies are beautiful things
So don't you worry about a thing / You've got plenty of bells to ring
Bring that bad / thing / you bringing

Dig how the night's an ocean teeming around you
Calling for you to be as free / as your dreamy spirit wants you to be

It's not just black & white / it's also golden bright / now
And it's as green / as ever was seen / a pyrotechnic kind of sheen
A laughing clown / a fountain of *eau de vie* / now
An iridescent spree / now

And it's crimson / and yellow / orange-o / & violet
Like Violet B. was with her everlasting gob / stopping mid-chew
When she found a purple-berry pie / when the intro of a very weird gum chew
Was done / over and through

Let's be kings of the nighttime scene
Two mannish cats who bust out of the seams of what it means
Listen, Sonny / we need no money

I've got a stock of lines within me / guaranteed to open what's shut
What?! / I'm a cat who struts uncut
Stalking the halls of every club you can conceive / imagine / or dream up
I've got an Ali Baba syllable team up
(That) greases up a doorman's id satisfaction / a calefaction
Mixing a tonic fix / to overcome any guest list diss twist
Upon a late arrival. It's club survival

And when the sun is jumping up / I can dig Sonny strutting into the light
You're boogieing and cookin' with the grooviest women there

Shutting down the night: it's Sonny!

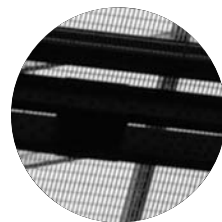
You might now want to electively put your butt in your chair
To help the thinking that you're drinking sink in
There's nothing Willie can come through with / that you cannot crew with
Within your own mindset

And:

Unless you're Miles Davis there's always some brother—
Some mother smoother than you!

So don't you worry about a thing
& you've got plenty of songs to sing
bring that bad thing / you bring

& when you're finally dead / earth can be your bed
Life's a child waiting to be fed.



LOVE'S A TANGLED ROAD

Tonight / tonight the moon is clean
There's nothing in between / the light that throws a sheen
On everything we think we see / under the stars
And neon of the bars / convincing us we are in love

But any moment now a cloud or two will frown above us
For love is a fleeting thing / a lying and a cheating thing

Most times it seems the road to love is a tangle
Always an angle keeps me from finding love / in a maze of covering
Love is something whispering / something hiding / vanishing

To me it feels like love is willful and confusing
Always abusing lovers like me who keep the flame
Praying to meet another who keeps the same
Weighing a heart unclaimed / wanting no more of games

Still I go on searching / weaving and lurching
Hoping one day to see love clear.



LA VIE EN ROSE

She's a wonder to me / and
when she comes over to me / moving lightly with the band

I feel a need come on / I need to become her pawn
And though I lead our turn around the dance floor

It is an entreaty to me / mesmerizing and enticing me to see
my partner as the queen of all my being

I can't resist / she's a magnet that draws me / that thrills me and awes me
Everything I hold dear is dancing right here beside me

She's like a wish I made that somehow comes true every morning
& brightens up my way

& there's a shade of love in things that she'll say
The bloom is on the roses every day for my love & so for me

The dance is like a dream / swaying and weaving under golden stars.
The lights that sparkle in her eyes are em-er-alds and shiny dia / monds

Sparking up / the night. / A dance of dreaming never felt so right



THEY SPEAK NO EVIL

They never speak / They never see
They're stones to the world but live in the what's to be

They never speak / They never hear
They point to the void but face it without a fear

They dance a line / and define / a pantomime cadaverous
With a knife / through with us
They're quit of life / come unstuck / long on time / but dumbstruck

They never sleep / They never need
The mystery of meaning opens beneath their feet



In the early winter dusk of time
The broken city, dark, funnels and tunnels in streams over the gunnels of life;
Gusting up streets and towers and emptied out alleyways
Seeping through city maze

The people made / the people unmade
The generations lighting up our rooms of shade
The people fated / fade / two behind you and the four behind them together

Even for those who sleep against the doorways of the harrowing highways
Even then / a lighted skyway

Long / sleeping on / writing a ream / a reverie stream
Agleam / extreme after the life-dream

