

Cheo Jeffery Allen Solder

Selected Poems

To be performed (words and music) at the event

“The First Black President:
Has Martin Luther King’s Dream Come True?”

9 February 2010
Hebbel Theater, Berlin, Germany

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false dawn

...prayer for barack obama

8/29/08

the light seems to come
and then it's gone again
not yet time for the sun
to birth the new day
some hours from now
the earth will turn
to reveal the chance
yet again
to rise
to work
to sing
to laugh
to try anew

barack is beautiful
no question
easy to love
no doubt
easy to admire
no question
easy to believe
no doubt
easy to follow
no question, no doubt

at heart he is sincere
his reasoning sound
he is fighting
the good fight
you can feel it
full of common sense
a secret socialist
just like fdr
just like w.e.b.
just like martin
just like malcolm
just like imamu
just what we need
he cares
he speaks
he acts
he leads
for you

and me
as americans

his rhetoric is long
speaking in tongues
eloquent and soaring
creating luscious rainbows
across the sky
of our collective possibilities
and so, so overdue
rain in a cracked and parched
deserted desert terrain

too bad
i am no american
not i
no american at all
history has taught me that
daily life
confirms and informs me
daily
though it is
all i know

i am tempted
even so
to put aside my anger
my own private wisdom
hard fought knowledge and
clarity to see
with wakeful eyes
of hyper alertness
some call it paranoia
this strong sensitivity
to every danger
fully cognizant
and ever aware
i am
of just where
i am
this slippery slope
peering and listening
through the cacophony
of 24/7 news and
distraction most purposeful
to understand
to react

to what is going on
every plan to destroy me
kill my children
strangle my hopes
poison my dreams
cancel my future
negate my very existence

i am tempted
to forgive and forget
to act like pretty words
and lofty thoughts
inspirational, integrationist's designs
can just wash away 400 years
can make me minimize
every unfair disadvantage
every length that i am behind
every insult to my humanity
every time i have been called
uncle
boy
colored
last
nigger

i am tempted
to forgive and forget
every inhuman torture
every unjust death
every precious life cut short
every soul not yet at rest
every survivor i see
of histories most savage
most heinous natural selective
test
struggling along
not beautiful
but doing their best

the temptation is great
to take my eye
off the ball
and forget that
a child of the sun
a lovely family brown
in the white man's
house

is not my goal
at all
at all

i am tempted
to forget that my goal
is african land
away from here in hell
the american nightmare
the myriad photo-ops
to the contraire
being posed after all
a nation of my own
not being tricked
by images of
awards
titles
special dispensations
faux gold

no scrooge am i
i celebrate
like you
tiger, oprah, cosby, belafonte
fity cents, beyonce, denzel, deval
and all the other rewarded
the richly deserving rest
because how can i
not be happy
when some talented one
breaks away and through
to the top
small and hollow
though the victories be
because they lack true power
or they serve machines
not in our hands
no scrooge am i
i celebrate like you
and follow their stories
and cherish their glories
and i cry too
when they fall
way, way too often

i am tempted to forget
the shimmering vision

that haunts my dreams
of a new nation
where a first family brown
is the norm
but not the house white
rather the house black
the african house
the house of alkebolan
united and whole
is my goal
since i am no american
katrina reminded me
under funded schools remind me
ghettos remind me
housing projects remind me
malt liquor reminds me
crack reminds me
gang violence reminds me
prisons remind me
cories remind me
poverty reminds me
dead heroes and heroines remind me
tougher ordinary times and lives
than miracles can rescue
remind me

yes
i am tempted
to forgive and forget
because the light he shines
is so right and square
so bright and fair
the smiles so sincere
the tears so real
the dance so happy
i long to join in
holding hands
in a multi-hued circle
singing songs of joy
longing again
to put this burden
this struggle
this fear
this fight away
to think and live
another way

the thing that stops
me up short
before i can gleefully shout
is that i see fear
in the eyes of all
who are about
“i hope they don’t kill him”
is the inner prayer
memories of blood
our most tender spot
it is whispered
on every corner
office
home
church
and vacant lot

our hearts have been broken before
we lost martin
they took
malcolm and medgar
so many others
too many others
famous and unknown others
to count
we’ve been here before
the false light before the dawn
the telling story is that we know
that he is but a man
not made of steel
but skin and bones
yet god’s light shines
from his glance
this love child of goats and corn

beyond that
we also need to be careful
pay close attention
don’t loose the thread
because he is not what he seems
this weaver of dreams
he is not there to serve us
as bad as we need him
he is there to serve them
this child of the sun
like deval
he speaks not for us

except in muted tones
under his breath
he speaks for them
and there is that
to ponder and admit

all this is hard truth
not wanted
but it is through
a clear glass we must look
to survive as always
nothing's changed
as long as we live in a world
where peerless beauty
and courageous truth
and god's gift to us
is in danger for shining
there is no alteration
there is no new day
there is only
the faint light
this timorous glow
cast in a yet another
false dawn
long night still to go

yet...

