

SPLEEN

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ATARAXIA

Light, weightless, movement at its most natural. Robes bring warmth, enfold and encase a ripe and noble form – the body of a God – but cannot shade the dazzling, taut physicality. Soft to the eye's touch, filling, overflowing the ear's cavernous palm, and yet – the hand dares not brush, nor grasp a single thread. For one is all in him, and though the slightest breath could not stir him; one finger may topple this temple.

Dan Harvey

C

THE SALARY MAN

I'm the celery-man.
I'm in white and pining,
sick in strings. Shaking
in sins. Walking on shins
spouting hymns. The lightness
in the head. Holy.
Rhythms abound.
Again I'm dressed,
in white and tied,
but good God untie me,
from my attempts;
keep hanging above.
That tree. Sit in on my
office. Protest.
Insipid pens
scribing. Officiate.
My room so well lit
lighting agencies are happy.

Eat me and taste
my flesh: let
enter that mouth
dry, confused; let it
become your word.

Have mine.

Wesley Zell



To a Friend – Translation by Aurelia Specker from A une amie (Madame Adélaïde Dufrenoy)

What new and dear occupations have deprived me of seeing you,
And interrupted the course of our conversations?
Tomorrow I will have counted a week
Since the moment when, solitary, anxious, low spirited,
Against the black poison that slowly kills me
I call for your help in vain:
My pain, always more cruel,
Has for only refuge your faith.
Indulgent and true friend,
Come and rescue me from myself;
Have pity on a madwoman,
Who, despite herself, gives in to the God who pursues her,
As long as the day lasts, as long as the night lasts,
She loses herself in that thought.
From that fatal love how can I recover?
What use will I make of my courage?
When, from an ungrateful man, I would like to free myself
I still cling on to my slavery;
Everything reminds me of my sweet pleasures now lost,
Alas! and against me conspires
Even my tender lute, no longer encouraged
By the noble harmony of its lyre.
But are they forever broken
Those divine bonds, that stemmed from
Friendship, Love and Glory?
Such perfect happiness, so many unremitting efforts
Don't they leave any memories?
Have I therefore become widow of his heart?
She upon whom the clever imposture
Cheerfully meditated my misfortune,
Is she worth his sacrificing such a pure flame!
Oh! tell me that, tired of her deceptive charms,
He will soon come back, ashamed of his betrayal,
To reward my faithfulness and my tears,
And above all do not worsen my grief,
With the tale of his wrongdoing, too quick to humiliate me;
I can forgive him the torments I suffer,
I cannot forgive the way that one may speak of him.

Phantom Hitchhikers

It was in the depths of dark October,
you glanced over to the passenger seat,
struck by a past recollected in sober
middle age. A ghostly girl, incomplete,

like the oaky smoke of her cigarette -
sixteen and laughing, in a battered coat
and second-hand satin dress. You forget
how she came by the felt hat with the note

of crimson mingling in amongst the brown.
You train your eyes back on the road and try
to quell the glowing embers and the crown
of thorns of thoughts of days you left to die.

Tell yourself *no use now, after the fact...*
but the girl is still there, and the girl still laughs.

Bethan Roberts

Man with the Toy Hand Grenade in Central Park

There is a man out there
who was once the boy standing by the Ramble,
with the grenade clutched in one hand,
and the anger of his father and mother,
even some of the boy's own,
solidifying the other's grip.
I had his shoes—
the ones he was wearing in the park.
Those blue skips that his grandmother
bought him every summer too,
with the laces that never got dirty fast enough,
and sat there in their white glory,
until he drowned them in mud.
The man wears both suspenders on his shoulders now,
that deranged smile dissipated.
I've even seen him in Central Park,
still knobby kneed and checkered,
holding the fists of his cross-eyed son,
as they walk west towards 5th Avenue.
I had his eyes too—
Not now, but in the mountains
where I waited for the boy to die off.
In my frenzied dawn of man,
my sister was singing "Tangled up in Blue" with the radio,
and I was strumming along on my rifle,
tapping my skip clad foot
to the rhythm of our rage:
the man's and mine.
I made my way out of the cabin,
into the clearing in the woods
where my sister cooked petals
for the creatures of the night,
where I shot my first bird,
burying it beneath the warm bed of a fawn.
I climbed onto the stone fence,
that swayed beneath my swelling feet,
hooked my spindly arms around the limbs of the apple tree,
and waited in the tree all night,
pointing my rifle at the spinning of recluses,
and screams of cougars,
waiting for the boy to die—
for him to fall out from my blue skips,
splatter onto the stone fence,

