

Solistalgia



Collective



Collaboration

Fingers to fretboard, nails grate against grooves – metal string, wood, zing. Tiny vibrations – skin tremors, eager.

Palms slapping, soap-box drum – bouncing beats – alights nerves.

Now the Bass starts – pluck single strings, sound layers up, feel chords resound – deep down, chest deep.

A pulse – now it rebounds – guitar, drum, bass – intensify – sonic swells space – ricocheting: scuffed wood tables, candle wax pools, incense swelled air. Invisible, conductor crows: *It is alive – alive! Come together – right now.*

And beats match the scraping of old-armchairs, battered stools, pint glasses plonked on the bar.

And when the lead singer opens his mouth, he harmonises with vocal chatter – riding the sound, flying with energy.

And the backing joins in – pub goes wild, seam-split – folks elbow to elbow – cheeks flushed, pink, red.

And we could be bohemian, new age – each romantic cultural explosion, each laughing loud debate sprouting the seed.

Lecturer in the corner, regular – marks papers, sings along, building joy.

Voices weave like a choir, buzz in throats – something sacred, community of song.

Each time – each week – it is the best it's been.

Feel lightened, brighter – bursting with ideas – discuss, share, input – there, a solution.

Like music – thrashing strings, rising vocals – no good a cappella, solo, alone. All is better with rhythm, harmony.

One girl brings a flute, one night a trumpet – it was fantastic. Live for these moments – these precious points of collaboration – where people are connected, unified – nothing seems impossible, here, tonight.

Support

The wind was blowing something fierce. Rain too – battering me. Feet sliding on the tarmac. Swear I almost got lifted off the ground. Clothing completely soaked, drips inside my mac. Lasted me a good while, my mac, never let water in before. We get pretty bad storms around here; this one? Truly hellish. Right old bust up: gale spinning leaves into tornados, clouds blotting sun, rain thicker than fog. The type of pounding droplets that look like little frogs, hopping on the pavement, in great big blooming puddles. And I just couldn't get my grip.

All I wanted to do was get to the bus stop. It's down the lane, nice straight road – not that the council helps, far too many potholes. I'm not frail, still live in my own home, don't need to take a dozen pills a day, often go on walks. But trying to get down that lane on that morning, vision blurred, shoes scrabbling – it was a nightmare. I could hear myself crying out, little gasps at each gust. Made me feel helpless – you know? Like I was weak, little, old. Helpless.

Folks were rushing to get inside, young people, from the nearby university. They had their coats so buttoned up you couldn't see their faces. Shadowy figures dashing through the showers – made me think of ghosts, sinister. That's bad weather for you – everything becomes a dark shade of itself.

The wind picked up rubbish and blew it in my face, plastic bags and crisp packets. I didn't want to move my arms because I was trying to keep my balance. *It's like the great flood*, I thought to myself, *here to wash the world away, start anew*. Except I fancy there wouldn't be an ark this time round, not for me at any rate. Wouldn't be able to climb up it – would I? Not in this state. Just had to make it to the bus stop. Worried about getting there in time – the seconds were ticking. Lord knows how long I had been on this stretch of road, trying to battle the elements.

Then a terrific gust knocked me sideways. Mucky water splashed my face. Pain along my hip, leg, arm. Pulled up my sleeve to see a hint of red – bleeding. Felt like crying. Look at me – my life – been through much worse than a storm, ready for weeping. That made it worse, to be honest, made me feel even weaker, ashamed. Didn't quite know what to do, time frozen, water slicking my hair, running down my cheeks. *Probably missed the blinking bus*. Wanted to go home.

Then a voice – “Can I give you a hand?”

One of the university students, girl, bravely trying to force her umbrella against the weather. Held it over me, rain soaking her wool coat, lent down to offer an arm. All I could do was nod, all choked up, so embarrassed. She heaved me upright, tucked a hand in round my back to support me.

“Thank you love,” I said.

“It's ok,” she replied “ where are you heading?”

“Bus stop – end of the lane.”

“I know the one, I'll help you get there.”

Both of us got wet. She had to tuck away her umbrella because it kept blowing inside-out. I thought: *what with my wet mac and her without a hood, we will probably get colds*. Speaking to me as we walked – couldn't really hear each other over the wind, but it was nice to feel you were being talked to, that someone was there for you, struggling on together.

When we got there the girl hung round a bit, made sure I got on the bus fine. Somehow, as I was driven away, soaked to the skin, I felt happy, lighter than I had in a good few days. Good to know there are people out there who care – you know?

Individual



Reflection

Whirring hum-drum. Streaming brown liquid life –

Cups, open for coffee, arms circling.

Here come drinkers, wastrels, workers – wanting.

Watch them, pencil raised, ready to capture

the face lined man, deep gravel voice. Conspires,

speaks like rockfall, a glacier smashing stone.

To him life flows fast: complain, rave, rant – gone.

Woman – crow's feet, smile, portly, no-makeup.

She wears tartan leggings, accent dancing

over jokes. Gobbles bacon, chats with staff.

Another, examines each cake for fat.

Hair dyed to hide the grey, lashes permed black.

Holds phone to her face, sharp nose, jacket on.

Will I be like her? Afraid of age, straining for youth.

Or comfortable – wise eyed – satisfied, even proud?

Perhaps resentful, rushing, restless, time passing.

There is a wariness, conscious silent count-down.

Years, decades. Loved ones...

Couple walk in, snowy haired, quilted coats,

hands embraced. Watch them sip tea, share pastries.

I miss my Granny.

