

When you listen to poetry/spoken word, what do you hear? Almost meditatively I hear this question echoing, but no one ever answers as if it were meant rhetorically. Posing this to myself, particularly since I am invited to read and listen to poetry quite often; I find myself forced to be cognizant of what is being said.

Beginning my mornings with an amalgamation of Jazz and poetry, I must say that my consciousness is supercharged by the spirits of Coltrane, Roach Om, Miles, the Last Poets, Ngoma, and other strong artists in “movement poetry”. Roach Om screams, “Money killed love, so what I was looking for is dead!” Now, that is enough to keep my mind moving for a few hours at the least. This is what I call movement poetry.

Calling it movement poetry is not an attempt to categorize it in such that it is a sort of neo-genre, but to emphasize what its effects are on me mentally and spiritually. One could argue that poetry has no real general purpose, other than to be an artsy expression; that would be because they have no purpose in their poetry, other than to be cathartic. Although poetry is an expression of ideas to be recreated as a revolution in the minds of its audiences; this allowed me to theorize that a poet, being the maker of the colorful paints, and the reader (being the one who paints the picture) is the real artist—whether skilled or not, thus making this a paradoxical relationship. Now we are getting somewhere, since this would turn the table on the understanding of how readers play a significant role in the reception and creation of art. However, interesting, I am beginning to digress. Back to the idea of the impact of this movement art; if someone builds on a steady diet of *movement poetry* as heard from renaissance artists that forces its partakers to think outside of themselves, despite it being delivered in a manner palatable as entertainment—it would be incumbent to think in such a revolutionized way as well in result. Poetry will then become more than just some words splashed onto pages and recited on open mic stages, but rather a movement.

If you really listen to the voice and spirit of the work; you would probably find yourself less entertained, and rather inspired to do more than you may already be doing unless it is with a fulgurate attention that you bend your mind to. It is really hard not to act when you hear the words “*My heart is a Djembe drum, played upon by the dark hands of a fifth street cappuccino...*” said by poet/activist Kamau Daaood; you can’t just hear those words and dismiss it with some banal adjective. Poet/activist Suzie Smith asks the question in her poem *Heroes*, “*Where all of our heroes have gone, as we pick them from our teeth...*” this is a good question that deserves at least some form of answering, instead of being seen as a hot-line.

“...because we have not understood our history, we have allowed ourselves to be bought and killed out of history...it is incumbent upon us to look as poets still poeting, *how do I go out and return with friends who have something relevant to say?*” —Sonia Sanchez

*Bum Rush the Page, L. R. Rivera & T. Medina*

So, why does so many questions in poems go unanswered, so many call-to-action are left fallen like the dust collected at the base of microphone stands? Have the crowds stopped listening for content because there is none, or is at all about the entertainment. There was once a time where being a poet and activist were almost synonymous of each other; where poets got involved beyond the open retort to ethnos-struggles in the community. Take a look at the post-'92 renaissance of Leimert Park, where artists and community leaders joined together to preserve their community, activism at the deepest core. This brought people together in such a way that even eighteen-years later people are continually being culturally enriched by its spirit of activism.

There is a song that is sung that goes unheard, for it waits in line for its turn, behind the misogyny, the exploited rap lyrics, it is the last one at the open mic spot; after all have had their fill and have taken their leave it is still waiting to be heard. A song that speaks the truth, the poem that lays it all out in exposition, but no one is here to listen to these songs of freedom. So what do you hear in the voice of poetry today, besides the catch phrases and quote-smacks?

Are you listening or just being entertained as folks run their lips and sounds pour out. Quiet your mind, silence the war inside your head that scream with distractions and listen to what you've been hearing, for what is being said should truly be heard...