

## Without Strings

It isn't like the other times, when I'm standing naked  
in front of an auditorium, on stage, holding  
a flute or some other instrument I have never learned  
how to play, expected to perform a virtuostic concerto.

In this one I am fully clothed. And, although  
the musical instrument is unusual, one neither you  
nor I have seen before, somehow I proceed  
with confidence, know that I will play it well, thrill  
the audience with new and unusual sounds.

Yet when I turn to take it from its case, I discover  
that all of the strings have been removed, ask  
the audience to pretend with me, hold it  
across my body, strum the air with one hand,  
fingering non-existent chords with the other, hum  
a melody that ought to be sounding. People grow restless,  
start to boo, tell the MC to shoo me off the stage.

And so I awake in disgrace, later realize that this dream  
is simply a metaphor for the present moment, as the poet  
stands before you with nothing to strum but his words,  
each of which has had its strings removed, can never produce  
more than the naked hum of music which is bursting  
from each of our souls, aching to be shared with the world.

Life is not a dream, despite what it says  
in the song. And this is good, I decide, because  
you will probably not boo me off the stage,  
show a bit of sympathy for this poet—  
and his verse as well—offering, when we conclude,  
at least a smattering of polite applause.

Steve Bloom  
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