

ARCHIVES

2008 Poetry Issue

Concord of sweet sounds

by adminnewspack
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*The man that hath no music in himself,
Nor is not mov'd with concord of sweet sounds,
Is fit for treasons, stratagems, and spoils;
The motions of his spirit are dull as night,
And his affections dark as Erebus.
Let no such man be trusted.*
William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice*

There is nothing so heartening about the literary vitality of the *Indy*'s readership than looking at the submissions to our annual poetry contest. We experienced an increase in submissions of nearly 60 percent over last year, and our panel of judges all poets themselves struggled mightily to winnow the field down to the verses published in this issue.

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 **BROOKDALE**
SENIOR LIVING

by James Brown and his backing combo. A heavy metal band makes an appearance in a third poem, while the chirpings of mysterious birds may or may not be heard in our winning poem.

This motif of music that courses through our winners may tell us something about the essential function of poetry, regardless of its verse forms and subject matter: That the versifier's task is to make words transcend literalness and harmonize with other similarly liberated words to create new meanings that are as rich as they are surprising. *David Fellerath*

Please join this year's winners and some of our judges Friday, April 18, at 8 p.m. for a reading and reception at Open Eye Cafe, 101 S. Greensboro St., Carrboro.

Click  listen to listen to the poets read their poems. You'll need the free Flash Player, if you don't already have it.

First Place

AKA Decanter

By Jenny Jennings Foerst

Doing all my starlings in,
I've ice-plumed absinthe.
Wherefore did it puzzle
nor warble clearly violet?

This is not a jigsaw floe
or key to entry here,
and *this* is not a field guide's
rendering of enigma,
no thicket's raven windcall.

Judge's Comments: "AKA Decanter" asks many more questions than it answers; it tells you what is *not* a lot more than what is; what it offers is equal to what it asks from a reader: engagement. And what a great collection of words! This is a poem written with love for its language and channeled through a mirroring form that turns starlings into ravens, puzzles into jigsaws into enigmas, warbles into windcalls. Field guides are just a record of what one has seen *this* poem, with its wealth of surprises, opens up a door on the unseeable, the unsayable.
Ken Rumble

As far as **Jenny Jennings Foerst** knows, not only is this the first time she's entered the *Indy* poetry contest, this is the first time she's had a work of verse published. But she's been published before as a holder of an English Ph.D. Foerst, formerly of Florida, read William Faulkner and Henry James during her studies at UNC-Chapel Hill, and her master's thesis was published in *The Faulkner Journal*. After completing her dissertation (a post-feminist deconstruction focused on Faulkner's *Absalom, Absalom!* and James' *The Golden Bowl*) she

took a couple of local teaching jobs but didn't go into academia. "My husband was settled here and doing well in high tech industry. Most of the available [college] teaching jobs were in rural areas where you can't get other jobs." Foerst, who lives in Cary with her husband and 12-year-old son, is an editor/ writer at RTI International. Her poetry writing is casualbut chronic. "I just scribble when something comes to me," she says. "I have lots of these that are 10 years old."

Foerst almost didn't submit her winning poem: "I'm very long-winded and academic, and I was looking for a longer [poem]. I couldn't find a longer one in my files, so I opened up the computer and said, 'What is this?' I was under deadline."

Second Place

It's a Man's World

By Richard Allen

*There are seven acknowledged wonders of the world...
you are about to witness the eighth.
Standing in the spotlight on showcase, twelve young men
who have given you such tunes as 'The Grunt,'
'Pass the Peas, 'Gimme Some More'...
Ladies and gentlemen, without no doubt,
these ... are the J.B.'s!**

Hot light floods the stage. Turned out
in brown gabardine, the baddest band in this Super Bad world
throws down the intro groove to "Gimme Some More."
Jabo, stretching out some locomotive eighth-
note hi-hats, lets out a high-pitched grunt
of satisfaction as his snare spits. An arc of men
encircles Mr. Dynamite, the slow-burn horn men
blowing low blue flames. Without a doubt
they're disciplined as they are dapper, stiff-backed grunts
in James' army, staging coups in theaters world-

Judge's

Comments:

With "It's A Man's World," Richard Allen has succeeded at something the Godfather himself could not doarticulating James Brown. With the rhythmic flair of longtime James Brown compere Danny Ray, Allen sets the stage for his soulful ode: "Hot lights flood the stage. Turned out in brown gabardine, the baddest band in this Super Bad world." Allen goes further

wide. Another sojourn on the night train, tonight the eighth of forty dates. Already none remember anymore

which town they're you can have Watergate in any more than they recall the way they'd joked as journeymen beyond each bar's back doors, hoping for an eighth of eighty dollars for an after-hours set, cold sweat of doubt slickening their drumsticks, necks and valves, world-famous James observing incognito, letting out a grunt

of approval in the dark club's corner. Next day, with another grunt he'd drive them through audition: "It's a New Day," one more time from the bridge. Hired, they met the world in fresh cuts and new shoes, sharp young men straight from a Chattanooga dive or Cincinnati fish-fry outfit, doubtless tight enough for Friday night... Sold-out theater, Eighth

and U, NW: Ike drops a sour note into the eighth minute of "Soul Power" and with ten outstretched fingers and a grunt Soul Brother #1 lets him know four fins just dropped out of his paycheck. A backup singer winces. *If you want to earn more, you got to learn to be there for James. Get yourself together.* Thus these men get the bad news about their place in this Super Bad world.

