

Miles And The Radish Man

by Ed Frankel

At the after-hours club on East Fifty-Ninth Street,
All us hipsters dressed to the nines,
Sitting in, laying out,
The burning in our pulses, cooling each time
We bring thumb and third finger together,
The language of cool, congealing,
Having said it, frozen, in the mouth,
No longer, really, what it is.

Backstage we kiss each other's necks,
Whisper in each other's ears,
Feign, juke, posture, test
The limits of range, velocity and will,
The flex and strength.

We sniff each other for clues.
Is that a Bessin or a silver Benge?
 Where did you get that custom-made mute,
That secret sauce to lubricate your valves?
 Where did you learn how to breathe like that?
 Are those special exercises for your fingers?
 Do you have something under your tongue?

We meditate on our drinks,
Search our cloudy auguries, wide-eyed--
For the edge on the one leg up,
Beyond what the fingers can be trained to manage,
Beyond musical memory, and perfect pitch.

He came in, "too square for the hipsters
Too hip for the squares,"
Eating salted radishes from a paper bag,
Overgrown college boy-- those horn-rimmed glasses,
Thick as the bottoms of a soda pop bottle,
Hair slicked back in a pompadour
With "just a little dab will do ya."
Everybody teased him hard,
White boy this and college boy that.

They talked about Schoenberg and Ravel
Who Miles said were hip before it was hip to be gone:

*Imagine Stravinsky on bebop, "Rites of Spring,"
Stone-age Russian tribal music,
Blood rites and human sacrifice.
Those long, pulsing figures not chaotic as you think
If you count it from a distance there's a pattern underneath.*

*Imagine Erik Satie playing "Straight No Chaser."
The spaces between the notes and riffs, as music too,
Like architecture is the music of space,
As much if not more than the thing itself.*

He chorded out places to play in that Miles said
Were like the Milky Way or the human heart.