drown in the creek,
where my grandma stored her watermelons,
or die at the hands of my swift longbow,
so I could bury him by the bird
and be done with him.
The boy who is now a man,
went to the Ramble for his boy to die off too.
The grenade and the rifle—
they were just for nerve.
The boys died like babies were born.
All on their own.
But my boy didn't slip through the soles of my skips,
his boy didn't crawl out from his knickers and crew-cut.
We'd never let anything live before,
not the bird, not the fury that curled up in our pockets,
pushing aside our Swiss army knives and seams.
His boy just sat there.
The glorified shoelaces,
insisting on being white,
and mine snickered in the dark as I aimed my gun
at the moans of the hounds, guarding the silos,
and the Queen Anne's lace blowing against the porch steps,
at the dew collecting on the ferns beneath our feet,
and finally at the silence of morning.
That's how long I waited.
The boy sat there with his freckles and scabs,
waiting for an apology or a surrender.
I slid down the tree trunk and found my way to the cabin.

Our boys died off slowly,
the weapons stored away in cedar trunks
for our sons,
our rage along with them.
But every now and then,
I have his eyes again.

Nika Sabasteanski



Interview with singer and songwriter Nick Hampson

The 20 year-old Oxford student's success in the music industry is thriving, with his name put down under "Musician of the week" with the Huffington Post, his band's (Northeast Corridor) songs played on the BBC and soon to be out on iTunes, as well as several tours already completed.

1) You've accomplished a lot as a musician, with an album out and a tour in the USA and England. What are your future projects? Will there be a second album coming up?

For the time being my solo career is actually on hold while I focus on my band, Northeast Corridor. That's not to say I won't play on my own, but everything is now under the new name. For the record, to date I have only actually played one North American show. However, I will be back there on the 20th May in New York City to play a solo performance after the premier of our first music video at a big media event. As for future projects, our first single release is also going to be the 20th May, and we are set to headline the Oxford O2 Academy on 13th June!

2) You've also recently founded a band, Northeast Corridor. How did that come about? The band will be releasing an album pretty soon too, right?

Forming a band is something I have always wanted to do. Even when I was doing the solo thing, I wanted a band. But, I also knew that if you could control a crowd on your own then you could easily do it with a few mates behind you. The learning experience of playing alone was invaluable, and I definitely feel like a much better performer now in light of that. The band came about remarkably quickly. It started as a three piece in college, but we quickly realized that a fourth member was going to be a necessity. My sister, of all people, actually suggested Tom Stafford (our lead guitarist) – he was a friend of a friend of hers from school. I guess the rest is history. As for an album, our first single comes out May 20th – it's a new track called 'Where You're Sleeping Tonight'. We are talking to record companies at the moment and I hope something will be formalized soon. You'll have to wait until then for the album!

3) Where do you get your inspiration from ?

I have always found creative writing, of any sort, to be a decently accessible process. People talk a lot about 'writer's block', but I have never really experienced that. When I sit down to write, something is pretty much always there. This will sound weird, but I feel like I have crafted a method whereby I can actually kind of disappear into my own head... it's somewhat meditative I suppose, but when writing lyrics and poetry I always close my eyes and ignore peripheral thoughts until you can't think of anything except the black you can see. That's when the best ideas seem to come out.