Knees hit stage for the eighth time. The crowd cries out for more. James lets out a grunt as he rises up. These twelve young men don't doubt it's a man's world: it's the hardest working man's world.

**Introduction to "Doing it to Death" by the J.B.'s. 1973.*

using vivid, colorful language to introduce Brown's macho circle of minutemen, and before Allen's done, we've a panoramic view of the hardest-working band in the land:

"Jabo, stretching out some locomotive eighth-note high hats."

"the slow-burn horn men blowing low blue flames."

Then we're on the road, "Another sojourn on the night train," purveyors

of soul, getting the band's inside jokes about James' firm hand while dissecting his groans of approval from his salary-docking grunts.

What Richard Allen has accomplished with "It's a Man's World" is a poetic portrait of Mr. Dynamite and his workings, placing us behind his eyes and in the pocket of the funkiest music ever made. The poem, like the music, bumps on the one and leaves the audience instructing (x) "one more time from the bridge." Shirlette Ammons

RICHARD ALLEN studied poetry writing at New York University's M.F.A. program, under the tutelage of Galway Kinnell, an octogenarian who Allen says was "terrifyingly hale and hearty at that age, all his poems about wilderness and mountains."

Allen writes poetry as a sideline to his day job, which is the completion of his third year at Duke's law school before he takes a job next fall with a litigation firm in Washington, D.C.

There's nothing unusual about lawyers writing poetry. "I don't see much conflict there are other lawyers that write poetry," Allen says. "They're [activities for] different times of day." (When pressed, Allen says poetry is a 2 a.m. occupation, and the law is 8 a.m. to midnight.)

As for his poem, "I was interested in the sideman tradition ... great players playing in crack backing bands," says Allen, who was a DJ at UNC-Chapel Hill's WXYC. "They're some of the hardest-working men in show business, but they're not number one."

Third Place

Zero

By Debra Kaufman

Give me a zero,
naught, nada,
goose-egg, splat, love.
I mean not nobody
not nohow.
No lemon zest,
no saffron,
no zephyr to lift my hair,
my spirit. No zip,
no vigor, no thing,
not a soul.
I'm done with that zealot,
addict, fanatic,

Judge's Comments: I'm pleased to be writing about a poem by Debra Kaufman for the second year in a row. Like her winning entry from last year's contest, "The Rushing Way I Went, Where H is the Constant," "Zero" is a plunging pirouette, equal parts grace and speed. It opens with four acrobatic lines that start out as a cheer ("Give me a zero") and end as a tangle of limbs: in other words, "splat, love." I'm glad it's not me who's being so prettily excoriated here, but we've all been on one side or the other of this lopsided equation, and Kaufman's narrative of recrimination and self-reclamation is one with which we can all identify. But the real joy of this poem lies in Kaufman's hummingbird-light touch, which weaves the "callow yellow/ calla lily" and the "bass vibrato of a heavy-metal band" into a tinkling yet emphatic music-box melody. *Brian Howe*

For the second year in a row, **Debra Kaufman** has placed third in the *Indy* poetry contest, but it's surely a coincidence that her winning entry last year also carried echoes of math and physics: "The Rushing Way I Went, Where H is the Constant."

that callow yellow
 calla lily in love with the lurid,
 the melodramatic,
 the yellow yolk,
 the mean side of life.

I me mine, he'd chime,
 his voice waves concentric circles
 from his tinny heart through me
 to the trees to the lake.

My body felt not
 a simpatico tuning-fork vibe
 but a buzzing
 like a boat engine or weed eater
 or the bass vibrato
 of a heavy-metal band.
 Even the clouds had it
 in for him, he was sure,
 how they'd build up,
 conspiring to ruin his day,
 his always otherwise
 almost perfect day.

His eyes that blue, that blue
 of a blank high sky.

Kaufman, who lives with her family in Mebane, retired from Duke University two years ago to devote herself to writing full time. In addition to poetry, Kaufman also has been writing plays, which she's done off and on for about 10 years. "When I worked full time, it was hard for me to write plays," she says. "I kind of stopped for a while it's a bigger undertaking."

