

***Music from Words* (\$12.00 U.S.A., \$14.50 Canada) (Bellday Books, Inc., P.O. Box 37, Durham, NC 27702)**

By Marc Jampole

www.belldaybooks.com

Review by Pam Rosenblatt

Marc Jampole's *Music from Words* is a poetry read of great undertaking. Like the opera which he stylizes the book after, *Music from Words* takes an effort to understand.

Reading it more than once or twice gives you the opportunity to appreciate its content and worth. Jampole has written an experimental poetry book separated into five segments, much like five sections of a modern opera, called Opera and Arias, Love Songs, Abstract Music, Protest Songs, and Songs of Self.

Like the music of an opera, *Music from Word's* poetic words have an intensity which evokes emotions and feelings from the reader, or audience. The tone of the words conveys feelings that wake up emotions deeper within the reader.¹ And this seems to be what Jampole tries to achieve. His syntax, use of enjambment, and language all flow together is almost a musical way, as if John Cage wrote the piece, because technically there is no music heard out loud, or is there? Jampole's style of writing triggers either powerful enjoyment or severe sadness and disillusionment, even fear and anger. All these feelings are felt by audiences at successful operas like Giacomo Puccini's *La Bohème*² or Giuseppe Verdi's *Il trovatore*³. Operas tend to localize everyday emotions that people have, and so does Jampole's poems. Like operas, Jampole creates dramatic narratives and abstract works that deal with jealousy, impossible love, betrayal, friendship, and love-duty conflicts.⁴

¹ operamania.com/initiation.htm. *Guide to learning Opera*, 2007. p. 1.

² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/La_Bohème . *La bohème*, 2007. pp. 1-6.

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Il_Trovatore, *Il Trovatore*, 2007. pp. 1-5.

Let's take a look at "July 4", Jampole's opening poem in *Music from Words*. Here Jampole's speaker is an adult who recounts an encounter with a young girl at a picnic he went to. The tone has a musical and dramatic build-up that is playful.

And the three-year-old at the picnic
said she wanted to play the violin
and I said, just like Joe Venuti
and she said, you're a Joe Venuti
and I said, you're a Joe Venuti
and she pulled a tuft of grass and said,
here's some Joe Venuti
and she pointed to a sparrow scratching in the dust
and said, there's a Joe Venuti
and from a plastic bag she dumped
a bunch of Joe Venutis...

As you probably can figure out, the speaker is bantering back and forth with this child whose imagination is as active as the speaker's, and Jampole's himself. You can visualize all these "Joe Venutis" popping up all over the place at that special picnic.

The flow of the words, the enjambments, and the imagery make "July 4" a poem to celebrate. Like an opera, the poem evokes feelings, this time feelings of enjoyment and happiness. That is until the end, when a change in tone happens:

Later, like Marcus Aurelius
observing models of human behavior
we watched the ducks glide away
after the bread was gone.

The party had ended, and the fun for the speaker has come to a close. He had made a friend but just as "the ducks glide

⁴operamania.com/initiation.htm. *Guide to Opera*, 2007. p. 1.

away/after the bread was gone”, the speaker seems certain that the friendship was temporary. These final lines of “July 4” prepare the reader for a reading experience not suited for children, especially that charming little “three-year-old at the picnic” as “the ducks [have glided] away”. The reader may be able to easily read Jampole’s flowing words, but the reading comprehension level may be suited for adults who, can like to “Later, like Marcus Aurelius/ observ(e) models of human behavior”.

Just as “July 4” is about temporary friendship, Jampole has written “Afternoon on the Island (After Seurat)” (p. 29) which is a poem about impossible love, as he projects a woman with whom he is in love with into post-impressionistic painter Georges Seurat’s painting called *La Grande Jatte*, or *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte*, created from 1884-1886.⁵ At first read, “Afternoon on the Island” seems to impress the reader as light and gliding experience of the speaker viewing the painting. He says,

In a distance I see her,
past families with dogs, couples under trees,
beyond a trumpet player, last drops of rain
among shadows with concrete hardness.