To some extent I get inspiration from everything that is happening day to day, though I have become more and more interested in writing fictional narratives, inspired by 'real' people, or occurrences in my life. As in, you take something that someone said to you, and build something elaborate around it. One of my mentor's, the great Austin TX singer-songwriter Karen Mal, once told me to 'never let the truth get in the way of a good story'. You won't believe what those words have meant to me as a writer. The balance, when writing embellished accounts of real incidents, is to maintain a level of emotional connection to what you are writing about, such that whatever colours you paint something in, you always remember what it looked like as black and white. Otherwise you will get nothing out of singing those words night after night.

4) Do you find that there's a particularly rewarding moment in being a singer/songwriter? (e.g. finally penning down a song or performing on stage).

It's kind of funny, but I really don't see myself as a singer-songwriter any more. It's definitely something I have been, but I think I have evolved into something else... Within the context of my band, we all have a creative input into the songs. I tend to write something – chords and lyrics, and occasionally guitar riffs – and will take it into rehearsal and the other guys will change it up and add things, leaving their own mark. I think the most rewarding moment, for me personally, remains that moment after a show when someone comes up to you and tells you that something you said or wrote really meant something to them. I have a couple of songs which tend to provoke this reaction more than others. I got into songwriting to try and affect people in a positive way, like my songwriter heroes have affected me. There is nothing better than someone telling you that you have changed their life in a positive way, even if that simply means that something you wrote or said made them feel better about themselves. There ain't nothing sweeter than that. But, don't get me wrong – running out onto that stage is one of the best feelings in the world!

5) You've also performed in the US and are part American. Do you find that the American scene react differently to your music from that of the English one?

Not really. I mean, it has always been a certain type of person who listens and enjoys my stuff. I don't think it really makes a difference what country they live in. That's not to say my writing isn't influenced by the American culture I have seen and lived around. It definitely is. But, I think that music transcends culture barriers pretty easily, especially within the West. In the end, if a song is good then it will resonate with a lot of people, wherever they are. Same with lyrics – we're all human and we all spin in the same whirlpool of emotions and ideas. It's kind of like when someone is talking through a silent movie – you don't mind so long as what they are saying is interesting.

6) The lyrics to your songs are beautiful - to me they're like poetry. Do you spend as much time writing lyrics as you do composing the music? Are both parts of equal importance to you?

A year ago, I would have told you that lyrics were the be all and end all of the art of songwriting. I was obsessed. I used to listen to every poetic songwriter

imaginable and dissect every little idea and emotion until each one felt second nature to me as a person and as a writer. You know, sort of living within the songs you were listening to – starting to see the world through their various lenses of narrative. I would always disregard the first way I chose to describe something for the second way, as it is bound to be a more interesting way of looking at it. Now that I am fronting a band, whilst the lyrics remain just as important to me, the music has had to come up to match that importance. I'm no longer writing for an acoustic guitar and a single voice. I now have to write songs that have a much deeper set of dimensions, within which we can construct instrumental parts, more melodic lines, more harmony, etc... The game has changed. But, definitely for the better.

7) What do you hope to accomplish still (music-wise)?

Literally, everything. I feel like I have hardly scratched the surface of what is out there. However, I also don't view music making as a means to an end. Of course, it would be awesome to be successful. But, I make a point of playing every show as if it is my last. Each one is as important as the next. Sure, over time you start playing to more people, which is great, but you can always play to more people and to be obsessed with these sorts of trivialities would undoubtedly end in discontent. Yeah, I have dreams and goals like everyone does. Right now, I'm just glad things are going well.

Follow Nick Hampson on Twitter @NHampsonMusic, Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/NickHampsonMusic?fref=ts>), and **Soundcloud** (<https://soundcloud.com/nickhampson>).

