7th Street Echo by Paige Hernandez

TIME/PLACE

Now. Chinatown...Near the Arena ... in Washington D.C.
...or anywhere in your crib ;-) 

CHARACTERS (2)

MILTON (MILT) - sixties, male
CANDELA (CAN) - eighteen, female
At home, Gender and ages can be adapted.

ABOUT THIS PLAY

This little ditty is an ode to Go-go music which is an original African American music art form created and based in Washington D.C. As of 2020, Go-go is the official music of the city.

In D.C., Go-go music and bucket/street drumming inspire and inform each other. This play looks to illuminate the Go-go genre and the unsung goddesses that are women musicians who play on these male dominated music scenes.

CREATE YOUR OWN MUSIC

Bucket drumming is junk percussion...an amazing rhythmic take on recycled and repurposed materials. Street musicians literally work with what they have to replicate the sounds and components of a drum set.

For this play, use what you can find in the house...pots, pans, amazon boxes, empty dog food cans, spoons (metal or wood for sticks), metal straws, chopsticks...you name it! Bigger objects will help with bass drum/booming sounds, smaller objects are best for snare drums, toms, cymbals etc.

Be innovative. Be creative.
Have musical conversations with your loved ones.
AFTER READING THE PLAY...

Google some of Go-go’s greatest (more artists mentioned throughout the play):

Chuck Brown and the Soul Searchers- Go Go Swing
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sqL_QoRM3Co

The Junkyard Band- Sardines
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ljgSh0Fv0f0

**Hip hop centric Go-go:**
Salt n’ Peppa- My Mic Sounds Nice:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r5Ta1FeLsq8

Wale- Pretty Girls
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8YxSzXnZ40

And some **bucket drummer virtuosos**
(Who are in the exact location of the play!!!):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uAyWnVq-h1Q
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5uFL_dYq0Og

And when all this madness is over, come to D.C., grab some wings and mambo sauce and check out some of the many street drummers and Go-go scenes throughout the city.

Enjoy!
Lights up.

MILTON/MILT is standing on 7th and D St. NW.
The commotion of rush hour is heard.
MILT waits, anxious and urgent.

MILT
(to himself, checks his watch)
Every minute counts and she ain’t here yet.
I told her 7th and D NW.
I hope this doesn’t cut into her time.
Come on Candela. Lives will change in the next ten minutes.
Show and prove!

CANDELA/CAN approaches.

CAN
Hey.

MILT
You’re late.

CAN
Am I? I thought the hit wasn’t until 8pm. It’s 5:30 and rush hour is ridiculous. You need me to set up or something?

MILT
Not exactly. Look, I didn’t tell you everything. You don’t quite have the gig just yet.

CAN
What? You said I had it. Tonight, Backwoods BBQ with the N.E. Kings. I got the text right here-

MILT
I know I know. But Bones isn’t convinced. You do realize that you’re just riding on legacy, right? He needs you to prove yourself. Many cats battle to sub in for this gig and he needs to hear more. You got your sticks?

CAN
Always.

MILT
Where?

CAN
Back of my jeans. “Holding up my spine…”
They smile at each other.
Tension relaxes but urgency is still there.

MILT
Bet. Let’s walk...towards the Arena.

CAN
Wait wait wait. Why can’t I just play for him here in the restaurant?

MILT
It’s more to it than that and you know it. It always is. Let me show you something. Come on ...two blocks North.

CAN
So who is all this for exactly? Boney?

MILT
Bones.

CAN
He skinny?

MILT
Nah, but he can kill em on the trombone or any horn for that matter and like I said, he books the band. NE Kings’ drummer bailed out yesterday and he called me looking for a sub. I thought of you. Now is your time.

Bones’ ear is amazing. No tricks or fancy ish. Just keep it in the pocket. Take the original grooves and play around with them. He’ll be able to tell then.

CAN
Tell what?

MILT
Be able to tell what I already know.

CAN
Which is...

MILT
That you’re better than your father.
CAN
Nah. Never.

MILT
Look I respected your old man. Was at all of his hits
...Southeast, PG County and was there when Chuck Brown asked him
to sit in.

I was there when your father went down as one of the baddest
drummers in Go-go history. He was consistent, thorough and
funkier than a pig’s upper lip!

(beat)
When he passed, I was devastated. I really was. DC and Go-go
music aren’t the same without him. And mad cats try to copy him
and fail miserably. Trust me, no one can fill the void he left.

(beat)
But you, you represent the new era. Educated, versatile and you
swing hard. Not to mention.... you’re a woman. Go- Go is ready.
Hell.... music is ready.

