

Jayne Cortez □ – Celebrations And Solitudes (1974)

Written by bluesever

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A1 Lead A2 How Long Has Trane Been Gone A3 Essence Of Rose Solitude A4 Song For Kwame A5 Forreal A6 Festivals And Funerals A7 Solo B1 I Am New York City B2 Under The Edge Of February B3 Lynch Fragment B4 Ife Night B5 Homicide B6 3 Day New York Blues B7 Remembrance B8 Do You Think B9 Making It B10 So Long B11 Lexington/96 Street Stop B12 I Won't Forget It Jayne Cortez - Voice [Poetry] Richard Davis – Bass

The obituary for Jayne Cortez rightly describes her as a "jazz poet," a category that was one of her signature labels. What might not be as evident to observers is how hard won such a label was for Cortez and several other black poets of her generation. Along with Amiri Baraka, Larry Neal, Carolyn Rodgers, Sonia Sanchez, Michael Harper, and several others, Cortez helped solidify a place for "the music" in artistic writing and performance before people, especially scholars, were regularly using the phrase "jazz poetry."

Decades before the black arts era of the 1960s and 1970s, poets incorporated jazz references and approaches into their work. Most notably, Langston Hughes depicted musicians in his poems, and he developed a style of writing poetry that invoked the rhythms and features of blues and jazz. But aside from Hughes and later Bob Kaufman, the presence of jazz in poetry did not become an overriding presence, at least not to the degree that the music appeared in black arts discourse.

More so than any era before or since, large numbers of poets developed personal ties and working relationships with each other. Indeed, Cortez and leading jazz artist Ornette Coleman were at one time married. Sun Ra, Albert Ayler, Sunny Murray, John Coltrane, and others contributed to arts projects organized by Baraka.

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Several poets also wrote commentary about jazz. Baraka, Larry Neal, and poet A.B. Spelman even started a small arts journal featuring the music. The interest among artists in establishing a "black aesthetic," or distinct African American artistic productions, led cultural advocates to encourage poets to actively incorporate jazz into their works.

Jayne Cortez was always in the mix and a leading contributor in the growing discourse on jazz and poetry during the black arts era. "See how she, Sister Jayne Cortez, picks her words/verbs the nouns/makes the rhythmic imagery just happen to your eyes and ears, at once!," wrote June Jordan of Cortez's collaboration with bassist Richard Davis on the album Celebrations and Solitudes (1974). According to Jordan in her glowing review, Cortez was an extraordinary poet "of surrealism, jazz, blues, and Black language well refreshed by craft."

Now, at the time of her recent passing, we'd become accustomed to referring to Cortez in more succinct terms: "jazz poet." --- culturalfront.org

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