

EDWARD KAMAU BRATHWAITE

Jah Music

a sequence

1

TAMBOURINES

The ear receives its sip
of water drink
of sound

ripples of silver cicada

and the skin stretches tight to my fingertips
and the dewdrops form bells
and the silver shatters like glass

as you begin your whisper

first like soft shak-shak
then jumbie-bead rattle
then snakes in the garden of eden

all evening all evening of glitter

and the stamp of the foot of the ground
and the shaker: rasp
of the calabash seed in it belly a *hampa*:

ta ti ta *ta* and a *pan-*
ther of breath in the forest of sound

and a dancer

FLUTES

Its when the bamboo from its clip of yellow green
begins to glow and the wind learns the stops of its fires

and my fingers following the termites drill
find the hollow of silence
echo of sound

that my eyes close all along the wall all along the branches all
along the
world

and that sharp creak and shadow those soft graves of sunlight
spiders over the water
cobwebs crawling over your stampen ground

find

from a distance so cool it is a hill in haze
it is a fish of shadow along the sandy bottom

that the wind is following my footsteps
that my fingers encounter wells

that that face that I have seen before in some damp summer
freedom
is my echo

echo me in wind cuckoo and cock my brother
into your sudden turmoil grind the sounds of stone and pebble
that I may begin to know their cleft and culpt and texture

it is a baby mouth but softer than the sound it makes
it is a hammock sleeping in the woodland
it is a hammer shining in the shade

it is the kite ascending chord and croon and screamers
it is the cloud that curls to hide the eagle
it is the ripple of the stream from bamboo

it is the ripple of the song from blue
it is the gurgle pigeon green the woo dove coo
it is your breathing listening the splendour
it is your breathing waking up the world

3

KLOOK

The drummer is thin . and has been
a failure at every trade but this

but here he is the king of the
cats . it is he . who kills them

. sick . sad . and subtle .
from his throne of skin and symbol

he controls the jump.ing rumble
u.sing sim.ple skock and . cymbal

his.quick.sticks.clip.and.tap.tatt. oo
a trick or two that leaves you

pranc.
ing and reveals that perfect quattrocento patt.
er.ning. gi.otto. ghir.landai.o chan.o po.zo. klook

4

CIRCLES

(for Melba Liston)

Music will never fly out of your green horn in squares
nor out of your harps nor out of your thumb pianos
because it does not grow on cotton wool plantations
it is not manufactured good nor made of metal neither
it can never go straight up to heaven
clambering up its notes from a ladder in the sky

for it curls like your hair around its alabama root, circles
like fishwater around your children's sticks
has deep watery eyes like a sea lion has clear fiery eyes like the
hawk
it sees through stone and dynamites itself in quarries
of deep bone bringing our riddim home
it is the blue lagoon inside your slide trombone
it is the echo not the rock that does
it is the reggae reggae riddim dat explodes the prison burns the
clock

5

BIRDS

(for Marjorie Whyllie)

It is strange how your hands your fingers
your thumbprints and the palms of your hands
have become a flight of twitters
the left hand of violin sparrows
the pianist hopping like blackbirds
the drummer & dragon gunpowder fists in its
power

when the tambourine rustles from grasses of silence
how high is the high that that butterfly can fly
when the piccolo speaks why the fire

but the crab cracked hands of the gabriel
trumpeter
golden & talon
burning his wheels at the height of his talent

your eagle

6

AND MILES & MILES & MILES &

He grows dizzy
with altitude

the sun blares

he hears
only the brass
of him own mood

if he could fly
he would be
an eagle

he would see
how the land
lies softly

in contours
how the fields
lie striped

how the houses fit into the valleys

he would see cloud
lying on water
moving like the hulls

of great ships over the land

but he is only a
cock he
sees

nothing

hears

nothing

he reaches to the sky

with his eyes

closed his neck

bulging

imagination topples through the sunlight like a shining stone