Sixty-four / hundred twenty-eight / two hundred fifty-six / five hundred twelve
One thousand twenty-four
The lives of those whose times have come before you lie in wait at the door

More than the stars you count / the people pushing up under the floors
And washing up on memories' shore / holding up your history's core:
Rapes / loves / slaves / lords / fakes / and whores / massive wars
Coupled with their joys and pains on the breathless dance floor

Somewhere in your past a starving mother cried for mercy from an overlord
Somewhere one killed another

Somewhere in your past / a man arose to save a village
Just by praying to a god no one recalls anymore
Or lived all / all alone / but for one love that shone

One lucky son sang music pure enough to drive the sun
Long enough to bend the light when day was done



Somewhere / and outcast
Somewhere / one king took a dozen lovers at a singly daybreak

The radiation of the past / past everything we're breathing
All the lives we'll soon be leaving / to the underground foundation

Back / to the single face in the deepest pool / the rule / it glows / it waits
The Jewel / ground up in the glittering sidewalks



They never speak / They never see
They're stones to the world but live in the what's to be

They never speak / They never hear
They point to the void but face it without a fear

They dance a line / and define / a pantomime cadaverous
With a knife / through with us
They're quit of life / come unstuck / long on time / but dumbstruck

They never sleep / They never need
The mystery of meaning opens beneath their feet

They never speak

THE VERSE / AFTER THE DOOR

I always knew I'd fall for the girl next door
To stay at home with love would be my great reward
My sorrow came when she required more than the simple life

She wanted fashion and fame and money and speed
And I just wanted to love and to need her

So I guess it's the road for me and my dream.
The search for a new loving home ...
This will be my only theme



The road opens up tonight / now that I am free
Colors flood my eyes / and I can see

Home is just one scene / in a giant play
In a book / only one page

The songs I already know / lovely as they are
Should grow / into something more.

There's a world of love and music / after the door

TUTTI FOR CUTIE

Every song I sing for you / and everything that I do
If it swings / it just means that my love is true



Every day bleeds away when I face it without you
Everything's grey and I run away from sunshine's rays without you
Every song's minor and tragic
That's every day that goes by without your magic

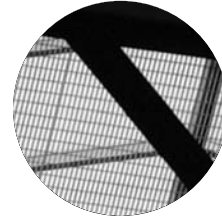
I'm drowning under the sound of the clock's ticking
It's crush-ing all my dreams and all my little hopes of loving
It's a beating of beats that repeats and repeats
And it keeps me from knowing some peace in the night
(would be quite alright with me now)

It's too much! It's too strong!
It's too long - breathing without seeing you
Eating nothing - Smoking all my little cigarettes up
My mama done told me just to come on home

How, now?

How to go on living knowing my home is where you are
And just then you walk in through my door

When you're home the sky turns blue
Everything's a happy hue
There's a rainbow in your eyes
And happiness is just a kiss away – a smile from you
I'm just a happy pappy
Don't need no map - just come closer now



Let's take a trip aboard that ship
There's islands of love awaiting lovely lovers who venture out onto the sea
We - we could be famous for loving - just two sweethearts doing the thing

Clark Kent and his Lois Lane
Roxanne for Cyrano did the same
Tarzan and his Jane - they held on 'till they could swing it
Boris and the tall Natasha
Captain Smith and Pocahontas magnetically flamed

Girl, you send me - now apprehend me, baby
My world's empty without you - so can't you just keep closer to me?
And love me, baby

Everything you bring makes me zing like Tigger bouncin' off the walls
... up and down the halls

Say you'll stay and make every day a lovely lover's bouquet

Just so it's clear to say
As long as you can stay
I'll be so happy with you

You'll be happy too!