Earlier this month, Raleigh's Burning Coal Theatre staged a reading of her one-act, *Variations on a Dream* "the first play I wrote after I left Duke. It's an experimental play that takes place in a dream. It's all in dreamscape, you never see the waking person."

Kaufman says the play was influenced by Carl Jung. Kaufman says Jung believed that "dreams were expressions of soul.... [There's] the dreamer and the shadow, and the shadow is the part you don't want to look at in the dream life."

Honorable Mention

arson at the Conservatory (con fuoco)

By Jennifer Coon

Judge's Comments: *Con fuoco* means "to play with vigor," but the poet takes the literal translation of this musical term to play "with fire" and gives us the quirky perspective of an arsonist's delight in an orchestra of destruction. The idea is charming: a beautiful, symphonic kind of arson set at a musical conservatory. Through its striking auditory imagery, this little lyric poem embodies the burning instruments with musical wordplay. We can almost hear the hissing of fire through the S-sound in the lines, "the singe of brass/ drips to the floor like steamy tar." This

he can hear it
before the first spark erupts.
the achy old wood, moans,
nails scar floorboards
like a brand, and
then the music

his ears rage with the sounds,
cellos weep minor thirds and
dissonant fourths
(with the double basses)
the singe of brass
drips to the floor like steamy tar,
flames wispy under piano lids
lick C to B, char
ivory to ebony.
hollow wooden bodies
split in the dry heat,
metal strings spark like the touch
of a thousand fingers
at the neck
until the whole building,
lit like a Roman candle,
spits down ash, on
the corner of Bloor and Bay

moment of destruction is also the creation of song.
Jaimee Hills

For some reason, poetry seems unlikely to be inspired by the sort of event that would motivate a television crime show, but according to **Jennifer Coon**, there really was an arson at the conservatory. “I worked in Toronto, at the Royal Conservatory of Music,” she says. “There was an arson at the school two fires in a weekend we found out it was one of the maintenance guys.”

Coon, a native of Ontario, where she published poetry in several Canadian literary journals, moved to Durham a year and a half ago. While her husband works on his Ph.D. in religion at Duke, Coon directs the paralegal training program at Duke Continuing Studies, just a few blocks from her home.

“There are a lot of cultural differences, especially living in the South. I have a lot of things I could be writing about. One of the biggest things for me is that every day I’m reminded that you can carry guns in the U.S.A. You can’t carry handguns in Canada.”

On the other hand, Coon says, “I could deal with not seeing another flake of snow in my life, even though I’m

Canadian. I love the weather here.”

Final judge

Ken Rumble is the author of *Key Bridge* (Carolina Wren Press, 2007) and *President Letters* (Scantly Clad Press, 2008.) He is an artist-in-residence at Elsewhere Artist Collaborative and a member of the Lucifer Poetics Group. His poems have appeared in *Talisman*, *Wherever We Put Our Hats*, *Cranky*, *Parakeet*, *Fascicle* and others. He lives in Greensboro.

Preliminary panel

Shirlette Ammons is a poet, writer, musician and director of an arts program for children. Her forthcoming collection of poetry, *Matching Skin*, will be published by Carolina Wren Press in May 2008 with an accompanying CD and a host of guest artists. Her first collection of poetry, *Stumphole: Aunthology of Bakwoods Blood*, was published in September 2002. She is also vocalist and co-bassist for the hip-hop rock band mosadi music, whose debut album, *The Window*, was self-released in 2006. Her poetry and essays appear in *The Ringing Ear: Black Poets Lean South* (University of Georgia Press), *What Your Mama Never Told You: True Stories about Love and Sex* (Graphia Press), *The Asheville Review* and other publications. She has received the Kathryn H. Wallace Award for Artists in Community Service and the United Arts Council Emerging Artist Grant for songwriting. Ammons resides in Durham with her partner and their dog, Zaji.

Jaimee Hills lives in Durham and is a freelance writer for the *Independent Weekly*. Her poetry has appeared in journals such as the *Mississippi Review* and the *Kennesaw Review*, and is forthcoming in the online journal *Blackbird*. Her work was selected for inclusion in the *Best New Poets 2006* anthology. She holds an M.A. in Writing Seminars from Johns Hopkins University and an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and she is a former editor of *Backwards City Review*.

Brian Howe contributes to the *Independent Weekly*, *Pitchfork Media* and *Paste Magazine*. His poems and sound art have appeared in a variety of publications, including *Octopus*, *Fascicle*, *MiPOesias*, [McSweeney's.net](#), *Soft Targets*, *Effing Magazine*, *Cannibal*, *Word for / Word* and *The Village Rambler*. He is the creator of the electro-poetic project *Glossolalia*. His chapbook *Guitar Smash* was published by Atlanta's 3rdness Press in 2006.