CAN
(Sigh)
He didn’t want me doing this.
“Be anything but a musician “, he said.
He said he had been enough of a musician for the entire family.
He hated that I was good. And I hate that he can’t see me do my
first gig.

MILT
Wait... this is your first gig?

CAN
Paying? Yea. Pops wouldn’t let me play out in public...or at
least out of his presence. He didn’t want anyone to hear me,
because then he knew that they would ask me to gig. It terrified
him.

With the drums, I could only be “in conversation” with him. He
always said, “When you play, you play with me...this is how we
talk, how we communicate. Don’t let your playing fall on deaf
ears in a club”.

So, this gig is my coming out gig...so to speak. I just wish he
could hear me. I wish he didn’t hate that I was so good at this.
MILT
He just didn’t want to see you hurt...rejected.

CAN
It’s gonna be weird, I’ll admit it.
I’m used to trading fours, eights or whatever with him.
You know...I play a little something and he plays back.

\[\text{CAN and MILT trade eights (beat box style) and then burst into laughter.}\]

CAN
Hahah! Yea! Just like that. We would go on for hours. Talking to each other through the beat...trying to knock the other off their game.

MILT
Wow. You must have a blast doing that!

CAN
Six months flew by. USED to have a blast.

MILT
That’s what I meant. Look he’s still here...he’s all around you and he’s definitely present when you hit those drums. I can testify to that!

(beat)
You do this right tonight and you may never have to prove yourself again.

CAN
Do you think I can be a regular? It doesn’t have to be a weekend gig. I could do Monday nights or Tuesday...Backwoods BBQ, Nick’s Grill...anywhere around here.... I only need $50 a hit.

MILT
Whoa. Whoa. Slow down. And what am I your manager? I’m just a friend of your pops who saw potential in you. You get old fast and quick kid. If my fingers weren’t aching, I’d still be picking at the guitar.

But look, I know all those club owners and we’ll talk more but first things first. We’re here. You gotta rock this Can. Like only you can do it.
I’m still unclear. What exactly am I rockin?  

**MILT** points to a collection of buckets and a shopping cart gathered across the street.

**MILT**
The buckets. Right here at 7th and F.

**CAN**
Street drummin?!!!

**MILT**
Yup. This is where Go-go thrives.

**CAN**
My pops says this is where he started.

**MILT**
It’s true.  
So it’s actually kind of fitting that you start here too.

*(beat)*

Now you know that there are buckets all around the city. Georgetown, Dupont, SE, /SW waterfront but none of those spots are more significant than right here. Gallery Place/China Town Metro...outside the Arena. This is the only place where you can get that vibration...that echo...for blocks.

**CAN**
Pops use to take me here to hear the drummers.  
Dirk, Wildboy, Luther...I know all of them.  
It’s funny I’ve never been *inside* this arena but I’ve been to every game. We would look up the schedule, hop the green line and come after the game to hear the buckets.

Dirk played after all the Caps games. Wildboy after every Wizards/Mystics game and Luther....he’s here any other time.  
*(A certain gravity)* This *is* it for him. His lively hood, his income, his home.

**MILT**
Yea I spotted him and his cart a few more blocks north...all of his belongings and a bunch of buckets. But shoooottt he’s just as happy as the next man.
MILT (cont.)
And from a music standpoint, every drummer needs to do this. Not only is hittin on the corner raw, but its electric.
You need personality, groove, creativity and humor. You gotta move the crowd, throw in that chant:

*Groove that makes you move,*
*You could never lose now!*
*Take it nice and smooth*
*Time to show and prove now!*

Haha yes! And watch your bucket get flooded with $1’s, $5’s and even 20’s. On the corner, every note, every sequence, every rhythm pays off.

CAN
Word. Now cats are all G’d out. Big ol’ egos. Won’t do a hit for less than $100 on a Saturday night! When you’re hungry, you’re raw and fearless and you know what?

MILT
What?

CAN
I’m STARVING.

MILT
Ok bet.. Bones will be here any second.
Lemme tell you his vibe...

He wants to see a crowd. And not a walking crowd...but a crowd that stands there...a crowd that you command. Pull em in with all the recognizable hits and take them on a journey. Slow and old school Go-go pocket jazz...

CAN
Chuck Brown, Suttle Thoughts, Lissen Band , EU...

MILT
Then take it up a notch...

CAN
Backyard Band, Rare Essence...

MILT
And then bounce beat for the youngins...
Hernandez

CAN
TCB, New Impressionz. Open high hat. Loaded Tom’s...loud!