It's a make-or-break
Make no mistake
'Cause there's no faking love

It's a date
Every day
To let love
Make a way

So just promise you can stay



STAYS

There was a man on the second floor
He'd always retreat behind his door
whenever I'd come off a tour

From what I gathered he'd never leave the floor
I'd hold my breath when I'd hear his sneak-ering pause at the door
Creaking the floor
hiding, for sure

Once came a fiery flame / and the fireman came
Hurrying staircases / dropping floods up / up above me
Making a vertical sea

We ran around saving what could / until the fireman said that we should
Get out of doors and stay for good / like we knew we should

They brought the man from the second floor / He was carried out by police and more
Pitching forward / running out of air / down the stair / into glaring lights
Looking unaware of the night

They set him down and he sat by me
For once in time began speaking free / pointing out a flaming tree
Just two refugees / looking at the spectacle sight / and crying

That was when he said something to the air

"I saw a burning like this before / The fire there / it was war, for sure
Screaming into the air / Soldiers on the stair / Staring into the glare /
I couldn't endure"

Looking at the man / he was pretty old
And I began to fear he was shuddering from the cold

But what he said next sent an icy hold & told me what his unconsolated /
beholding eyes knew:

"I lost my family in '42

The reason I would hide from your view:

The SS man looked just like you"

From what I gathered he'd never leave the floor
I'd hold my breath when I'd hear his sneak-ering pause at the door
Creaking the floor
hiding, for sure

'Cause where is the cure? / & how to endure?
When fear and hate is such a lure
At history's core

The answer's obscure . . .

THE MICHIGAN FARM

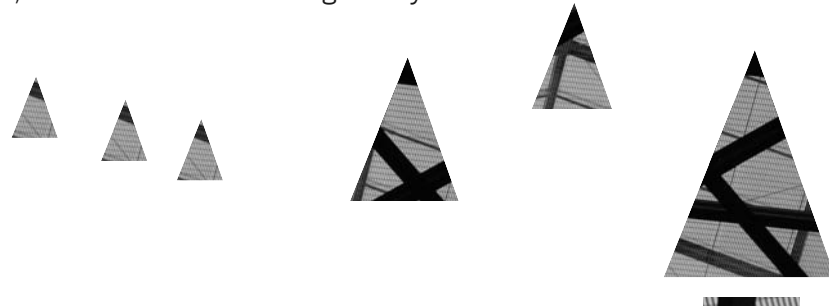
Put away the colored lights / Set aside the tinsel tree
Step out into the night with me / Christmas Eve is there
Wait and see

Come away from the fireside / Feel the heat of the flame subside
Fields are asleep deep under the snow / Softly above
Stars shimmer and glow

Trees that with the winter frost / cling to life but pay the cost
Slowly, painfully, limbs still rise / reaching longing arms
To the sky

Hear melodies no horn can play / Earth whispers what no words can say
Christmas carols the winds blow away

Sweet, secretive lives dreaming of day



CASSANDRA SONG

Let me tell you what's true
My soul's a golden flag that flies so far in the boundless blue
I know high up above what will be below

Let me tell you what's true
The wings of windy change that will come to you cut me right through
I know nothing is certain to hold onto

And I'll tell you what's true
Your life will run away from you in moments both quick and smooth
I know fast are the hours and far too few

Let me tell you what's true ...



THE RETURN

Every grain of sand that's lost upon the shore / will eventually roll home
Every leaf on every tree that falls to autumn / leaves a greenish stem to grow
... becoming the leaves that adorn every tree in spring

Every wave that breaks the surface of the deep / to know a moment in the sun
Just as suddenly returns to twilight sleep / Every one lives only seconds and it's done
... It's only the way that the ultimate mystery's spun

Every breath you take / you borrow from air / giving back some part of you
Everything that lives has a birthright from the stars / a current passes through /
the person who you are
... And though the distance is far / you return to you mother sky / as a star



INFANT EYES

Before time can cast a spell / or mind ring like a bell
we grow to fit our size / and see with infant eyes

Before life can make a mar / or love can leave a scar
we follow what we are / the light of distant stars

But every waking day / we're taught a different way
We learn how to be blind / and lose what we should find

Like you, I'm a guest here / just a ghost in this illusion
Shadow-play / out on an / empty stage
And everything made of breath / is forgotten at the end of it

Assuming this is the last day of my life
Which might mean the first day of *life*
I'm struck with silence like a phantom trumpet
or a saxophone melody's memory

If there's nothing there but a dream / why act so scared and so extreme?
Nothing in time before birth / caused any fear or pain

And I think that death will / will bear us / bear us on to brightness!