Follow his band Northeast Corridor on Facebook playing at the O2 Academy the 13th June (<https://www.facebook.com/corridorband?fref=ts>). **Debut release "When You're Sleeping Tonight" out May 20th.**

Interviewed by Léa Carresse

KENWOOD IN AUTUMN

It's stalling. With the leaves hanging on,
Before the wind's playful shake
Pulls the strings, and teases them down. Down
upon the other used props piling in their wake.
Dogs bark and a prammed child cries
They are a drip in the stream, a cloud in the sky.
Released from my gaze they retreat away
Breaking back into their traditional scheme.
"That's the dog walked and later Lucy's coming round"
So we can take a fragment of her to stow away.
Cast it on the pile that already teems,
Fragile and temporally bound
To be crunched away.

William Yeldham

9th Floor View – A Haiku

Crooked pentangles
of sunshine. Silhouettes, light,
against marble floor.

Follow, levitate
(if only in my mind's eye)
above shimmering

squares of brick and glass.
Clashing palettes under skies
trusting, tranquil blue.

Ignaz Schneider



Attempts at Sleep

Poet, writer

Breathless on ground-

Ghost moment whispers past.

*

Le génie du poète... c'est une blague.

On ne pense jamais quand on écrit.

Ce n'est qu'une construction, un appareil faux pour convaincre le peuple et les critiques,

Pour les persuader à croire au sens d'un

Tas des mots choisis par hasard dans un orage des pensées et sentiments

Qui viennent de quelque fond cérébral, quelque fonction humaine sans mot dire

Duquel le poète s'acharne à sculpter quelque chose de profond

Dans une abîme des formes et possibilités.

Mais c'est pas l'Art pour l'art.

C'est l'exposition d'une cellule sentimentale.

Soit un grain de sable, soit un tableau, soit un univers

-soit une prison.

L'important, ce n'est pas le génie,

Mais le processus.

*

Those wavy lines on our eyelids when we sleep are the
framework for the images of the dreams we have.

*

Something I've been doing recently to

lull myself hypnotically is to
imagine a cassette and its spools of
tape moving slowly, imagining the
precise slow movements of the parts
Imagination shaping and playing with
all space and form in cinema-mind
grows into

Weird dark prophetic vision
Green energy breaking museums and
coursing through minds with
spontaneous art production
upload straight into galleries and
shopping centres get it everywhere
museums not only for what came
before

Art in the instant for the instant
//Modern-time is hyper-
accelerated into a constant NOW
which art to show destruction and
entropy of all things must imitate//
Worshipping a projected formless
'human form' edged out by neon light
Screaming in darkness, running
down dark street with flow of ideas
with explosive results

Turns into bodily fight with phlegm

Keeps up for over 2 hours

Was it sleep a dream a fit or vision?

Is there a difference? Can't tell

Make art faster and keep going fat

Write in a trance Write in a trance

Write in a trance Get it down

somewhere before it disappears and

the experience is gone from the

memory of humanity

Get it down before it's too late

There goes my lovely long sleep

again

Elliot Koubis

Down Here

Down here it's grey and damp in spring, cold and dry in winter, and a wasteland in autumn. It doesn't matter too much, although Maxim always mentions how the foreigners say it is so dirty here. He says that while he takes drags of his cigarette, in front of the Lenin monument, the one with his hand raised to the sky. It's -10 degrees, and while everyone else is warmly wrapped in coats, he shrugs, talks and gesticulates in a light sweater.

Igor is filming him now. He has to film him for this project they're doing together, for the institute they're studying in. Maxim recites a poem, a poem from Pushkin, "I love you." He recites it beautifully, expressively. He's an excellent actor. It's helped by his physiognomy, his dramatic, passionate features. Wide, lily-leaf green eyes, thick lips, high cheekbones and a wide-set jaw.

Igor stands still. Maxim's smoky voice dies away, signaling the last verse. Igor stops the video. He looks exactly like the typical Russian young man. Hair cut very short, almost shaved, strong features, fleshy lips twisted in a scowl, a heavy leather jacket thrown on broad shoulders, a silver Orthodox cross dangling from around the neck, old blue jeans. He shows Maxim the video, but Maxim isn't satisfied with it. He rarely is satisfied with whatever it is that he does.

