

## **I Was Born In The Renaissance**

A Poem for a Common Wealth, A Poem for Kentucky (From the Banks of a Brave & Mighty Friend Named Indiana)

[Waitin' on some folks, been drinkin  
In the Red Room]

In the meantime I raise my glass  
To the Whiskey Poet, Ian Uriel Girdley,  
Of Indiana;  
Kentucky Bourbon over two sweaty rocks  
    Is where this loving rant, this ode, begins:

O say can you see  
I've been hangin' with these Indiana cats,  
Poets  
They have a certain Indiana air about them that I respect  
They read lines, celebrate poetry, invoke the muse  
They have a certain unspoken Indiana air about them -  
A sense of place, and pride ... as they should

Indiana has earned its stripes  
With modern masters of the American songbook  
Gracing its cultural lore  
Folk-tale lyrics by the great and ragged boot-stompin Tom's of musical musing  
Tom Petty  
Tom Waits

*I said john, john, he's long gone  
Gone to indiana, ain't never coming home  
I said john, john, he's long gone  
Gone to indiana, ain't never coming home*

The Indiana I am most familiar with, is that which I sometimes refer  
To as "Indi-ucky"  
From New Albany to Jeffersonville to that sleepy bunbox of Utica  
    Where as I sit, this early summers night, on the banks of the Ohio  
Gazing at the bluegrass - just 'cross the pond, as they say,  
    Penetrating *my* Old Kentucky Home  
    With heart's tower raised and naked light's eye  
Slowly I begin to understand the taste, the language, of this here Bourbon  
Wrapped 'round my tongue, I see visions  
Of monks chanting  
Deep in Mammoth Cave, I hear mountainous  
Fields growing unfolding crops in my mind and in my soul,  
I hear mountains  
Growing in my mind and in my soul

    I sow clover  
In the magnificently empty rooms of my mind quietly  
On the banks of this mighty river in honor of Wendell Berry

While the world  
Beyond my reaping continues to wage its war

And suddenly it comes to me ....

As I think on Wendell Berry  
As I make communion with the place  
    To which he returned  
        To firmly anchor his roots in heritage,  
Akin to Allen Ginsberg  
From the other side of the world - He put his farmer's shoulder to the wheel

It occurs to me that  
I Was Born In The Renaissance  
A Regular son-of-a-bitchin' Golden Era  
The Enlightenment  
San Francisco in the Sixties  
Greenwich Village  
Kentucky  
Kentucky  
Has a certain air about it, I can see it  
So clearly from hear,  
Just out-side it

I feel it deep in the marrow of my matter  
    Like Whitman  
I'll - I'll sing a song of myself  
    Like Ginsberg  
I'll - I'll celebrate myself

Because myself *is* Kentucky

Because  
I am Kentucky  
Where  
Elvis Presley (and)  
Bill Monroe  
Sing about us  
With a *Kentucky Rain* fallin and a *Blue Moon* shinin

And apparently, it occurs to me,  
That that rainfall and that soft heavenly blue light  
Must compliment one another in some strange marriage of sweet alchemic chemistry -  
'Cause

    We grow crops,  
Fertile crops

A kind-of Beat Generation crop unto itself, of its own,  
And yet - for the world  
A **K.Y.** "Kentucky" **Jelly** soothing the friction of modernity  
With it's wisdom and rural attributes

From a fertile field .... grows a fertile crop:  
James Baker Hall, Ed McClanahan, Gurney Norman, Bobbie Ann Mason,

And Wendell Berry , Wendell Berry, Wendell Berry

And, have you ever heard of Frank X Walker (or of York for that matter? perhaps  
We should all know a little more 'bout York),  
Or Louisville's own Dr. Hunter S. Thompson with his own Gonzo-crazed perspective  
On the Kentucky Derby celebration, or the "crazier-than-nine-loons" Ron Whitehead  
Who grew up on a farm outside of Centertown, population 323, in  
Western Kentucky,  
Or Frederick Smock who writes so elegantly, gracefully  
Musing on the sacred poetic adventures of the heart of Gethsemani Abbey's  
Thomas Merton  
Thomas Merton  
Thomas Merton  
Poet, monk, radical, spiritual revolutionary who believed  
That Trappist, Kentucky  
Was the center of the universe

I am from Kentucky  
Sweet Kentucky  
The by and by home  
Of Saraband Books  
Of Larkspur Press:  
Where Gray Zeitz grey beard sill contains an Earthly virtue  
Once known as patience  
Of Larkspur Press where Larkspur Poets such as Logan English  
Are still alive Bob Dyaln - Yes, still alive - in NO LAND WHERE I HAVE TRAVELED (A  
Kentucky Poem)  
Of Larkspur Press where James Baker Hall and Mary Ann Taylor Hall  
Are forever wed in the holy bond of their words  
Of Larkspur Press where Rebecca Gayle Howell's *The Hatchet Buddha*  
Is beautifully hatched

I am Kentucky  
Where Mark Twain himself wished to be at the end of the world

I am Kentucky  
Where Nickole Brown's *Sister* was born  
Where Nickole Brown's *Sister* is alive!

I am Kentucky  
Where Brother Paul Quenon  
Doesn't eat square fish

I am Kentucky  
Where Robert Penn Warren is still the only one  
To ever receive the Pulitzer for both Poetry and Fiction

I am Kentucky  
Where Allen Tate is still a Fugitive

I am Kentucky  
Where James Still is always moving

I am Kentucky

Where Maurice Manning  
Purgatories  
The Doctrine of his Axe

I am Kentucky  
Where Joe Manning  
Sings his axe  
In the Chapel of the Bear

I am Kentucky  
Where Will Oldham  
Sings with Johnny Cash in the Darkness

I am Kentucky  
Where my own father is an unknown Poet  
Whose words are vessels to my heart

I am Kentucky  
Where my own mother  
Wrote a poem for her eighth-grade school teacher assignment  
And the teacher didn't believe that she wrote it  
(because it was that damn good)

I am Kentucky  
Where I was born in the Renaissance

In the meantime I raise my glass  
To the Whiskey Poet of Indiana;  
Over Kentucky Bourbon  
Over long gone rocks

I sing a song of myself:

*It was on one moonlight night  
Stars shining bright  
Wish blown high  
Love said good-bye  
Blue moon of Kentucky  
Keep on shining....*

Dedicated to the Memory of  
**James Baker Hall**, 1935-2009,  
Former *Poet Laureate of the Commonwealth of Kentucky*

Song Lyrics by:  
Tom Waits, 1985; Bill Monroe, 1946