She would like it here; cakes on the counter,

regulars who comfortably chatter as
Sun shines through windows, lighting peachy wood.
I feel my throat close, blink, see her – mind's eye.
How long it's been. Forgotten – guilt surges.
She wouldn't have liked the hard wood benches.
The coffee would need some sugar, thank you.
Such a nice serving girl, very good cakes.
Do they like dogs? She'd come back if they do.

Please let her come back.

I don't cry, no tears fall. But find release,
almost wetting my cheeks, remembering.
Her eyes, crinkles: laughter, weeping, smiling.
Think of myself, my future, my ending.
Feel the pages of my notebook thinning.
Realise that I came here for writing
Others, strangers, observing. Sit alone.

Watching – the separateness has let me find myself;
quiet waters of the mind, visible reflection,
time taken to brush away dust and muck. Refreshed.

I've been missing that.

Missing her. Me. Peace.

Freedom

The wind sings: whoosh, swoosh, shush. It dances around fingers, feet, legs, moving with graceful flow. The heather bushes are its skirts, garments to be swished and flurried. Dancing to strange music; unknown, unheard. But could be imagined, in the moments of calm, surveying a lone figure wandering the mountainside.

The heather crunches, scratches its feathered stems against ankles. Bell shaped flowers paint the ground purple, pink, hints of lilac on the threshold of blue, yellows and peaches. Earth's own sunset, turning to twilight. Admiring its splendour are the chattering birds, rodents, a myriad of creatures meandering this colourful stretch.

A grouse is disturbed, shoots upward with gobbling clucks. Bul bul bul be-chichichichichi. Wide tan wings open, sprayed to the sun, the wind twisting and tossing the bird up. Out of reach. What it is to fight gravity, win – if only for a moment. Break earthly bonds and become one with the cyan sky.

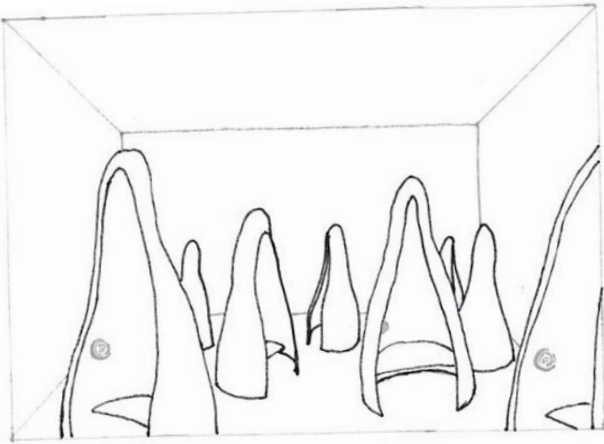
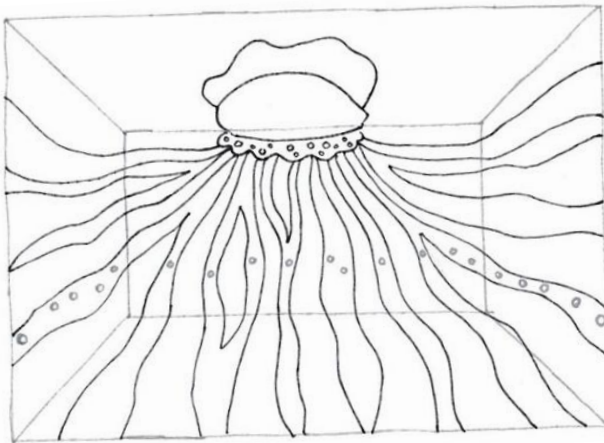
A horizon without cloud, endless blue. Somehow flat and depthless, paradox. Begs to be scooped by fingers, like water. The figure, wanderer, plays their hand along the breeze, drifting with its tides. Ebb and flow, feeling their breath rise from within – out – the crisp swelling of lungs. They let the path divine itself, the wind their guide, rock, stones, heather.

The wanderer reflects: you cannot divine the importance of a moment until it has passed. But this, they are sure, is a pure instance, one to be cherished. They can smell the sun, taste it, the light floral greenness of late summer. Musky undertones are long, hot and dusty. Perfect. Draw the scent inward, cradle it.

Lips stretch in an upward crescent, part to hum an instantly forgotten melody. One that speaks to the soul, captures the wonder of standing here, alone, the world one's own. Solace. They sing aloud, uncowed, no one to judge. Dance, shoes off, toes in the heather, bell flowers brushing the skin. Who cares if they catch? Who cares? No one here. The song spinning out, the wanderer's arms open to embrace the landscape. So grateful. They sing for the sandy, rock filled ground, for the buzz of insects, at once lazy and frantic, for the blooming heather. And for the light that plays across skin, running along limbs that swing, a mouth that smiles, fingers that dance to the wind. Free.

In-Situ

When exhibited, the narratives would be shaped in a similar form seen below. *Collective* texts resemble the tentacles of a Portuguese-man-of-war (vertical example opposite; horizontal example below), while *Individual* texts drift down the inside of polyp styled pods.



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 | - skin tremors, eager. | Palms slapping, | soap-box drum | - bouncing beats
 | - alights nerves. | Invisible, conductor crows: | It is alive - | - right now.

alive! Come to-gether

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 | - now it rebounds | - guitar, drum, bass - | intensify

| - sonic swells space - | ricocheting: | scuffed wood tables,
 | candle wax pools, | incense swelled air.

And beats match the scraping | of old-armchairs, battered stools,

pint glasses plonked on the bar. | And when the lead singer opens his mouth,

he harmonises with vocal chatter - | riding the sound, flying with energy.

And the backing joins in | - pub goes wild, seam-split

| - cheeks flushed, pink, red. | - folks elbow to elbow

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each laughing loud debate | sprouting the seed.

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Voices weave like a choir, buzz in throats | - something sacred,
 | community of song.

Each time - each week | - it is the best it's been.

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