

# CYCLES

Generative Poetry Writing Workshop

## **Vol 1: July 17<sup>th</sup>, Mixtaped Memories**

Facilitated by PaulconQueso

& sponsored by ArtDefined Inc.



## Mixtaped Memories:

How does music bleed into our poetry?

And how can we invoke our memories using references to music or sampling lyrics?

Somewhere between a Jukebox poem & a Memoir piece, we get 'Mixtaped Memory' poetry...

Sensory details / memories mixed with music to time machine us back to that memory / moment.

## Music in poetry...

- Should our poetry be musical?
- Is poetry inherently musical / lyrical in nature?
- How can music transport us?

# History of the Lyric poem:

In antiquity, poems were often sung: the first lyric poets in ancient Greece performed their work to the accompaniment of the lyre, and the oldest anthology of Chinese poetry, the Shijing, was a collection of songs.



In southern Europe in the middle ages, the popularity of troubadour poets granted them unprecedented freedom of speech and social influence in their time, and their lyrical work would influence European poetry for centuries.

Lyric poetry is made up of two forms with many sub-genres. Nonetheless, a common feature in all the subdivisions is the use of great emotion and thought. Traditionally, the refrain was commonly used and included one or several lines that end or follow a strophe and is then repeated throughout the poem, either exact or with a slight variation. However, today the use of refrains is quite rare outside of music.

Lyric poetry is made of two main types: elegy and ode.

Elegy: A poem of mourning or reflection on the death of an individual.

Ode: A serious or thoughtful poem, usually with a formal structure.

Both elegies and odes can be sub-divided into several different kinds of poetry.

The most popular form of lyric [poetry](#) is the 14-line sonnet (generally a sub-division of an ode), either in Petrarchan or Shakespearean form, in Western civilization. The Petrarchan [form](#) is a sonnet consisting of an octave rhyming abbaabba followed by a sestet of cddcee or cdecde. On the other hand, Shakespearean consists of three quatrains of abab cdcd efef followed by a couplet, gg. Shakespearean sonnets generally use iambic pentameter.

The ballad form continues to be a common form for both poems and songs. Other poetic forms that began as songs include Odes and Villanelles. Today, poets still draw on the forms and rhythms of different musical traditions, from jazz, rap, and hip-hop to folk songs and country music.

'Music' by Sophocles

*Music*

By Memory's daughters,  
the Muses,  
Forgetting,  
named Lethe, is hated  
And not to be loved.  
O for mortals, what  
Power there is in songs,  
What greatest happiness  
That can make bearable this  
Short narrow channel of life!

*Translations from the Greek by Reginald Gibbons*

# 5 minute freewrite:

In LIST or bulleted form:

- As many of your favorite music artists or songs as you can think of.
- 5 songs or artists that remind you of someone, and who that person is.
  
- Pick one song. Write a few sentences about what, if anything, you find poetic about it.
- Same song. Write down as many of the lyrics as you can remember off the top of your head.
- Same song. Write 5 words that describe how you feel when you listen to it.
- Same song. Write the story of when you first listened to the song.
- Same song. Write 5 people, places or things that song makes you think of.

Added challenge:

- Turn this list into a SONNET (Remix!) over the next week
  - -14 lines
  - -Abab cdcd efef gg (Shakespearean)
  - -Abba abba ccddee or cdecde (Petrarchan)
    - But put your own stank on it!

# Music as a means to tell a story & capture your culture / history

[Victoria DelValle: "Aguanile"](#)

(sampling Hector Lavoe – "Aguanile")



# Music as memory's time machine:

Jaquira Díaz

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## December

Every year around December you come back to me in dreams, except you're a man now, tall like your father, dark like your mother, with a fly Miami accent and a low fade, an amateur boxer with a dope left hook, the king of blacktop ballers, tattooed and lean-muscled and sweaty, a barrio legend with a boy of your own, and sometimes you can't believe just how much your boy looks like and moves like the boy you were, and how you wish I was still around so you could say, *Look at my boy, Nena, just like Papi*, and brag about your identical jump shots. And every December I wonder if you've told him about our nights, reckless and faded and full of music, how you wrote all those lyrics about growing up poor and Afro-Rican and fatherless, how we took the streets, terrorized the neighborhood, and maybe there are tears in your eyes, and maybe there aren't, when you tell him how you loved me, how I loved you, how that was not enough, how when the holidays come around and the whole hood is blasting those aguinaldos and "Mi Burrito Sabanero," you remember those two kids we were, how we lied to each other, promised to be together forever because we didn't know any better, because we were only fourteen, because we needed to believe that there was someone.

