



Tracks

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Album Notes:

It's raining. I sit down by a window, raise the sill, and let the nocturnal downpour serve as background to the voice of Andres Rojas. The sound of the rain is soft enough that I feel the frisson of the fricative of Andy's Vee when he says, "grave."

I once heard an astronaut say that when he was in space what he most missed was the sound of rain, so it makes sense to listen to Andy this way this evening. Andy's poetry is the poetry of earth, of mountain trails, of the sweet fluid violence of water against rock. "The sea / has no obligation to be kind— / it fulfills its duties well, / it carries on, it holds no memory."

The awe expressed for the world in Andy's poems reflects the impersonal nature of Nature. The magic, in fact, resides in this poet's ability to take meaning and find beauty in that which finds no meaning in him. There is "an absence older than stars. / They and the fireflies still shine, I'm sure—" The speaker knows "what light can mean / even to one who means nothing to it."

But the world outside our world, the ancient earth and older absence, resides even in the world we've created, for "upstairs in the garage hides a forest trail."

And listening to Andy read "For Kurt, Where Your Mind May Find You" is the answer to the question, "Why an album of poetry?" Andy's words on the page suffice. They must. They are in themselves whole, micro-macrocosms. But not only do you hear, yes you do, a bird trill distantly at the end of that first line, you hear Andy's gentleness, his beautifully crisp Cuban accent. In each phrase and line is great giving, and the sweetness in his inflections gives still more.

In these lines, behind and beneath and within the world always abides the older earth. Bridges are "black stones breaking to white chatter / like parrots, the smell of eucalyptus / clamoring in the autumn rain / as if it were the tropics, Lima, / fifteen years before, as if Vallejo / were not already Vallejo." Andy has previously translated the great Peruvian poet César Vallejo, with lines like "I will die in Paris in a rainstorm, / on a day I already remember."

In words ostensibly for Kurt Cobain, César Vallejo, or Andy's father, whose "car lay, solitary, / a lesser moon deflecting moonlight / barred by the shadows of pines," the speaker is ever haunted by wonder, as the source of beauty, at a world and a truth that find no meaning in him. It's the poet's job to find meaning, or wonder in the lack of it, not the world's.

I'm listening to Andy read of the autumn rain, with the not-quite autumn rain outside my window, to the clipping in the way he says "eucalyptus," the gentle Cuban percussions in the words "cathedral" and "throat."

Ari's EAT Poems series is a gallery of Jacksonville's lyricists and poets. He curates it lovingly. He gives, greatly, as Andy's vocals and phrasings give.

This album, Season of the Dead, is necessary today. It will also be in 50 years. And it will be here, anytime and every time I need it. Let it do for you what you need too. It will give you its tragi-cosmic [sic] awe at "absence older than stars," so when you ask, "What color love?" it will answer, "It is a shadow, / a stain that spreads like failure or remorse. / Never again the child's easy palette. / Never the grace of a blank page."

Such hard truths so beautifully spoken will bring you the requisite wonder and see you through.

--Tim Gilmore, 2016

About the poet:

Andres Rojas was born in Cuba and came to the U.S. at age 13. He has lived in Jacksonville since 1983 though he spent the 90s as a college student in Gainesville. Currently the poetry editor for Compose, he holds an M.F.A. and J.D. from the University of Florida and works for the U.S. Department of the Treasury. His poems have most recently appeared or are forthcoming in, among others, Barrow Street, Colorado Review, Massachusetts Review, New England Review, and Notre Dame Review.

Album Credits:

Poems by Andy Rojas, performed by the author

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Album notes, Tim Gilmore

Cover design, April Gray Wilder