i pray he stays safe
i hope he wins
i pray he leads
i hope he is true
i pray he lives
just as
i hope we all
do so too

selah

elephants and memories

is it possible that we are actually free?

is the belated news just now reaching us
down here in the depths of hell
where we toil endlessly
age after age
generation after generation
believing in the myth of our
servitude and inferiority
long after the actual chains
have faded into swirling dust?

is that what it means
this sound of hands clapping
the sight of tears
coursing down so many
cheeks
brown, tan, pink
as a new era dawns?

oh, i am well aware
of the potential for violence
lurking in the hearts and minds
of the losing side
of such a lop sided victory
for our side at last

sort of a first round pounding
and knockout at the start
of the second
a foregone conclusion
at the weigh-in
a downcast eye
while the ref gave the same old
the same tired instructions
to both sides now
no hitting below here
no hitting back there
go to the neutral corner
follow my instructions
listen to me at all times
and protect yourself
at all times

did we finally hear it and
and comprehend at last
protect your self
at all times?
is this what it means?

they were scared
afraid to look
us in the eye
this one he called him
a rock star they shouted
too eloquent they moaned
too smart they groaned
is that what this fear
looks like on their faces?

we haven't won too many
this easy
usually we are bloodied and
though still standing at the end
we are too exhausted
to raise our fists
in the air
we are usually too polite to gloat
because the victorious margin
has been just too thin
defeat was close
and we got over
by the skin of our teeth
we were lucky
and we tip toed away
planning our next assault
for another day
of chip, chip, chipping away

is that what this means?

free at last, free at last
thank god almighty?
let's make no mistake about it
they took off the chains
and some of us went on our way
others remained tied to the soil
all of us remained tied to the toil
and to the nagging feeling

that somehow it was just a dream
this mythical thing called freedom
like a shell shocked soldier
we relive in constant and fast flashback fashion
the horror, taste the fear
and it ain't no accident, y'all
listen here

you see, in order to comprehend
to understand the mechanism
that is employed to hold a man
to grasp a woman
to beat a child
down
you have to first peep
the invisible threads
just the right buttons
that are used over and over again
to control the memories

let me explain it this way
have you ever seen an elephant in a circus?
a descendant of the mighty woolly mammoth?
one of the most fierce
and powerful creatures on land?
we've all seen them, yes?
yes, we have all seen them
doing docile tricks for our
amusement and light hearted wonder
this descendant of a mammal
that struck fear in all who were near
is doing silly parlor tricks
and being lead around by rope
tied about its muscled neck
with nary a thought of escape
or rebellion
to go on about its own business
doing whatever...
who could stop it?

understand the mechanism

when the beast is small
the trainer or breaker
- after all, all young things
are quite naturally wild -
places a huge chain around its neck

and attaches the chain to something
immovable
the baby pulls and pulls
and cannot get away
it is more than the baby's strength
to break
as time goes by
the chain gets smaller
until it can be replaced by a thin rope
that does not even have to be secured
because the grown elephant
has a long memory
it remembers the fear, the pain and frustration
it remembers pulling and pulling
to no avail
in the end
its own memory is used against it

now, there are other creatures
with even longer memories than
the elephant
like you
for instance

understand the mechanism
peep the strings
being pulled behind the scenes
check the buttons
being pushed behind the screens

it begins by cheapening life
making examples of all
who resist
for all who remain
it seemed a fair bargain
kill two to get one
this making of a slave

it continues by tall riders
in the night
bringing hooded terror
with a whip, gun and rope
by torches light

beatings and torture
are the rule
for those who get

too bold
and they leave the evidence
for all to see
and don't even hide
who they are
because it is to them
we must go
for justice, after all, after all

memories, like a corner of my mind

they take the true ones
those who would lead
and leave the bodies in plain sight
the blood, oh, the blood
what a fright

they lock up the bold ones
those who would fight
and never let them go
until it is too late
prison is all they know

they shut the schools
by taking the books
stopping the reading, written, 'rithmetic
and throw us a ball
there just ain't room for us all

they got the women
mad at the men
they got the men
mad at their daddies
they got the children
mad at everybody
nobody talking to nobody

if you're too smart
to be guided by thugs and
rhyming and unread children
they bought off the intelligencia
with fake jobs
with impressive titles
and real and steady money

or they got us on our knees

having turned out our
churches and spiritual centers
places of worship
and sources of
personal and communal strength
they got us
worshipping a shallow snapshot
of an emasculated revolutionary

jesus wasn't no punk, you know
he was a very dangerous man
they crucified him
for a reason, you know
he did not say
turn the other cheek
and lay down and just take it
he said
forgive them for their hate
and fight on with love
in your heart
using righteousness
as your guide
and the power of god
as your weapon

yeah, they got us all
turned around
twisted and turned
upside down

but like the elephant
a mighty beast
you can at the drop
of a hat
decide that you have had
enough of that

the last time
we were on the move
we shook
the world, y'all
our cry was heard
in every land

peeping the mechanism
understanding the buttons
gives you the power

to decide
do you fight
for your humanity
and theirs
with love
or do you go along
for the ride?