# Music as an entry point into a story / memory:

- [Isabella Ramirez - skating \(but only around the perversions of men\)](#)



# Music as a means to access culture / assimilate:

Safia Elhillo

## Asmarani Is at a Party & Knows This Song

i learn all the words to cam'ron's hey ma  
i learn all the words to foolish i learn  
the words to big pimpin & candy shop  
this is how i became an american

i stockpile the words by a radio  
in the cool lacuna of night & each  
new sound blues my passport to mirror the  
ocean's dark rounds the song in my mouth

to a twang & now i cannot remember  
my wealth of middle names the list of men  
who had to live for my father to  
become my father our house is silent

back home & its daughter is split clean down  
the middle & must someday choose a side

# Freewrite: 6 minutes

## Poetics of Time Traveling

Consider your own origins / what places & memories / traditions you come from.

Think back on a formative or landmark memory or moment that shaped you...  
(losing something, achieving something, learning a lesson, making a discovery, etc)

While doing this, meditate on a song that invokes a particularly strong emotion you felt during that moment, whether that be:

- HEARTBREAK
- RAGE
- GRIEF
- PAIN
- JOY

Compose your poem while listening to this song.

- Sample lyrics if you like (optional) but really focus on channeling the mood / energy of that song as it captures that moment in time.
- Extra challenge:
- Use the phrase “the song in my mouth” (Safia Elhillo) or “reckless and faded and full of music” (Jaquira Diaz)



# Using song titles / albums tracklists / lyrics as a means to create a found poem:

## & Heartbreak

Welcome to cardiac  
Non responsiveness

I was 20  
Bumping 808s  
When the call came in  
That momma was gone  
Went chasing grim  
Repercussions  
From all her substance  
Abusing my dim trust  
Borrowing 20 bucks  
To make escape into  
coldest winter with lips blistered  
From a wind blow so amazing -- it's amazing  
I was chasing phantasms into  
Basements, paranoid as  
Harsh trips on acid blasting  
Bad news with turbo thots & global  
Warming polar thoughts my pole (too hot)  
The only solar thought today,  
Her phone call, called for base  
Like childhood days  
Playing til  
Streetlights come on  
Or Robocops brought us home

Pinocchio boy, not one splinter of shame  
in your wooden frame  
How could you be so  
Heartless?

In the night, I hear em' crying out  
For a mother's touch  
Don't say you will...  
Say it still  
Say you're Will but  
a Fresh Prince, you are not  
Fulfillment of promise--yet this is  
A story all about how  
a pedestrian fuck with love locked down  
left hotel vacant, ventricles – chambers  
seized; a deflated balloon  
in hospital room  
Scene open on wake--  
Welcome to heartbreak,  
Winter break winter  
Brings its blizzard in the  
Wake of pulmonary embolism  
& pulse consistent with 0  
Percent battery,

& tragedy is perhaps if I had only  
Picked up that flashing  
Line's metronome,  
I might still  
hear  
Her heart  
today  
beating  
like an  
8  
0  
8.

# Mixtaping songs to create new meaning:

- [Anthony McPherson - "Break Dance" \(PoetNY\)](#)



# Freewrite: 8 minutes

## THE MEMORY REMIX!

Use research: your phones, pictures, playlists, vinyl, cds, album sleeves

- Go back to a particular year in your life where something major happened (traumatic or triumphant)

What artists / albums / songs were popular at that time?

