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Laugh Child Reading Series at Des Moines Social Club

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Abstract
Lauren Haldeman, Caryl Pagel, Jennifer Perrine, and Jennifer L. Knox all read some great poetry on the night of July 12 during the first installment of the Laugh Child reading series at the Des Moines Social Club. The lack of a mic would have been forgivable in the close-seated area we were in, but the Social Club has very few inner walls and lots of resonance, so the poets’ voices competed with voices of passersby and espresso machines. Much of the time the poets lost the battle but the poetry ultimately triumphed.

Disciplines
American Literature | Literature in English, North America

Comments
19 August 2014

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by Dan Coffey, Contributing Editor

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Lauren Haldeman was the first poet to read - a short, rapid-fire series of poems with motherhood as a connecting theme. They increased my awareness, in the always impossible-to-pin-down ways that poems do, of what it’s like to be a mother, and to be someone’s mom, and the very subtle difference between the two perspectives. Haldeman’s first book is due out this year from Rescue Press, and depending on where you look, it’s either going to be called Calenday or Team Photograph.

From what little I could hear of Caryl Pagel, and this is entirely the fault of the ambient noise at the venue, her poetry sounded very elegant and precise in the choice of words, and challenging on an intellectual and emotional level. But I can really only guess at this. Her voice was almost entirely inaudible, and it didn’t help that she has a rhythmic cadence that seems more like a tic and so resists becoming a music that the ear wants to grab on to and ride with. Her first book, Experiments I Would Like Tried At My Own Death was published by Factory Hollow Press in 2012 and her latest book, from which she read exclusively last night, is called Twice Told (H_NGM_N Books, 2014).

Jennifer Perrine’s scientific, or science-based, poems, were a delight. She had a gripping reading style (I am no fan of slams, but do believe the poet needs to be able to allow the words she’s reading to showcase their musical qualities). I was so enthralled with the first poem, “In the Human Zoo” (also the title of her second book), that I was still thinking about it during many of her other poems, and while I have only the slightest memory of them now, at the time they were so riveting that they struggled heroically with the images of the first poem that continued to engage with my brain. In a Human Zoo was published in 2011 by the University of Utah Press, and her first book, The Body Is No Machine came out in 2007 from New Issues.

I didn’t have any more than a passing familiarity with any of the poets save Jennifer L. Knox, whose poems, as usual, were explosions of plainspoken and offbeat humor and that veered from unapologetic sentimentality to hard-boiled insight. I was disappointed that she didn’t read many of her older poems, but this was offset by, according to Knox, the first public airing of poems from her latest book - the forthcoming, Days of Shame and Failure (Boof, 2015). These new poems show that she’s lost none of their fierce and deranged humor, but there’s even more of a bittersweet (and political) tinge coming through, and her last poem could stand alongside Patricia Lockwood’s “Rape Joke” with the blurred lines between humor and the pathologically violent behavior directed at the speaker who is in a relationship with the poem’s second person addressee. Her three previous books, The Mystery of the Hidden Driveway, Drunk By Noon, and A Gringo Like Me were all published by
the excellent Bloof Books. This is a promising series; I can only hope that next time the curator will be able to find the microphone.

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