MILT
Show him that you can hit with any of em and the best of em. Knock this out the park tonight and good news...you can have Backwoods BBQ every other week and Go-go Station, next Friday. You win over the rush hour crowd, you win any crowd. You cool? Nervous?

CAN
Nah.
(deep breath)
This is what I do. Been waiting on this moment.

MILT
OK.... There’s Bones! Tuck your hair in...

CAN
Secret weapon for later?

MILT
(smiles)
One step ahead of me.
No need to talk to him. He’s gonna sit here...let’s go across the street and set up. Luther left all this for us.

CAN gets excited that it’s Luther’s set.
They cross the street.

MILT
You done this before? You know how you want your setup?

CAN
Yea, I would sneak out and do drum circles. I would do buckets in Malcolm X Park sometimes in Dupont too.

(pointing to cart)
Help me move some things.
I need the shopping cart on the right...with the basket...the little front tray...open.
Three cans on the front line.
We can prop em up with these traffic cones.
Oh and the buckets closest to the cart...double em up.
**MILT**
Double em up?

**CAN**
Yea... put two buckets inside of each other.
Oh and Milt... check to see if they got leftover mud in em.

**MILT**
You mean left over joint compound? They sure do.

**CAN**
Dang, Luther got the fresh joints. Nice. Put those on the inside of the double. That way when I hit em... the paint falls out. Makes it look like I’m hittin harder than I actually am.

**MILT**
Ahhh dramatic effect.

**CAN**
Indeed.

**MILT**
How do I put these on the cones?

**CAN**
Use the handles.
Ok cool.
Lastly put the big garbage can on my left. Bass drum.

**MILT**
You sittin or standing?

**CAN**
Sittin... grab me those crates and...
one bucket in between my legs.

**MILT**
You gonna rock it with your feet?
It’s like you knew to wear JACKED UP shoes.

**CAN**
My shoes are always JACKED UP thank you very much.

**MILT**
Nah, its cool...
I bet it’s a hell of a grip on the bucket.
CAN
Exactly!

MILT
Alright, I’m a put the money bucket out front and it looks like you’re all set.

CAN
Wait. Not quite. Push all this back into this cubby…this corner. Maybe I can use that metal grate wall behind me.

MILT
You sure? It’s crammed.

CAN
Yea I’m sure. I need that echo.

They move the setup for maximum echo.

Now I’m straight.

MILT
Ok babygirl. You were born with this.
I’ll join Bones across the street. When I sit … you hit.

(as he walks further away, he shouts)

Groove that makes you move,
You could never lose now!
Take it nice and smooth
Time to make your pops proud!

CAN begins “to play”.
She physicalizes the motions of playing
But we can’t actually hear the drums… yet…
We hear her rhymed subtext.

CAN
(clicks the sticks)
1 2 3 4!
And with the click of a stick, I’m off on the race
My hands move fast and I can’t keep pace
On 7th street doing what drummers do best
Live improv, all my skills to the test
Close my eyes to capture the focus
So far a good start to my new street opus
CAN (cont.)

Behind closed eyelids, I think of what all this means
Living in the moment, a past daydream
Feel everything out with a rhythm and a strike
Dance if you like / come close I don’t bite
Win this gig, I just might / cart clatters so bright
and I love that sound!
Feet keep the timing with bucket on the ground

Cop sirens play into my orchestra of the streets
Corporates try to dance, youngins beat their feet
Factor in the hum from the metro right behind me
Bones nods his head just as if he might sign me
People stop and they stare as they head up north
And just as they leave, I whip my hair back and forth!

And the crowd goes wild, I can’t believe I’m this loud!
If my pops was here, he would be so proud
With my eyes closed I can hear it all
The mud the buckets drip, the coins as they fall

Elevated to a place that’s closer to him
Crowd going wild, testifying on this hymn
“Groove that makes you move
Time to show and prove now”

I got my chant in and I see Milt going crazy
Sensing pop’s ghost like Whoopi, Demi, Swayze
Beating on the drums trying to capture his spirit
The echo’s so huge that the whole city hears it

Hittin with my pops, call and response to the sky
He plays the pattern back with the echo on the sly
This is how I connect to him now, this is how I live
Legacy through him, giving what I gotta give
so I play until I’m numb
until suddenly there’s a pause
I look up …
…

And there’s a deafening applause.

Crowd goes wild as Can takes it all in.
CAN
(to herself)
My first gig. Love you pops.

CAN continues to play her street opus.
We hear her actual drumming now.
The flavor of Go-go.
The hunger of hip hop.
She’s remarkable.
From a lineage of musicians...
a new legend is born.

THE END