First Friday Art Night

Writers Night: Community

June 1, 2018
Imminent Brewing

Sponsored by
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http://guides.mynpl.org/PoetLaureate
http://downtownnorthfield.org/
https://www.ci.northfield.mn.us/99/Arts-and-Culture-Commission
http://www.imminentbrewing.com/
Leslie Schultz

A Candle for Maggie Lee

Lilac. Twilight. Hosta bloom.
Wisteria and tiny dog-tooth violets.
A plum, dewy and unbitten.
Chunks of glittering amethyst,
dark as Elizabeth Taylor’s eyes
and cool as a cat’s wink. Tulips
almost as black as the skin of an eggplant.
Also, the black light in the Hall of Gems
revealing efflorescence, and that minute bruise
I received who-knows-where. The race-car
sheen of my closed laptop computer.
The crescents of lavender under my daughter’s
sleepy eyes...

All these extravagant iolite existences now carry
the tinge of you, Maggie Lee; hold your memory
in their shadows: your life
touches mine as I walk beside the flowing Cannon River

or pause on stairs imagined by you, here in my town,
your town, our town, where there is, it seems, a constant well
of beauty, purpling and ethereal, renewed and renewing as
the hot petunias in the civic baskets will,
do, as drifts of phlox in the Carleton Arb
and that sunset band of cloud on the St. Olaf hill.
Joy Riggs
**Time Travelers**

Dad and I sit in canvas camp chairs on a patch of thirsty lawn in front of an unfamiliar band shell. While the high school and adult musicians tune their instruments, their director steals glances at the sky and checks his cell phone.

“Think it’s going to rain on us?” I ask Dad.

He gazes upward and makes an assessment based on decades of cloud-watching.

“We’re going to be cutting it close,” he says.

Positioned across the street from a grand old courthouse topped with a clock tower, the band shell is only two summers old, but it feels like it belongs. Residents and businesses raised $250,000 to erect the outdoor performance venue in the center of this small Illinois town, in the same park where my great-grandfather once directed a cornet band.

The concert kicks off with “The Star Spangled Banner,” and then the director announces: “Tonight’s all about playing fun stuff.”

As the first few bars of “Theme from Scooby Doo” float in the air around us, I scan the faces of other concertgoers, all strangers to me. Some are elderly, some are likely the parents of the younger players, and some appear close in age to my own three kids. Although my great-grandparents moved from this town a century ago to pursue greater musical opportunities, the setting feels all-so-familiar. It’s as though I am a child again, seated on a blanket in front of the courthouse in my small Minnesota hometown, watching my dad play the trumpet.

The sky grows darker, and the wind picks up. I continue to relive my childhood as the thirty-member community band plays an arrangement of themes from old TV comedy shows including *Happy Days*, *The Brady Bunch*, *Bewitched*, and *The Addams Family*. Midway through the concert, the director grasps the microphone and faces the audience. He thanks the sponsors and introduces Dad and me.

“This is Bill — and his daughter, — from Minnesota. Bill’s grandfather—grandfather, right?” He looks at my dad for affirmation, and Dad nods. “His grandfather directed the Aledo band in 1895.”

We rise from our chairs and wave to the crowd. The locals may think we are wacky to be so caught up in chasing the past, but I am pleased. I know Dad appreciates the recognition, and the chance to feel connected in a new way to a long-dead grandparent he wishes he’d known better.
The papa, the papa. Tradition! Questions flit in and out of my mind while I listen to the next medley, from *Fiddler on the Roof*. What would my great-grandfather think of our genealogical expedition to his old stomping grounds? How many of his concerts were foiled by rain? And—a question that begs to be asked—how would he have handled that arrangement of the Scooby Doo theme?

Storm clouds rumble overhead as the band plays its final number: the march from “El Capitan,” an operetta John Philip Sousa composed in 1895, the same year my great-grandfather directed concerts in the park where I am sitting.

If he were to magically appear before us, in a crazy sci-fi time travel scenario, it might please my great-grandfather to discover that Sousa compositions are still performed here more than a century later, and it might amuse him to know that outdoor concerts are still at the mercy of the weather—despite a modern director’s ability to receive storm updates from a telephone he keeps in his pocket.

But he might be most delighted by this truth: although community bands are not as prevalent as they were 100 years ago, they are alive and well—in Aledo, Illinois, and in towns big and small across the country. Despite all the other entertainment options available to them on this June evening in 2007, more than one hundred people chose to gather at a park to hear their friends and relatives present a live band concert, and for forty-five minutes, they were united in an experience that could not be replicated virtually.