the elephant has
a long memory
so do you
just
remember who you are
overcome the latest
memories
have no fear
you will rise
not fall
original man and eve, the woman
remember who you are
mothers and fathers
to us all

his story
(history)

a new born babe
opens his eyes
and history begins
again

it happens every time
all over the world
whatever has come before
is all part
of the hazy and distant past

to them
what happened yesterday
is a story
being told
being heard
for the very first time

imagine yourself
just getting your start
and what you will know
from today on

a black man sits
in the white man's house
a latina sits
on the highest court

times are hard everywhere
people are out of work
your people are out of hope
too many people
are out on the streets
scarecrows and beggars
abound

a war is being fought
in far off lands
body bags are piling up
in all camps
and if you are
ghetto bound
it would appear
the war is being fought

on the block
where you live

the schools are out
of money and books
dispassionate and beleaguered
teachers go through
the motions
and count the heads
and the hours
of the day

there's no learning
going on here

certain blocks are safe
if you wear the red
and know the hand signs
other blocks are painted blue
and you walk around
walk around
walk around
if you know
what's good for you

your daddy is gone
if you are lucky
he's serving his country
in some way
fighting in the deserts
or making license plates
and steel furniture

or maybe you see him
everyday
and don't even know it
cause he is one
of the walking undead
that you hurry past
cause they scare
and disgust you

maybe you know exactly
where he is and
where he will forever
and always be
six feet under

and just up the way
in a green park
with grim statues
and names on stone

your baby momma and
grandmamma are there
doing the best they can
with no education
no qualification
or viable vocation
cause the schools
have been dead
a long, long time
around here

there's always
washing and ironing
cleaning and polishing
to be done
in somebody else's
big house
in a safe and
quiet place

there's always
somebody else's
children to fuss over
to make sure they
grow up
straight and sound
to take their place
as the new boss
and misses to be served
in the fullness
of their time

when you need a hug
when you need a kiss
when you got a question
that needs an answer
when you got a choice
that needs to be made
right or wrong
which one of these
the house is empty
or they just too tired

you find out
early on
that you need
a family around you
call it a posse
your boys
a club
a gang
all you know
is all you know

there is plenty
of learning
going on there
it don't take no
rocket scientist
to see it

big chucky
is the man
the leader of the clan
he got a plan
to put some change
in your pocket
a little foldin' green
in your empty hand
so you can get
the sneakers and the chain
a slice when you're empty

manhood for you
begins early
you got a job
and responsibility
a certain corner
to serve and protect
and in your circle
you got respect
you can even help out
baby momma
and big momma
just a little bit

if you get sent away
it ain't nothing to fear
it happens to all

the young men here
it gives you a chance
to really learn
your craft for real
'cause the streets
is mean
on the block
where you live

and if the candle
is cut short
you go out
like a warrior of old
it ain't nothing to fear
'cause it happens
all too often
to the young men
on these streets
and on the block
where you live

requiem

for baby boy and bobby hockless

don't ask me
to play the blues
'cause i ain't gonna do it
not me
not today
not me
don't even ask

no, i ain't playin'
nobody's blues

i know its the music
of my people
recognized and revered
as original expression
all over the world

folks always assume
that if you black
you love the blues
not me
i don't love the blues
i hate the blues

on the surface
it is harmless enough
just a simple scale

it begins
with a basic pentatonic scale
five little notes
that flow together easily
d f g a c, for instance
very nice
a logical ripple of
pretty little notes cascading
up and down and
though the air

the trouble starts
for me anyway
when the next note
the blue note is added
an a flat is inserted

between the g and
the a

no big deal
just one more note
but it's more than that
anybody with an ear
can tell you that
so much more

see
the added note is
in discord with the others
it is a halting addition
a haunting addition
a sideways sound

and in that off color
blue note
is contained
all the sadness
all the hurts
all the pain
all the rage
of a people
who know so much
sadness, hurt, pain and rage

just today
i read about another
lost soul
beaten to death
in chicago
for no reason
that makes sense

beaten to death
by brown children
just like him
for no earthly reason
or should i say
for no heavenly reason?
the devil's at work
here?

and i remember another
lost soul

my friend
bobby hockless
killed for a stolen beer
so long ago now
just shot down
like a mad dog
over a stolen beer

he was guilty, sure enough
he stole a 50 cent beer
and paid for it with his life

he wasn't a good boy
not like baby boy
in chicago
an honor student
no, bobby was just
a boy
a brown boy
who wanted a beer
and didn't want to pay
plus
he was too young anyway
to be drinkin' beer
and it cost him dear
oh dear

see?
that one little note
brings all that up
all the stories
all the fears
all the pain
all the rage
of so many lost souls

so,
don't ask me
to play the blues
not me
not today
not me
don't even ask

not if you care
what's good for me
and

not if you know
what's good for you

i ain't playin'
nobody's blues