"It won't do at all." Maxim growls, blowing the cigarette smoke through his nostrils. "Fair enough. Then let's film it by the Volga" Igor says, shrugging. "What, you think a change of scenery is necessary?" Maxim sarcastically replies. Maxim is particularly brusque. Those who don't know him fear him. He gazes around him with an unnerving, dominating glance. He knows exactly what he wants and has little time to waste. Within a few minutes he forms a definite opinion of people and doesn't back away from them.

I know he likes me, although he is very rough with me sometimes. He comes home in the evening, sometimes smelling of liquor, and he might be a bit violent if he is ill humored. He might break a few glasses, pull my hair instead of caressing it, grab my skirt and tear it. But it's OK. I always knew I was something special to him when I asked him his name, and he pretended not to understand the other foreigners, but he smiled at me indulgently and replied "Maxim." I would look back at him, and he nodded, amused, his bright eyes staring into mine.

But he would get impatient with me whenever he talked too fast and I failed to understand him. In which case he stared down at me, angry and condescending. I would come to Lyuda in tears, but Lyuda reassured me. "That is how he is. Don't cry. No use in crying. Come, look at the dress I made." Lyuda sewed wonderful wedding dresses, made in white silk, and so cheap. They sold very well.

"All the girls get married here so young. If they don't get married, it's seen as quite odd. The Russians, they wish the girls health, luck, and a young man. If you're pretty, they'll ask you if you have a fiancé. We're a people which earns so little money, and my dresses are cheap but of solid quality. Hence the success." Lyuda reasoned.

Lyuda knew Maxim from the theatre institute. She had been however in the year above him. Her career started out as incredibly successful within the Mariinsky theatre, but she fell madly in love with an officer from Vladimir who had arrived for a short time in St. Petersburg to visit distant relatives. She left everything behind, followed him to Vladimir, bore him a son, and he left her.

When he left, Lyuda didn't cry. "It happens," she said. She gathered her stuff and moved to Yaroslavl. "It's a bigger city, it's near Moscow but also near the countryside." She said. "Not very near Piter though" Maxim gruffly remarked, blowing more smoke.

"Piter belongs to the past." She simply answered, fingering the silk, feeling out the quality.

"Do you miss him?" Maxim asked, referring to Slava, Lyuda's former husband.

"Not really. Sometimes I wonder what he's doing now, where he is, how he feels. Sometimes, I think of how after a fight, he would come back sheepishly at the door with a huge bouquet of flowers in hand. Sometimes, I wonder if he will ever return one day to my door in exactly that way."

"How is Ilya? Does he not make up for Slava?"

"Maybe." Lyuda shrugged, sewing. "He's a bit useless, like most men. But he keeps my family happy and reassured about me."

Outside the night is dark blue and a damp wind blows through the empty streets. The streetlights leave a sallow orange light. The trees are bare, even if it is the end of April. The snow is here to stay until the end of May, Lyuda says.

Lyuda's son, Stas, crawls to Maxim's chair. Maxim laughs, picks him up, and Stas giggles.

“I hope he becomes like you Maxim.” Lyuda says affectionately.

“What, like me?” Maxim exclaims, surprised.

“Of course.”

“What, coarse and abrupt like me?”

“Free-spirited and full of life, like you are. Sing him one of your songs, or a few of the verses you wrote.”

I say nothing. I only watch. What Lyuda sees in Maxim, I saw it all in him from the very first day. The language barrier is painful. I wish I could tell him that he is all this and much more, but saying it without stuttering or getting confused mid-sentence is still too difficult. One day...

“Cut yourself some slack.” Igor once told me. “You’ve only come here a few months ago, and you could hardly get a word out. I swear that you speak better now. Your accent is disappearing.”

“A lot better?”

“Maybe not a lot better, but you’ve definitely made progress.”

