

To These Poets
for Tato Laviera

These old poets,
these messengers
these teachers who come into our lives
from places beyond
with lessons to be learned
crafting similes and metaphors
comparing and contrasting
full of dramatic alliterations and dynamic allusions
flying rhythms and syncopated beats in harmonic fusion.
What is this gift that opens itself to see?
What is their cause and reason?
What is this message, and why?

These old masters
these word warriors
who give voice to highways in the cosmos of thought
who stand up
who rise up from their sprouting seeds
to be counted, to declare
to claim their place in the circle of life
who are *¡presente!* to confront injustice
and reach out to another
to show, to give, to nurture
who are mountains and thunderstorms,
lakes and gardens
who are songs of humanity
sad songs and fast songs
holy songs
songs that embrace and celebrate
songs that shine light into darkness

songs that are rooted in the real
full of passion
where even anger is a form of love
songs that heal

These teachers
this symphony of voices and meaning
this mothership of community
these spirit guides who call our names
this circle that pulses, burns and unravels
who hide in their internal silence
then burst into us like fire and sunlight
who paved the road long before we were born
and endured profound sacrifices we cannot even imagine
in our comfortable and spoiled lives
who marched through neighborhoods
armed with history and knowledge
to knock down indifferent doors
who lived in subsidized housing
who stood on pantry lines to feed their families
who forced open the gates of biased universities
so that our children, and each of you, could be educated
who dismantled the hypocrisy of apartheid
who brandished nation-building tools with visionary minds
who read books about art and revolution
and wrote the book of struggle and freedom
who descended from indigenous peoples
who were slaves in factories and warehouses
who moved from tenement to tenement
and from island to island
who lit candles with offerings to honor their ancestors
who raised their children and did not abandon them
who changed diapers, scrubbed floors, washed dishes

cooked delicious feasts every day, and did all that was necessary
 who buried their brothers and mothers
 and still found ways to console each other
 who never gave up when they were expected to fail
 who made magic in music and danced mean mambos
 who kicked butterflies and backstrokes in the oceans of survival
 farmed the land and harvested its bounty
 who transformed the limitations of ordinary existence
 into extraordinary creativity

To these mothers and fathers
 sisters and brothers, daughters and sons
 who embrace each other's differences
 who search for knowledge in obscure locations
 because they need to know
 and leave the stories and records of their poems
 long after they are gone
 with imagination that penetrates beyond thick walls
 transcending the boundaries of space with strength and elegance
 whose fresh water circulates in the river of our being
 who carry us to the shores of creation
 with words that are swords
 that fulfill and liberate
 that caress and adore
 that are tools to sculpt and shape paradigms
 that mark a path into the cinemascope of tomorrow
 to reach and teach all of us who will follow
 how to be fearless, to dare
 and to dream . . .

To each of these urban griots
 for each letter and syllable of sound sent to seek us
 for each word and verse that lifts us from the abyss

that comes to bless us
for each sincere intention selflessly given
for each thunderous cry that reaches the ears of heaven
for each door that opens to welcome us
for each bridge in the crossing
for each soul saved . . .

We celebrate your being and say thank you,
merci, arigato, danke, shukran, grazie, asante sana, gracias y mas . . .
con bendiciones recibidos en muchísimo ache.

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