The wind carries away the final notes of the march, and Dad and I applaud enthusiastically. Then we fold the chairs and dash to the car, minutes ahead of the downpour.
The other day we picked you up at the alley entrance. I imagine you exiting from your apartment building, taking the backdoor, emerging from the dark corridor between four-story redbrick buildings. Pigeons and sparrows watch, waiting to reclaim territory. Before crossing the wasteland of the parking lot whose spaces are guarded by a banshee landlord, resentful ex-wife to the real estate demi-god who owns the rest of the block, you toss your week’s garbage into the standing dumpster. When we moved you to this section of St. Paul, you had just begun your studies at the music school. In your apartment building were other students living modestly as they attended classes, dreaming of walking in the footsteps of Prince, learning the business, studying composition, forming and dissolving partnerships and bands. Things don’t always work out. Schools close. Dreams dissipate, give way to others. We no longer enter the alley to pick you up at the back exit. Too many times the owner of the lot has scurried from her lookout to stare through the passenger window and rant at us. You cannot be here. This concrete is mine. No passing through. No entrance. No egress. She has no patience with idling cars waiting to pick up or drop off a friend, a relative. So now we park at the mouth of the alleyway, engine running, and wait for you to appear. Rent is cheap. This part of downtown, both dodgy and elegant, is not yet gentrified. On one side, around the corner or a few blocks down toward the river, you find a five-star restaurant, theaters, a staid and elegant hotel. In the other direction, the Dorothy Day Center anchors the neighborhood. Homeless share the benches in the plaza in front of your apartment building with the lunchtime business suits, the gathering pigeons, state employees on the way to the DMV, bankers heading to or from Wells Fargo. But the other day we didn’t have to wait for you to reach our rendezvous point. You were already there, standing at the mouth of the alley. Next to you, a man we didn’t know, a man who wore several layers of clothing, one over the other, who carried his real estate on his back, in his pockets, in his shoes, under a baseball cap, and in dusty, plastic bags from Walgreens and the Riverside Market. Next to him, with your long wavy hair and thick, rusty beard, you were the flipside. He older, you still in your twenties. He dark. You pale with a tendency to freckle. He living on the streets, you renting space. We pulled up, put on our blinkers, waited. You shared a cigarette and nodded at something he must have said. Your hand briefly settled on his shoulder as you listened to him. Through the window glass we heard your laughter, smiled to see you and the man smile, waited as you took your leave—a complicated exchange of hand gestures—and strode over to our car. “Friend of yours?” we asked as you fastened your seat belt, and we pulled into the traffic on St. Peter’s Street. “Nah, just started talking.”
Larry Gavin
**Fossils: Spring 2018**

Prehistoric heartbeats
echo through river rock.
The sound deep, resonant, failing
like their origin epochs:
Ordovician, Paleozoic, a lost meter
stumbled upon by just looking
down. The swirls and loops
forming the spinning, preferred,
shapes of the universe: nebulae,
solar systems. The circle that is time
repeats itself like our errors
repeat themselves eventually
becoming our own past, tiny
but insistent. Rock
doesn’t care,
doesn’t need to understand
itself, but we must to hear
the grammar of rocks
to understand the music of stars.

**Aubade**

Cresting the hill in low light a world
Of swamp and willow; sumac and blowdowns,
Snow and broken shadows blue-white.
Below, three hundred yards away, beagles
Greet the day. A cottontail roused from its form
Dog voices plaintive as the determined act
Of pursuit and the equally determined act of being
Pursued. The air, my breath, a beginning drifted
On another beginning. Snowshoes and fresh snow
This feeling. This world. All those things for which
We wish - all the ways the earth teaches us -
all we fail to really learn. The dogs, quiet now,
Search brush piles. The cottontail escapes
And daytime waits to patiently unfurl.
I rode my bike into the snowy woods to be alone. Over hundreds of miles of slow pedaling and slower walking, though, I rode my way into deep friendships, friendly rivalry, anonymous commiseration, miserable kinds of fun—into the small, weird, half-frozen world of fatbike racing. Some of us are fast, some are slow, a few are really slow. All of us love our fatbikes with their frame bags and bulbous tires, love our winter clothing and required gear: the puffies and buffs, the headlamps and the stoves, the sleeping pads and bags.

We all love riding our bikes into the snowy woods to be alone, and to be with each other for a minute, an hour, half the day, all night. In little groups, in pairs, or alone, we ride over corrugated snowmobile trails, through hibernating woods and swamps, up and down undulating hills and steep mountains. Wasn’t the trail bad after Gateway? Damn, I’ve never seen better track than the section before Melgeorges. Could you even see the markers on Two Top?