The reader can visually imagine the scene: the speaker seems to be speaking about

Seurat’s painting where “families with dogs, couples under trees, beyond a trumpet player” can be viewed through Seurat’s Pointillism technique. Jampole describes this painting almost as vividly with words as the colorful oil paint Seurat used to create the painting. Jampole makes the situation come to life even more so when he writes, at the end of the poem, that he spots a woman he’s attracted to, “a woman I could love, or think of loving,”. It’s unclear if the woman is actually in the painting or if she really exists. What is clear is that the reader feels a sense of harmony, or “an

⁵ Thompson, Jon. “Georges Seurat”, *How To Read A Modern Painting*. (New York: harry n. abrams, inc.), 2006. pp. 50-53.

instant of harmonious motion," when the speaker first notices the mysterious woman "and the scene parses into stillness of one part/of one part of one part a moment when/objects transform to trembling specks of color." This feeling of at peace or "harmony" is achieved through words just as the feeling of "harmony" can be accomplished visually through the tones of paint and evoked through music, especially operatic music.

Jampole concludes "Afternoon on the Island" with an abstract, metaphorical comparison of poetry, art, and the opera. He writes:

a woman I could love, or think of living,
the thought like swarms of little dots
of color holding phrases holding words
holding phonemes holding elemental sounds
confused and orderly, soothing, disconcerting,
whole and parts, ordained and accidental,
as love is always, a new way of seeing,
a new way of not seeing.

Here Jampole captures the conflicts of tone and emotion, often intensified in opera, expressed through his poetic words through a metaphor of love.

Through articulate description and enjambment, Jampole has led the reader to understanding "love is always, a new way of seeing,/a new way of not seeing". In other words, love is a lot like music and poetry and art. It opens the mind and imagination to

seeing and feeling things in different ways.

Not all the poetry in *Music from Words* is friendship and love oriented. Some poems reveal the harsh realities of life, where even the most terrifying of fears come true, as seen in this next poem.

"Showing off the Roses" (pp. 12-13) is about an older man

who has Parkinson's disease. Through the poem's slow but moving rhythm and its descriptive words, Jampole makes certain the reader feels his speaker's distress and agony as well as courage. The speaker describes how life is for him now that he has Parkinson's disease, how he does "Move slowly,/see everything, always saw everything, always saw./More time now,/pushing muscles pushing back, more time now,/Show plants and bushes, dirt bulge like sponge cake round ceramic ladies./Then have lunch,/search for legs, stopped inside my frozen moment,/embarrassed by this stiff,/slow sadness..." The speaker has his routine but is hindered by his handicap. The reader feels the speaker's pain. Once again, a comparison of poetic words to operatic music – and music in general – and words can be made. Feelings and emotions are conjured up to evoke intense sadness. Again, Jampole has identified everyday sentiments that people have in ordinary or trying situations.

Jampole creates a violent and somewhat terrifying tone in "Ghost" (p. 62-63) as the speaker describes a dream that seems to become real.

In "Ghost", the speaker dreams of getting abducted and raped. The audience feels his fear as he is "Dreaming, soldiers lug me from plane/despite my claims, American citizen,/blinded, neck between my knees,/ ankles cuffed to wrists/motors whining, grumbling,/cars and planes and cars again./Where am I? What did I do?/Why can't I call my wife?" Through language and enjambment and tone, Jampole has dramatically drawn the reader into "Ghost" very quickly and effectively. The reader doesn't want to but does read on. And the poem gets more violent until the speaker says, "I wake to tranquil breathing: my wife,/gentle whir: the dryer downstairs,/ muffled roar: an SUV rumbling past our window." This isn't a poem for a "three-year-old at a picnic" to hear. Like in an opera, emotions of terror and anger are awakened. This poem is a far toss from "July 4", the opening poem in *Music from Words*.

And all of the poems get across the Jampole's intended tone.

The comparison of music to poetry clearly exists. Marc Jampole's *Music from Words* is a good read for adults who want to put their thinking caps on.

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