

Blue Requiem

By Devreaux Baker

Tonight, the sounds of my neighbor's bass guitar remind me that the blues come from some geography of the wandering spirit like Odysseus forever searching for the way home again. The journeys of body and soul always begin in unlikely places from ancient deserts filled with the arc and curve of war time flares or drumbeats of nomadic tribes to bay water shacks of gumbo kings anxious to elevate lives with food and music way beyond hunger or pain. It is no surprise that the blues followed a crazy path from slave ships anchored in terrible southern harbors all the way to bars in Mississippi, Chicago and New Orleans.

It was in how Gertrude "Ma" Rainey resurrected the image of a woman losing her man, and Bessie Smith became the undisputed Empress of all Delta Blues teaching us that sorrow always holds hands with love.

The Reverend Gary Davis moved gods and goddesses that slept inside the temple of our bones to shake loose lashes of lightning in the form and shape of dance moves that exhilarated the soul and set us free to traverse the sweet corridors of flight over and over again.

Blind Lemon Jefferson strummed notes that rose and fell on wings of desire until all of us came to believe there was going to be light at the end of that blind man's tunnel. Robert Johnson stood at the crossroads and called to all of us to shake free of whatever binds a soul and move outside the confines of a life to touch the splendid body of a morning that night had spent hours undressing.

When I walk down to the blowhole that sits at the edge of the ocean and listen to the rise and fall of waves that signal a new day, I hear a background of blues snaking its rhythms past slavery's chains and alcohol fueled visions. I move into the realm of blood, sweat and tears of future generations that gives birth to an elemental jive, a smoky infusion beginning and ending in some feast of notes where we all sit down together loosen our clothes and feel the ship dock in that lonesome harbor. This must be how the blues resurrects the misbegotten, forgotten, disappeared, and abandoned heart ache that resides in our terrain of ghosts. The place for marginalized voices to gather with their sheet music for the newly risen so that choral reckoning we have been waiting for all our lives can finally happen.