Of the joys / the world can spare / there's none that can compare
with fathering a prize / who sees with infant eyes



DID YOU CALL HER TODAY?

Did you call her today? Did you call her today?
Did you make time to say / that you need her today?
Most girls rely on a message / some text or tweet
One call can give your expressage / something much more sweet

So did you call her today? You should call her today
From a stop on the way / at the club or cafe
Every day you're away / make the time just to say
That your baby's your bae / Did you call her today?



I dig that touring life now it's a gasser / It's just what I asked fer!
Blowing hosannas in a band / with cats who can dazzle on the stand /
is unsurpassed sir

You get out and shake that moneymaker night and day
You circle the world by tipping tempos & sail away / with every horn that's
looking for something

... Some unspeakable signature figure that signals a swinger

Big math stuff ain't no thing for cats who swing / I like my dirty / greasy
No-fool soul food / from the old school / where vibe is the rule

(Vibe that's from the sweet-hot street)

I like feeling that beat / & tapping my feet / from my seat
To Hi-Fi vinyl on the sweet repeat / Wax spinnin'!

But none of that's winnin' if you've got no baby / a'waiting for you when
you tumble to home
You turn the key to lonely echoes of empty / A man needs a family
for his house a home to be

So take a tip from one who sees / the short & quick / the guarantee of what's happy
Without love you'll sink / like a rock gone inky in the drink / boy

One love / one real love will see you through when time & tide gets to busy
Beating you black and blue / You lose that blue hue with one true beautiful baby

So make that call without no more delay / And tell that pretty baby you will sway
Heaven and earth / just to keep her your queen and to stay

Man / promise her the milky way
If it means that she will keep time with you one more day



Did you call her today / You should call her today
From a stop on the way / At the club or cafe
Every day you're away / Make the time just to say
That your baby's your bae / Did you call her today?

Boy / you should call her today / son!

A SECRET IN THREE VIEWS*

(Based on the poetry of Rumi)

I don't know / Am I supposed to know?
What if every road / leads the same way home?
Pathways bend / and never reach the end of it
Blending / weaving around to begin again

And every night the questions come
And ask the moon to rise up
And fly away from old Brother Sun
& shine her light independent-like (just for one time)

Playful calls / cat-scratch star falls of mystery
Blessing every night dreams / that play over darkened scenes
Like Northern Lights in the sky / like diamonds in flight

Where they lead / is the lonely question of life

And even though we strive / to make some sense out of being alive
We plot & plan & connive / some sense of purpose to derive

(When really, all we think we know might just be one big cosmic swan dive)

But take heart, you weary traveler
Don't fall apart
Your final lover now sings straight into your heart
You're the sky
Yours / the inner eye
You / my only love



You / who question the lessons
Make your mind up to stay up
& lay up
& wake up with me tonight.

My love
I have only three things to say:

First / when I was apart from you this world did not exist
Not this world / nor any other

The second is that you are whatever I was looking for
It was you / always you / without you, love, I smother

Third is why / why oh why / did I ever learn to count to three?

So sleep / You are safe in the star-laden sea
So sleep / You are safe in the star-laden sea

And so he sings / and everyone else starts to sing with him
laughing & dancing & drinking

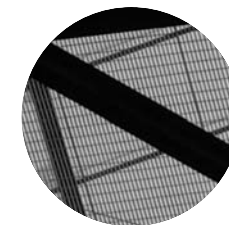
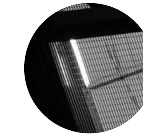
And you are the fruit / of this golden vine

You are holy wine

You are wholly mine

You are holy

And you're mine



**Written with Phil Galdston*

THE ENCHANTRESS

(For Martha Elling and Dolores Marsalis)

She waits alone / in a chair / in a room
The echo'd line of years / gone over too soon ...

