

## "Words' Worth" Poetry Readings

Poets at the Culture, Arts, and Parks Committee of the Seattle City Council.

### **Self Portrait As A Kite** by Tina Kelley

I am a yellow, green and turquoise Cellular Star,  
daughter of Fluted Sled and Hexagonal Roller,  
sister to a Rhombic Box, mother of a Mini Phantom.  
I am in love with a man-lifting train.

We come in the colors of kindergarten.  
My cousins drag lures for Polynesian fisherwomen,  
my aunt releases souls of Nepalese peasants into the heavens.  
I am the first item you put in your new home.

I am a six-winged cirrus asterisk within a star of David  
within a star of David, within a star of David; hear my prayer.  
I record batsong a mile high, pass notes  
to the sky, carry spinnakers of intercession.

When I was younger I wanted to cover my faces in sheet music,  
in snapshots, in newsprint and lists of things to do.  
In my lolling I kaleidoscope, changing shape from solid star  
to lacy snowflake, from wall of color to backlit tracery.

I have flown for three days at a stretch, and go out to greet  
the smallest sliver moon, relieved at its return.  
In aurora borealis I sing a lovesong to my skeleton,  
in bright cumulus I learn active verb, alleluia.

When the moon one night is brighter than full I wonder  
what tiny incarnation, what speck of a should ever merited  
the tremendous gift of living and seeing,  
and fit in the seed of myself? What was it?

### **Instructions From The Choir Director** by Tina Kelley

"The voice isn't an instrument that has buttons or keys to press,  
but you can control it with images. If you raise your hand  
at the end of a note, that in itself keeps the note from going flat."  
-Composer and director Fred West, November 1996

We start together by inhaling together, then picturing, quickly,  
how cherry trees hold their petals suspended above the ground.

And we start together, aiming together, six ball in the corner pocket,  
using the cue of his agile downbeat.

When we sing slowly we are asked to think of the spread of mosses and liverworts  
over the rocks from lakes and streams, up the hills, andante across the continents.

When we sing sforzando, we imagine a sun so bright and sudden  
it makes ours cast a shadow.

We learn deep breaths for the long whole notes,  
and lie back and think of England.

For pianissimo he tells us of his beloved,  
who breathes at night you can't hear her.

During the old hymns we picture fireworks,  
but fireworks without the grand finale.

As for the solo vibrato, he reminds me with his left hand  
of poplars in the still air.

I think of Julie Andrews thinking of chocolate mousse,  
Paul Simon contemplating the smooth grind of the earth on its axis,

Billie Holiday awash in returned letters.  
Perhaps those high baroque tenors ponder frying on a spit,

and overblown sopranos memorize the garish, decrepit  
tulip the day before the petals drop.

For intonation, there's the Cheshire cat, how it feels itself folded  
into harmony with the air, just before evaporating.

For elegant polish, he told us the story of singing "Gloria"  
up at Limerance Lake, at sunrise on the longest day of the year.

Do not think of the dull thud of the cracked plate placed on the table.  
Avoid, he tells us, any glance to the flowers on the altar,

the unfortunate dissonance  
of the daisy's stale smell.

And for the amen, think of cinching the last loop  
in signing a marriage certificate, think of the unity implied

on the tombstone that reads, "Children,  
some look, the mountain is out."

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