- For you, at that age or stage – was there a particular song or other piece of media that helped amplify those feelings?  
(a break up anthem, a ballad you felt seen by, a bop you felt free to)

Now find a way to sample / mix / re-mix that piece of media into your poem in some way.

- Was this song something you listened to or watched at that party you had that first dance?
- Was it YOUR SONG with a particular someone?
- Was that album the soundtrack of that particular year in school?

Can you encapsulate this piece of art into an EXTENDED METAPHOR?

- IE: Usher's 'let it burn' around a fire metaphor, letting something die out / end.

Added challenge:

Sample an album or artist's song titles in telling a particular (personal) story you otherwise may have difficulty telling in your own words / lens.



# A Poem for Ella Fitzgerald

Scnia Sanchez - 1934-

when she came on the stage, this Ella  
there were rumors of hurricanes and  
over the rooftops of concert stages  
the moon turned red in the sky,  
it was Ella, Ella,  
queen Ella had come  
and words spilled out  
leaving a trail of witnesses smiling  
amen—amen—a woman—a woman.

she began  
this three aged woman  
nightingales in her throat  
and squads of horns came out  
to greet her.

streams of violins and pianos  
spirited Ella's welcome  
and our stinned glass witness  
our fabled eyes  
unveiled  
opened up  
said what's that coming?  
who's that knocking at the door?  
whose voice lingers on  
that stage gone mad with  
*perdida, perdida, perdida.*  
i lost my heart in *fooooooo*.

whose voice is still living,  
up this morning chimney  
smoking with life  
carrying her basket of words  
a ticket a ticket  
*my little yellow*  
basket a wote a  
*let's see for my music and*  
*one thousand's a hundred of*  
*was it blue... no no no no*  
*was it green... no no no no*  
*was it blue... no no no no*  
*just a little yellow*

voice rescuing razor thin lyrics  
from hopscore hung dreams

we first watched her navigating  
an apollo stage amid high-stepping  
yellow legs

we watched her watching us  
shiny and pure woman  
sugar and spice woman  
her voice a nun's whisper  
her voice pouring out  
guitar thickened blues,  
her voice a faraway horn

questioning the wind,  
and she became Ella,  
first lady of tongue  
Ella cruising our veins  
voice walking on water  
crossed in prayer,  
she became holy  
a thousand sermons  
concealed in her bones  
as she raised them in a  
symphonic shudder  
carrying our sighs into  
her bloodstream

this voice, chasing the  
morning waves,  
this Ella-tonian voice soft  
like four layers of lace.

*when i dis Ella  
tell the whole joint  
please, please don't talk  
about me when i'm gone...*

i remember writing one nite for her appearance  
audience impatient at the lateness  
of musicians,

i remember it was april  
and the flowers ran yellow  
the sun downpoured yellow butterflies  
and the day was yellow and silent  
all of spring held in  
in a single drop of blood.

when she appeared on stage  
she became Nat arching over us  
feet and hands placed on the stage  
music flowing from her breasts  
she swallowed the sun

Source:  
Poetryfoundation.org

sang confessions from the evening stars  
made earth divulge her secrets  
gave birth to skies in her song  
remade the insistent air  
and we became anointed found  
inside her bop

*bop bop dows  
bop bop doowass  
bop bop dooooooowass*

Lady. Lady. Lady.  
he good he good  
to me.

to you. to us all.

but we just some lonesome babes  
in the woods  
hey lady, sweetellalady  
Lady. Lady. Lady. be gooooood  
ELLA ELLA ELLALADY

*be good  
gooooood  
gooooood...*

# FINAL FREEWRITE:

## 7 minutes

- Write a poem in tribute to / for a particular someone, using music as a means into the piece.
- This piece can be FOR the artist who wrote / made the song.
- It can be for someone in your life or another figure (historical, mythical, etc.) you have no ties to but want to ODE / write a BALLAD to.
- Try your best to have a repeating refrain / chorus.

EXTRA CHALLENGE: Include the lines “she swallowed the sun” or “gave birth the skies in her song” (Sonia Sanchez)

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**THANK YOU ALL  
FOR COMING!**

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