When she would sing beyond the crying
of the dreamless sea / and her body fluttered free

And the sea was not a wish / no more was she a wish than me
Not more than a gesture / the sea

The songs and waves were not medley'd sound
For it was she and not the sea we heard word by word

The lyric phrases undeterred / though never understood
It was the waves that she stirred



But now the sea is just a memr'y
in an silent time / as the clouds go scudding by

And the clouds hold only rain / No strain re-echos in her sighs
Two curtain-closed windows / her eyes

No song exists in her solitude
Though in her hands she holds a bird / no poem and no word

Configures oceans overheard / nor melody conferred
It was the waves that she stirred

But soon her body will flutter free
And her body will flutter free
And soon her body will flutter free
And her body will flutter free

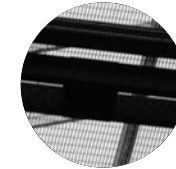


ENDLESS LAWNS

Afloat and all at sea
the stars align in threes
They're so fine and free
in blue and in green
like leaves on endless trees
Come climb the sky with me
Come hear and come to see
melody in perfect symmetry
in love in light
in key

AFTER THE SONG IS GONE*

They say that dreams never die
I think that that's a lie
'Cause how can a dream live on
After the night has gone?
They say that a love can last
Like the ghost of a haunted past
But what kind of fool holds on
After the love is gone?
If life's just a series of meaningless circles
Around and around the sun
Then what becomes of the soul all alone
When the story is said and done?
I can't help thinking something remains
After the joys and pains
But what part of us lingers on
After the light has gone?
It's a curious mystery why we sing
Knowing we don't know a thing
The music we hear will all disappear
In the beat of a swallow's wing
You sing a song to fill the silence in your heart
And find the song is gone



**Written with Phil Galdston*

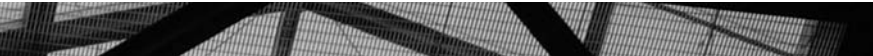
PERFECTLY OUT OF PLACE

Wednesday morning I disowned / or disinclined my face
Searching in the Book of the Alone / I sought a space
Some hidden solace / a path to trace
A full erase / stepping out of place

The day was gray and cobblestoned / cold raindrops spattered shoes
The TV and the radio re-broadcast sordid news
Such rich indulgence / a fiery fuse
And further proof / of a side to choose

I remember feeling wise / when sizing up / what the future
Could possibly bring / in my naive spring . . .

Maybe I'm just getting old / and only ruin see
But things are looking more and more / unsettling to me
Each age will vanish / you must agree
And death I think / is no parentheses*



**Apologies to E.E. Cummings*

THE RIO GRANDE SONG

(For Oscar Alberto Martinez and his daughter Angie Valera)

I used to hear the running of the river as a song with no ending. The sound was like a message to my spirit that the river was sending. The rushing of the water played with harmonies continually ascending. Enchanted by the river I would stand alone in fear and ever trembling. The Rio Grande filled my heart.

But now I've seen a side of things that makes the song a curious tune. It seems the river is a siren calling underneath a cowardly moon. And harmonies grow darker as the revelation opens up to me (and up to you).

Because now I've seen the river kill my brother and my tiny sister too.
The Rio Grande has drowned my heart.

Of course it's not the river, it's the people we've elected to lead us.
Who make the walls and send the armored wagons for the ones who would join us.
While billionaires recline upon divans upholstered in the skins of slaughter.
And feast upon the children we should think of as our only sons and daughters.

America, you've lost your heart.
(And it's no excuse - just being blind.)
America, you've lost your mind.



GRATITUDE

(For Robert Bly)

Just as sunlight casts a shadow / the first shade of another day
Interrupted in his sleep / still in half a dream

Nettled into awaking / wishing light away
Drinking his cup of coffee / puzzling what he wants to say

The evening before he'd tried to tell it
He'd showed off all his ecstatic truths
... and wine had encouraged his bray

He'd gone to bed / long before the point was proved
And risen / deep in the night / to walk

To wander under stars / And time and again
He'd wished then / that his children had come walking with hm

To wonder at stars / until they grew dim
Sharing the thoughts that spin him / like butterflies trapped within him



And so he thinks himself unlucky / this someone who has eyes to see
Who finds stars when wanting stars / who can sing the moon