We ride in draining warmth and invigorating cold, into the blank walls of blizzards and the gauzy screens of ice fog, through short days under gray or blue skies and long nights lit by the moon, pinpricked by constellations, and slashed by shooting stars. That headwind on Elephant Lake was tough. My stupid thermometer stopped reading at minus 40. How about this bluebird day, huh? Wasn’t Orion bright last night?

Experiences now, ordeals occasionally, pleasures often, good stories always—tell them now, tell them later, tell them over and over. If you can, tell a story for every mile.

I know the storytellers and the characters by their helmets and their bikes and their names and their actions.

Ben and Jerry: not ice cream makers, but locals, a bookseller and a bikeseller, who made fatbike racing sound intriguing. Ben doesn’t race but Jerry finished the big one twice after after two tries.

Doom: a fast guy, one of the fastest. He offers endless advice, recommends gear, and even sells me his bike, a machine too good for me. We talk online, share hotel rooms on road trips, fist-bump at the start line before he sprints off with the other fast guys.

Minnesota Mark: a doctor and tireless racer, happy to share tips and stories and gossip. We’re the same speed, and ride together up the Continental Divide outside West Yellowstone and over the endless flats south of Lake Vermilion. He waits for me while I puke up my poor nutritional decisions.
JayP and T-Race: Idahoans from New Jersey, racers and race directors, inveterately fast but always friendly and encouraging. He’s short and skinny, she’s taller and solid, but they smile promiscuously, win races and show us how to enjoy the pursuit, not the catch.

Svetlana: strong, unfriendly. She breaks the rules and then blames others for getting caught.

Wisconsin Mark: blue collar in life and on the bike. If he respects you, he’ll help in every way he can: expensive tires, beef jerky, a round of beers. A grandpa who loves drinking Red Bull and arguing with liberals.

Perry and Josh: bros from Spearfish. Riding, they yell “Tatanka!” and make bison-horn salutes. A Black Hills thing?

Charly: A trash-talker with good legs and bad lungs. He drops out more than he finishes, but he's chipper and every once in a while he wins.

Bill: another local, loves riding and racing. He'd rather drive a long way than ride a long way. A great companion on road trips and a great fan on the trail.

Jill: young, fast, positive, rings her bell when she passes you. Ding ding! She wins, too, but she loves meeting the challenge of the races more than taking first place.

Aaron: an ex-Marine with a leatherneck’s all-in style. Ursine, friendly, happy to share a cigarette on the trail. Thanks but no thanks.

Dallas: a selfless endurance junkie, the only guy - so far - who’s saved me twice in one race: correcting my wrong turn and then helping me, frustrated and frostbit, fix a flat tire at crap o’clock in the morning in the woods south of the Boundary Waters.

Kid: bike-company PR guy, photographer, fly-fishing guru. He speaks in epigrams: “Ask yourself, ‘Am I in danger, or just uncomfortable?’ You have everything you need to go out and come around again. Stay constant.”

Stay constant. Even when you’re alone, everyone is there with you.
Orick Peterson

Becoming Community

At first, you were strangers.
We couldn’t see you.
You were all so different

that you all looked the same.

Later, we learned
your face and bearing.
We saw you were a person.
We could meet your eyes.

You were new in town, then,
no longer a stranger.
We learned we could smile
and you would smile back.

You were still different
but your own kind of different.
We learned to be glad
when we saw it was you.

After more time, you were
someone’s neighbor,
with your own ways, strange ways,
but not bad people.

We liked your children,
your food, your music.
And you weren’t SO different---
you mowed your lawn!

We learned you are like us,
but we love how you’re different.
We’re proud of ourselves
that we love your difference.

The years and troubles
have brought us closer.
When we all need help,
we help one another.

Now we say
you are just like us.
“Salt of the earth,”
we say, “like family.”

It’s true you’re family
to YOUR family,
to your American
citizen children.

Are we like family
to your family?
Are you and we brothers?
Are we your keepers?

How shall we keep you,
stranger, brother?
When ICE comes,
how shall we keep you?
Steve McCown

Haiku Corner

For Eric and Margit,
hosts of the annual haiku get together

East meets West
at 6th and Union,
Northfield’s haiku corner.
Neighbors gather in a circle,
recite haiku, their own and others,
under a row of cherry blossom trees.
Images of Mount Fuji, the moon,
ponds, water lilies, and spring
awaken senses, enlighten minds—
a group satori on the street.
Basho, Issa, and Shiki
are present in verse;
community combines cultures
in written words
read aloud to each other.
Carolyn Link
The Potluck Method

Three of my friends have brain cancer. Sarah was diagnosed five years ago, John last spring, Jennifer just months later. These are not far flung friends. They all live within a couple of miles from each other and me in the same greater Minnesota town. It makes you worry about hot spots, those unusual concentrations of disease in certain geographies. It makes you feel vulnerable, in addition to the sadness and the concern. It makes you wonder how to explain it at the dinner table.

