

Music Both Sacred and Profane

*I am bound to walk among the wounded and the slain
And when the storm comes crashing on the plain
I will dance before the lightning to music sacred and profane
—Stephen Schwartz*

Dissonant shadows and sunbeams sparring,
chiaroscuro dancing in the sky.
Staccato thunder cracks, my hair rising

to brush against the clouds. The wind screams, warm
no more. Alone against the tempest, dripping
tears and dreams, eyes narrowed, I face the storm.

A *forte* beat of phosphorescent rain
lashes down, a *vivace* piece performed
across my tense back and rolling wicked plains.

Dark seas cascade, waves of watery wind
howl in a raucous timbre. Marked by Cain,
I roam the earth, angry, forever pinned.

In each drop, illumination imbued
reflects my sad face—stained by ancient sin—
and copies crystal lightning, split and skewed.

Roiling trees snap all chords, tossed by the air;
percussive bullets spit from onyx hued
skies. Will God still hear my tainted prayers?

I forsake fear and dance before the damning
dawn. Clouds churn and red light catches a rare
smile: I face the spray, *mancando*, laughing.

ELYSE SCHULER-CRUZ

This is What You Asked For

Gillam's ears still rang from the first RPG that took out the lead humvee in the convoy, and from the second RPG that destroyed the rear vehicle. Sgt. Roper screamed for the grunts to pile out and seek cover. He grabbed Gillam's collar and chucked him out before the gate was even down. After scrambling through the door of the shop in front of him, Gillam found himself alone. Not a single Iraqi was in the shop; maybe they knew.

Gillam peeked out of the doorway and saw some of the other grunts taking cover in an alley, peeking into the window of another shop and crouching behind chest-high walls. Rifles popped in an irregular rhythm. Gillam heard a zip, pop and fizz near his face followed by a spray of tiny stone bits. He ducked back into the shop and his rifle's charging handle.

This is it, he thought. This is what you asked for.

He poked his right side out of the doorway and sighted in on the men on the rooftop ahead of him. They wore no uniforms, no flak, no Kevlar. He could count them on his fingers and still have digits to spare. Three with AK-47s taking controlled shots at the Marines. One had slung his rifle across his back so he could fire an RPG-7. Gillam held his breath and squeezed his trigger. Three pops, and the rounds seemed to miss their intended targets. One of the men pointed his way and the other raised the RPG to his shoulder.

Gillam ducked back into the shop and dove behind the counter. He heard the RPG explode into the wall and doorway. Chunks of stone rammed into the counter, sending shards of wood flying. Bits of wood and rock pelted him. His flak and Kevlar hel-