

DITHYRAMB IMPROMPTU

A tall man with a banjo leaned against the Ozarks,
propped his boot on granite, made himself a song.
He borrowed chords from falling water
down the deepest canyon wall; he sang
of blowing cottonwood and bluestem miles of prairie
tomorrowed with the off-key bawl of calving.

He saved insistent rhythm from an Appaloosa hoof,
a pumping well and tin roof rain,
the ragged rugged meter of the languages that met,
a Hopi shuttling sunset through a rug loom.

Two cowboys mouthed harmonicas, puffing out the melody,
hummed loneliness and thumbed some badlands bass.
A Choctaw added drumming, like the coming of a twister,
like the warning of a rattler and the fear-beat of a doe.

Play the ranging polyrhythms changing green to gray
or tan, heathen heat that stills the windmill,
spirals deep inside the core drill, thrums
the alto obbligato for the dreamer and the drum.

Other voices join in. The ballad changes key
from minor to major and back again:
Dustscape, windscape, miles of mood as black as crude,
maggie eighth notes perched on barbwire staffs,
salt-flat hopes pitched higher-toned and sharp.

Tighten old guitar strings, patch and stitch the tune,
lighten with the lupine, touch a wing.
Listen to the underlilt, the afterbeat of thunder,
whistle up the wonder of thistledown and sand hill,
modulate the sounds from silversmith and logger.

Scale it all to satisfy harmony's quest.
And sing! Another chorus of the West.

--Glenna Holloway