Someone whose feet get sandy / in the hidden dunes
Someone who knows the ocean / who knows what he has to do

He still thinks his mind is full of tangles
Whose mind to him just a mangle is
... and who thinks his poems a mess

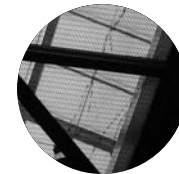
Even though he tells the truth / long before the point is proved
And rises / deep in the night / to write

To wander until light / and fly words like kites
Whose children / share their father's inner intuition

To sing to the moon / I think maybe soon
Somebody ought to tell him / Maybe we ought to tell him

Something he ought to know

Something his poems show



BELOVED

(For Toni Morrison)

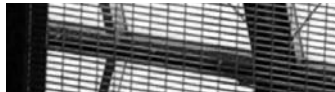
I have but four / the treasures of my spirit
Laying like doves / all around my heart

In memory they soar / But only I can see it
Gone, as with love / since we've been torn apart

The oldest was a girl / Curious of eye and gentle, she
The next was a boy / mighty
Then came along / a boy who brought us laughter
And finally the babe / safe in her mother's arms

And each was a joyful gift of God

But what God gives you - God can take it too



Escaping with the nestlings of my heart / to swim through the ice
Across The Ohio's frozen bridge of hopes

The sky that held the Bright Northern star
was as cold as the frigid sea

We'd rush over open fields
and hide in woods crowded with feeble trees
in fear and tears and whispered hymns and prayers
to find where some safe place might be

Dangerous bargains were entered then

Signed, with my finger the bloody pen

... Scared of the smuggling men

Prayed, and then prayed again

Still the blood-thirsty dogs gave raging chase

My hope began to fall / I couldn't save us all
Where no one would hear us call / The river became a wall



What did I do?

We were too few / with dreams to pursue
We couldn't push through ...



*Judea's refuge cities had power
To shelter, shield and save,
E'en Rome had altars, 'neath whose shade
Might crouch the wan and weary slave.*

*But Ohio had no sacred fane,
To human rights so consecrated,
Where thou may'st shield thy hapless ones
From their darkly gathering fate.***

And so I pleaded for strength enough
to strike a blow for freedom

Oh Lord ... transfigure us!



***"The Slave Mother: A Tale Of The Ohio"
By Frances E. W. Harper (1824-1911)

Knowing we would soon be seeing heaven made my heart a shining flare

I lit a torchlight with God's flaming words and set ablaze my head of hair

Rising to the air I felt a sense of power reaching everywhere

Overcoming all that I could see / The Lord's Holy Spirit used me

And, seeing the pathway / my children let go their fright

Surrendering nothing / they burned up their place in the night



Now they're with God / surrounded by the angels

Someday I'll see / my doves once again / with all of the heavenly host

. . . Amen

THE FANFOLD HAWK / A CERTAIN CONTINUUM

Think that / or imagine you are just / just gliding

The hawk flies / in clear skies / mirroring fire / floating higher
higher than any spire

unconcerned or aware / of hopeless / forgotten prayers

He's one with the air!

His golden skull / all full of null / and void
except for the will of God

and not with crazed incessant sounds
the noisy echoes that pull us to what makes us ill

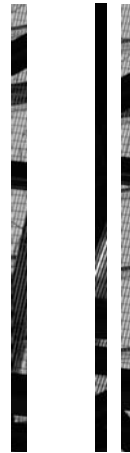
Why do we go / after what drives us mad / you know?

We push and elbow / grabbing what makes us sad / like every ego fad

Quiet the mind / find your flow aligned / or stay blind

Nothing comes of —

Making the same / blunder a thousand times / that's just inane and lame



And how to go sane / reading between the lines
when all the lines are your chains?

It isn't easy

You'll have to show some spine / some spirit

Move from within / Bust out of what confines

Because / Because / Because



There's a mystery / an enigma / there's a mem'ry oh so slight

There's a message / in the mirror / that will flicker to a spark / of light

...turn the dark into sight

Questions about love are as old as / everything that's ever been

Questions linger on until the end

There's a ribbon / in the river / that is running through your heart

There's a whisper / in the water / with a wisdom to impart:



Restart ...