Igor and I have an odd relationship. It remains unknown to Maxim. Some strange attraction exists between us. I lay down the bed once, tired, and he sat next to me. But before any of us knew what we were doing, he ended up in my arms, between my legs, his head on my chest, and I was kissing him.

“You cannot ever tell Maxim about this.” Igor said.

Not that I ever would! As though I would risk losing him, see his face contort itself and turn red with rage and humiliation...

Maxim had a difficult relationship with his father. He had also been feared, a powerful member of the NKVD, with a cruel face and many Soviet medals and pins hanging from the lapels and chest pockets of his uniform. Sometimes I stare at the picture hanging from the wall in Maksim’s room, next to a series of family portraits.

My favorite one is the mid twentieth-century portrait of Maksim's father's uncle. He was brought to the penal military unit, after he had made a harmless joke about the Stalin. The soldiers in his unit had all successfully been used as cannon fodder during the defense of the area around Leningrad. Only he had miraculously survived. Stalin's men couldn't believe it. They punished him for surviving, shot him in the legs, and he never could walk again. He never talked about the war. He remained silent most of the time.

Sometimes I wonder how I arrived here and why I love with such ardor this country inhabited with passion, strife, violence, trauma, love and beauty. This country of extremes, where the cold whips and slaps your face in winter, where the heat crushes you in summer, when the smoke curls over the towns and cities. It is a cruel but magnificent country.

Maxim leans over the fence railings that separate the Volga from us, and looks into the distance, to the golden domes of the church, next to where the eternal flame resides with the red flowers around it.

“My great and powerful Russia...” he sighs, smiling. “I won't ever sacrifice it for anything in the world. I hate it sometimes. I hate it most of the time. But you know what I hate the most?”

“I hate it when foreigners criticize it. They can't and won't ever understand what happens down here. How and why we do things down here. Down here – it's our mystery, our source of power, joy, misery, and wonder. No one can take it away from us.”

“Down here. In Russia.”

Léa Carresse



Down the Lines

Cold feet swinging, forced, I stretch
deep riverwards with bloodless toes,
and twitching limbs hooked through pipes,
as the serpent breathes beneath me.

Coal-toned altostratus in
grey woodland bridge and shoulder-blades,
pinched skin and cold, with blistered hands,
grey woodland bridge and shoulder-blades.

Pressed together they are the wings
of a butterfly but sharp enough
to slit a throat or open cans
or lock a wrist between them.

O river's daughter etching figure eight
in rolling glass, with itching palms,
the rhubarb plants: your wretched
pleas cannot disturb the past.

Jessica McKeown

I think we are all blessed with strangeness....

I think we are all blessed with strangeness,
because we are all with strange dreams, blessed.

I find it strange, to say all we are
is blessed.

I find it blessed, to say all we are
is strange.

In my dreams, I find this strangeness;

blessed.

Wesley Zell

Handwriting

It's my scrawl, my coded cipher.

Armed from the others with floppy t's and blurred e's.

It used to be "sloppy" : " Hand writing clinic for you I think

Mr.....",

But now it is artistic "Wow what lovely writing,

you can't read it ... but still".

So through my life I've strewn these snapshots,

In the margins of library books and reluctant thank you cards.

They go with me, a crumbling shadow

on which to build my character

with a thousand strokes

and puppet strings.

William Yeldham

Electroshock

In the days subsequent my steps are faltering,
and we walk together, cherry trees blossoming,
spreading dusky petals, our presence altering
theirs to parodies of confetti. “What’s coming

next?” you ask. “I suppose now all this madness’s
done with?” But your face gives the truth of it;
so I, etherised now against all sadnesses
or repulsed emotion, say nothing, sit.

Circuitous falls of petals that turn
vermillion in fading amber light
mock your anger; the cloud-tops redly burn
in my sympathy as day bleeds to night;

and I know not to dare to wish or dream,
and I know each dull petal masks a scream.

Bethan Roberts

