

College Guild

P.O. Box 6448, Brunswick, ME 04011

POETRY CLUB II

Unit 3 of 7

Poems That Use Music as a Theme

The collection of poems in this unit have music as part of their imagery or theme. Many song lyrics, when written down, would read like poems. The poems included here are all in free verse, but with very different formatting. As you read them, think about the role of music and its importance in each poem. Do the line breaks and visual format affect the mood of the poems? (These four poems are from the anthology *Good Poems*, © 2002 Garrison Keillor.)

1. Discuss each of the four poems.

2. Write four original poems of your own.

INSTRUMENT OF CHOICE

She was a girl
no one ever chose
for teams or clubs
dances or dates,

so she chose the instrument
no one else wanted;
the tuba. Big as herself,
heavy as her heart,

its golden tubes
and coils encircled her
like a lover's embrace.
Its body pressed on hers.

Into its mouthpiece she blew
Life, its deep-throated
oompahs, oompahs sounding
almost, like mating cries

- Robert Phillips

SCRAMBLED EGGS AND WHISKEY

Scrambled eggs and whiskey
in the false-dawn light. Chicago,
a sweet town, bleak, God knows,
but sweet. Sometimes. And
weren't we fine tonight?

When Hank set up that limping
treble roll behind me
my horn just growled and I
thought my heart would burst.
And Brad M. pressing with the
soft stick and Joe-Anne
singing low. Here we are now
in the White Tower, leaning
one on another, too tired
to go home. But don't say a word,
don't tell a soul, they wouldn't
understand, they couldn't, never
in a million years, how fine
how magnificent we were
in that old club tonight.

- Hayden Carruth

HER DOOR

There was a time her door was never closed.

Her music box played "Für Elise" in plinks.

Her crib new-bought – I drew her sleeping there.

The little drawing sits beside my chair.

These days, she ornaments her hands with rings.

She's seventeen. Her door is one I knock.

There was a time I daily brushed her hair.

By window light – I bathed her, in the sink.

In sunny water, in the kitchen, there.

I've bought her several thousand things to wear,

And now this boy buys her silver rings.

He goes inside her room and shuts the door.

Those days, to rock her was a form of prayer.

She'd gaze at me, and blink, and I would sing

Of bees and horses, in the pasture, there.

The drawing sits as still as nap-time air –

Her curled-up hand – that precious line, her cheek...

Next year her door will stand, again, ajar

But she herself will not be living there.

- Mary Leader
(for her daughter Sara Marie)

ALLEY VIOLINIST

If you were an alley violinist

And they threw you money
From three windows

And the first note contained
A nickel and said:
When you play, we dance and
Sing, signed
A very poor family

And the second one contained
A dime and said:
I like your playing very much,
Signed
A sick old lady

And the last one contained
A dollar and said:
Beat it,

Would you:
Stand there and play?

Beat it?

Walk away playing your fiddle?

- Robert Lax