Be your own / work of art

Questions about life are as old as / everything that's ever been

Questions linger on until the end

We are the face in the mirror / and the mirror

We are tasting forever / every moment

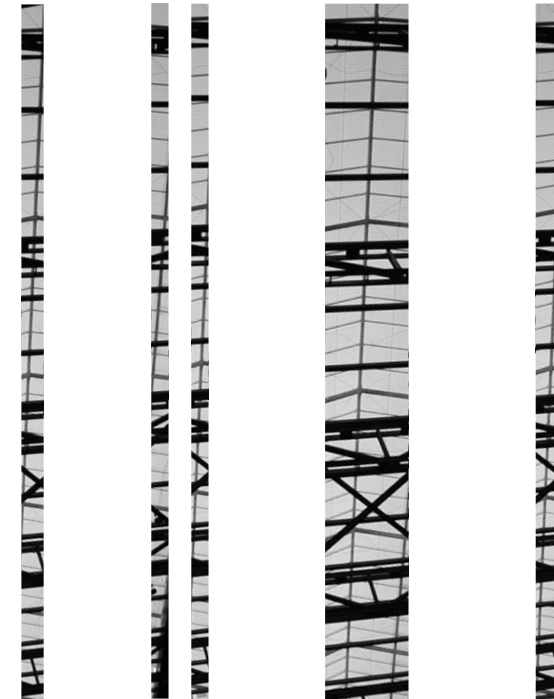
We are stars in the night / and we are the night

There's a ribbon / in the river / that is running through your heart

There's a whisper / in the water / with a wisdom to impart:

Restart ...

Be your own / work of art



SOURCES

ORANGE BLOSSOMS IN SUMMERTIME

Music by Curtis Lundy
Lyric by Kurt Elling (1994)

THOSE CLOUDS ARE HEAVY, YOU DIG?

*(Based on the short story,
“How the Thimble Came to be God,” by R.M. Rilke)*
Music by Dave Brubeck and Paul Desmond
Solo by Paul Desmond
Lyric by Kurt Elling (1995)

DOLORES’ DREAM

Music and Solo by Wayne Shorter
Lyric by Kurt Elling (1995)

THE WALTZ

Music by Laurence Hobgood
Lyric by Kurt Elling (1996)

THE MESSENGER

Music by Ed Petersen
Lyric by Kurt Elling (1997)

TANYA JEAN

Music by Donald Byrd
Solo by Dexter Gordon
Lyric by Kurt Elling (1997)

THE BEAUTY OF ALL THINGS

Music by Laurence Hobgood
Lyric by Kurt Elling (1997)

PRAYER FOR MR. DAVIS

Music by Laurence Hobgood
Lyric by Kurt Elling (1997)

MINUANO

Music by Pat Metheny
Lyric by Kurt Elling (1997)

WHERE I BELONG

Music by Kurt Elling and Laurence Hobgood
Lyric by Kurt Elling (1998)

MY LOVE, EFFENDI

Music by McCoy Tyner
Lyric by Kurt Elling (1998)

FREDDIE’S YEN FOR JEN

Music and Solo by Freddie Hubbard
Lyric by Kurt Elling (1998)

SHE’S FUNNY THAT WAY

Music by Richard A. Whiting & Neil Moret
Solo by Lester Young
Lyric by Kurt Elling (1998)

JOHN COLTRANE’S RESOLUTION

Music and Solo by John Coltrane
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2000)

ESPERANTO

*(Inspired by and integrating
“Questions” by Pablo Neruda)*
Music by Vince Mendoza
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2000)

NIGHT DREAM

Music by Wayne Shorter
Solos by Wayne Shorter and Lee Morgan
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2000)

ALL IS QUIET

Music by Bob Mintzer
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2001)

WHILE YOU ARE MINE

(After Kenneth Rexroth)
Music by Fred Simon
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2001)

MOONLIGHT SERENADE

Music by Glenn Miller
Solo by Charlie Haden
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2001)

A SECRET I

Music by Herbie Hancock
Solo by Freddie Hubbard
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2003)

HIDDEN JEWEL

Music and Solo by Bobby Watson
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2003)

MAN IN THE AIR

Music by Laurence Hobgood
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2003)

HIGHER VIBE

Music by Courtney Pine
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2003)

TIME TO SAY GOODBYE

Music by Joe Zawinul
Solo by Wayne Shorter
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2003)

A NEW BODY AND SOUL

Music by Edward Heyman,
Robert Sour, Frank Eyton, Johnny Green
Solo by Dexter Gordon
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2006)

WHERE ARE YOU, MY LOVE?

