

The Myth of Music

by Rachel M. Harper
for my father

If music can be passed on
like brown eyes or a strong
left hook, this melody
is my inheritance, lineage traced
through a title track,
displayed on an album cover
that you pin to the wall
as art, oral history taught
on a record player, the lessons
sealed into the grooves like fact.
This is the only myth I know.
I sit on the hardwood
floors of a damp November,
my brother dealing cards
from an incomplete deck,
and I don't realize that this
moment is the definition
of family, collective memory
cut in rough-textured tones,
the voice of a horn so familiar
I don't know I'm listening,
Don't know I'm singing,
a child's improvisation
of *Giant Steps* or *Impressions*:¹
songs without lyrics
can still be sung.

In six months, when my mother
is 2,000 miles away, deciding
if she wants to come home,
I will have forgotten
this moment, the security
of her footsteps, the warmth
of a radiator on my back, and you
present in the sound of typing
your own accompaniment,
multiphonics disguised as chords

in a distant room, speakers set
on high to fill the whole house
with your spirit, your call
as a declaration of love.

But the music will remain.
The timeless notes of jazz
too personal to play out loud,
stay locked in the rhythm
of my childhood, memories fading
like the words of a lullaby,
come to life in a saxophone's blow.
They lie when they say
music is universal—this is my song,
the notes like fingerprints
as delicate as breath.
I will not share this air
with anyone
but you.

¹ *Giant Steps* is a jazz album (1960) by John Coltrane. *Impressions* (1963) is another album by Coltrane