What I told my kids, and what I think and hope is true, is that we do not live in a hot spot. We and our neighbors are not marked for this awful disease. Perhaps three people we care about have brain cancer—or rather we know that these three people have brain cancer—because we are fortunate to have a broad and strong social network. We know our neighbors. We’ve pulled weeds and shared potlucks and raised funds and cheered teams alongside these people.

Last March, an ambulance pulled up to John’s house. Within minutes, three neighbors were on the porch. One drove his wife to the hospital to meet John in the emergency room. One took the dog home with her. The third waited for the teenagers to arrive home. Forty-eight hours, two hospitals, and several high-tech procedures later, we learned about the brain tumor. Later, we learned that it is inoperable. Later still, John embarked on a course of intensive treatment.

We don’t know exactly what lies ahead. But one thing is clear: whatever the medical outcome, this family will be supported by a network of people who care. Friends will drive John to treatment, preventing his wife from covering all the miles herself, exhausted and distracted. Others will deliver meals, assuring the family remembers to eat. Another friend has a specialist to recommend. Someone else covers a work shift. Still others will make it clear in words and action that the teenagers are loved and cared for by many.

That John and his family have this social support network is no accident. It was built over time, potluck-by-potluck, committee-by-committee, park clean up by park clean up.

Remember that scene in It’s a Wonderful Life, when George Bailey is in crisis and the people of Bedford Falls rush to his aid? Social connections were not newly created in that moment, they were tapped. George Bailey had built his network of social connections by knowing and caring for and trusting his neighbors in good times and bad over the course of a lifetime.

We know from research that positive social connections lead to good health outcomes in both the short and the long-term. Strong relationships with friends and neighbors help people to be more involved in their communities, perform better in school, and live happier and healthier lives. Plus, when we build that good will, those shared values, that sense that one good turn deserves another, we reap untold benefits for our families and our communities.
And, if you are lucky, when the chips are down and your neighbor is ill, you will have the privilege of lending a hand.
Southwest Pastoral

Dust settles on the old beater, a hunk of rusted metal with heat waves coming off it, surrounded by red earth. Eastward, a highway crawls through the wilderness. Lonely semis driven by sunburned men occasionally pass by. The old beater stays where it is. Once the flagship of a family vacation, its hollowed shell provides shelter; a cool refuge for snakes and lizards and feral dogs that sleep all day. The bones of their meals are bleached white by the sun.

If you looked closely you could see the speck of a town on the horizon. A waystation containing a Carl’s Junior, a family-run convenience store, and two competing gas stations. Who lives there, in that modern hamlet which is even less substantial than some rusty car, (now the site of an entire microcosm of the world) that broke down in 1987 and never started up again? Who works to feed the men in the big trucks, the hungry families in search of a bathroom, the group of dusty, tired rogues with black plastic water jugs in need of a nap and a charging station, maybe, or a sandwich and a shower.

I asked my father once where all the workers, the ones that manage this traveler’s oasis, live. He said, they commute. From where? We are nowhere. There is nothing around us for miles. Nothing but the black road and the burning sun.

Ode to the Strawberry Tree Planted at my Childhood Home

You were planted, a relic to my blooming fertility. After I cried my heart out, mourning my childhood, My mother took me to the plant nursery in our neighborhood and I saw you, and your red berries told me you were special. “We will plant this tree to honor you,” Mama said, which is why she took my bloody underwear and placed in in the dark earth, where you took root. It has been ten years since then, and I wonder just how much you’ve grown.
Do overripe berries still fall from your limbs, 
and create red stains on the soil beneath you? 
Or, have you stopped bleeding and aching, just like I have? 
Have you grown taller, or have you 
simply stopped— been completed: 
Growing thicker but not longer? 
Robust. That’s what my mother called it. 
You are what my mother intended me to be, 
A fruit tree sprouted from my own DNA.

I haven’t visited you in many years. 
Maybe you were never mine—perhaps you’re my mother’s, 
and you died like she did, one day in mid-April 
with disease in your veins and fruit and leaves. 
I shall never know unless I visit you, 
a backyard shrine to maturation, 
growth, and the bearing ripe fruit for others to eat. 
Dying, decaying, rotting in the earth 
like blood-stained child’s panties.
Sarah Entenmann

Ode to Northfield

In the city of 20 thousand
Teachers, I learned to
Speak 20 languages,
Dance to 20 rhythms,
Read 20 books a year,
Sing on 20 instruments,
Run 20 wooded miles,
Make 20 treasured friends,
And grow old graciously
Beside the river,
Learning all the time.