Music by Jimmy McHugh
Solo by Dexter Gordon
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2006)

LEAVING AGAIN

Music by Keith Jarrett
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2006)

WAKING THE DREAMCLOCK

Music by Joe Zawinul
Lyric by Kurt Elling
and Phil Gladston (2008)

SAMURAI COWBOY

Music by Marc Johnson
Solo by John Scofield
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2008)

LATE NIGHT WILLIE

Music by Keith Jarrett
Solo by Jan Garbarek
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2009)

LA VIE EN ROSE

Music by Edith Piaf
Solo by Wynton Marsalis
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2010)

LOVE’S A TANGLED ROAD

Music by Richard Galliano
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2010)

THEY SPEAK NO EVIL

(Based on the Robert Pinsky Poem, “The City Dark”)
Music and Solo by Wayne Shorter
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2010)

THE VERSE / AFTER THE DOOR

Music by John Clayton / Pat Metheny
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2010)

TUTTI FOR CUTIE

Music by Duke Ellington
Solo by Cootie Williams
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2012)

STAYS

Music and Solo by Wayne Shorter
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2014)

THE MICHIGAN FARM

Music by Edvard Grieg
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2016)

CASSANDRA SONG

Music by Branford Marsalis
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2016)

THE RETURN

Music by Joey Calderazzo
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2016)

INFANT EYES

(Based on the Franz Wright Poem, “A Happy Thought”)
Music and Solo by Wayne Shorter
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2016)

DID YOU CALL HER TODAY?

Music by Ben Webster
Solo by Harry “Sweets” Edison
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2017)

A SECRET IN THREE VIEWS

(Based on the poetry of Rumi)
Music by Jaco Pastorius
Solo by Wayne Shorter
Lyric by Kurt Elling
and Phil Galdston (2017)

THE ENCHANTRESS

(Based on the Wallace Stevens poem, “The Idea of Order At Key West”)
Music by Joey Calderazzo
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2018)

ENDLESS LAWNS

Music by Carla Bley
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2018)

AFTER THE SONG IS GONE

Music by Branford Marsalis
Lyric by Kurt Elling
and Phil Galdston (2019)

PERFECTLY OUT OF PLACE

Music by Will Vinson
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2019)

THE RIO GRANDE SONG

Music by Danilo Pérez
(after a theme by Hugo Distler)
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2019)

GRATITUDE - For Robert Bly

(Based on the Robert Bly poem, “Visiting Sand Island”)
Music by Danilo Pérez
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2019)

BELOVED - For Toni Morrison

(Based on the poem, “The Slave Mother, A Tale of the Ohio”, by Frances E.W. Harper)
Music by Danilo Pérez
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2019)

THE FANFOLD HAWK *(based on the poem,*

“The Hawk”, by Franz Wright)
Music and Solo by Jaco Pastorius
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2019)

A CERTAIN CONTINUUM

Music by Jaco Pastorius
Lyric by Kurt Elling (2019)



Renowned for his commitment to the Jazz tradition and for energizing the art of Jazz singing, GRAMMY, ECHO and EDISON JAZZ OEUVREPRIJS winner **Kurt Elling** celebrated his 25th year of recording and performing in 2020.

Richard Connolly is the founder and director of Circumstantial Productions.

Kurt Elling takes us into a world of sacred particulars.

His words are informed by a powerful poetic spirit.

Robert Creeley

In Kurt Elling's art, the voice of jazz gives a new spiritual presence to the ancient, sweet and powerful bond between poetry and music.

Robert Pinsky

He is my son.

Jon Hendricks

