

Pass Thru Fire

Lou Reed

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For L.A.

Andrew Wylie for making it happen, Stefan Sagmeister for his enduring brilliance and fun, Karin Greenfield-Sanders, Beth Groubert, Roger Moenks, Mike Rathke, Tom Sarig, and Ben Schafer for the meat and potatoes hard stuff.

Brando in *Waterfront* in the car doing the
“I coulda been somebody” speech. Put it to
a guitar. The same for Blanche in *Streetcar*.
The “kindness of strangers” recitation.
Can’t you hear it sung?

Preface to the Da Capo Press Edition

At a certain point, if one is lucky, you have a collection. Not the "Best Of," but everything, from the very beginning to now. It is interesting, as the writer, to see these lyrics, to proofread them and resist the impulse to redo them all. Translators ask for explanations of words, phrases that cannot be provided. Some things are unknown. Some questions cannot be answered. And sometimes the writing was just the rhythm and the sound and made up words with no meaning other than feeling. I have tried to remain true to all my songs. There are no favorites. I'm amazed that I can write them at all and I have no profound understanding of the process other than when I can do it it is relatively easy and when I can't I might as well take a car engine apart.

My teacher Delmore Schwartz showed me the beauty of the simple phrase and I have tried to do that my whole writing life. Andy Warhol was pretty good with words as well and from him I learned a work ethic and the value of repetition. But I'd also learned that long ago from rock and roll and blues. I wanted to do these great monologues to a drum and guitar. I wanted to act the song. I wanted to write the play with the music of my heart. I love the New

York accents. The psychology of the streets. And now as I am older the terrain of meditation, the lessons to be learned. And most of all: what to write about now.

—Lou Reed

Pass thru Fire

The exact line is "... Pass thru Fire licking at your lips. . . ." My other favorite line is "... there's a door up ahead not a wall." There are many favorite lines of mine that run through the album "Magic and Loss." It was originally intended to be about Magic, real magic, the ability to make oneself disappear. I had heard stories of magicians in Mexico with strange powers. I thought if I put out songs about magic they would get in touch with me and tell me their secrets. After all, people are always telling me their secrets, and I often put them in song as though they happened to me. Unfortunately two friends died of a virulent cancer within one year of each other while I was writing and so "Magic" became "Magic and Loss." I wished for a magical way to deal with grief and disappearance. I wanted to create a music that helped with loss. It seemed we are always starting over, given a chance to deal with things again.

In the "New York" album I'm struck again by the interest in outside forces. "Caught between the twisted stars. . . ." The stars are twisted, the map is faulty. Romeo Rodriguez loses his soul in someone's rented car. A bleak environment to start out in. But predictable

enough if you believe the dictum of one of my earliest songs, "I'll Be Your Mirror," where the singer offers to "... reflect what you are, in case you don't know." That was a love song, but the ability and desire to reflect can go other places, and show us other rooms and conditions within and about us.

I have always thought my lyrics went beyond reportage and took emotional albeit nonmoral stances. In the early lyrics this was often seen as a celebration or glorification of what was commonly seen as sin. Sinful behavior and actions going unpunished. That this occurred in a recording was of itself thought sinful. A recorded cauldron of sin. This plus the backing of Andy Warhol made for an incendiary brew. I came back to these times in "Songs for Drella," which was an attempt to give you a feeling for the times and the man and the position of respect he held in our eyes as an artist. It's wonderful to this day to see how he manipulated and handled the press, his extreme work ethic, his attempts to stay relevant in a world geared to the latest whatever. The new generation looks to define itself and the first thing it does is throw away the prior, the old.

In *Time Rocker*, a play that I did with Robert Wilson, we were interested in transcending time, passing through it and its various boundaries and worlds. This type of travel meant something to me being a form of magic. We didn't have a rented car but a time traveling fish. It brings me back to the desire in "Trade In" from "Set the Twilight Reeling" to transcend oneself to trade your very soul the very same soul that was "... up for sale ..." in "Coney Island Baby." The same Average Guy in "The Blue Mask" who put "... pins through the nipples in his chest and thought he was a saint." Love and the desire for transcendence run through these songs. "The Proposition"; "Make Up My Mind"; "Wild Side" for that matter. The characters in these songs are always moving toward something, there is conflict and they try to deal with it. In "Some Kind of Love" he "... put(s) jelly on your shoulder." While later trying to "Hang on to Your Emotion" so that you can "Set the Twilight Reeling" as the "... moon and stars sit set before my window." The actresses relate because they're acting. They understand the desire to see "The Bells," to hear the announcement of transcendence and freedom. And that's what all the lyrics are about.

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