

NO-NO BOY

1975



ASIAN PACIFIC
AMERICA



WWII internment camp
Crystal City, TX, 2019

NO-NO BOY / 1975

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(All songs written by Julian Saporiti/West Meade Music, ASCAP)

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NO-NO BOY: 1975

Julian Saporiti

This project started with a photograph in a museum, a picture of a forgotten Japanese American jazz band from Wyoming. Uncovering their story led me down a rabbit hole of history and self-discovery. Eventually, this research became a dissertation. At some point, the dissertation became music.

1975 is a collection of songs from a much larger work called No-No Boy, named after John Okada's novel. This sprawling 70+ song mess/project was created from years of conversations, archival work, and travel. Originally, the songs centered on stories of Vietnamese refugees and Japanese American incarceration. But my song-writing stretched beyond these initial research interests, wandering into many different worlds loosely bound to the Pacific. Because this album is part of a Smithsonian series representing "Asian American music," I selected many of these songs because they touch on a fragmented Asian American musical tradition: jazz musicians inside concentration camps, Saigon rock 'n' roll teenagers, Filipino cruise ship bands, punk rockers, and church choirs in Chinatowns.

1975 was the year Saigon fell, but these songs speak to the present as much as the past. This album can be a history book or an early 21st-century diary. To me, it's a travelogue and family album, straddling borders, some imagined, some physical and darkly drawn. Really, these are just songs, folk songs. I hope you like them and are encouraged to explore your own stories.

A Note About the Sounds

As a researcher, I theorize a lot about sound and music in history. On *1975*, I wanted to incorporate the actual *sounds of history* into my music. So I took years of field recordings from my research sites and turned them into sound samples I could perform with. If I did it right, you won't be able to tell that the majority of percussion sounds on this album were made from museum objects, old barracks, detention centers, barbed wire, and ambient sounds recorded everywhere from Wyoming to Paris to Saigon. On top of these sampled sounds, I layered instruments I could play, using little more than a laptop—the "folk way" of 2020.

For the sounds I could not make or find myself, I turned to, in no particular order, Dan Lipsitz (winds, horns: “Best Band”), Wes Langlois (guitars, mandolin: “Best Band”), Kristin Weber (vocals, violin: “Sand Creek”), Erin Aoyama (harmonies: “Best Band”), Joyce Kwon (harmonies: “Gimme Chills”), Armand Aromin (fiddle, vocals: “Gimme Chills”), Takénobu (strings: “Miss Burma”), Hamilton Berry (cello: “Close Your Eyes”), Karen Tingey (taiko samples: “Sand Creek”), Jeff Worral (trumpet: “Best Band”), David Ginger (trombone: “Best Band”), and Jacob Borchardt (bugle: “Sand Creek”). Emilia Halvorsen was my indispensable partner through the recording process and lent her voice, ear, and hands to most of these songs.



Field Recording.
WWII internment camp
Crystal City, TX. 2019

1. St. Denis or Bangkok, From a Hotel Balcony

The voice you hear speaking throughout this song belongs to my mother. When I was a boy, I remember her talking in a French-Vietnamese creole with her sister Nicole and their mom, switching between languages seemingly word to word, reverting solely to Vietnamese when my French cousin Delphine would eavesdrop. My grandmother left Vietnam in 1976. Unlike most of my Viet friends, our family were not boat people. We escaped overland through Cambodia into Thailand, where my Uncle Laurent, a French journalist, got them on a flight to Paris.

“St. Denis” is a scatter of memories revolving around my *bà ngoại* (my mom’s mom) and meditating on a special kind of sadness one feels in not knowing a relative as well as they should. It is an attempt to exhume a difficult family legacy fractured and disfigured by war and exile. It measures different types of distances between Nashville, Paris, and Saigon.

I remember riding the Métro with Bà Ngoại in Paris when I was six. I held onto a shiny metal tiger pin we bought from a subway vendor. There was the smell of roasted chestnuts. I play a toy organ on this song because it reminds me of the carousel in the Jardin des Tuileries and the small wood-

en sailboats my brother and cousin and I would push across the fountain. The last time I saw Bà Ngoại, I was in college. She lived with nuns in St. Denis. I remember her sitting on her bed praying. We would walk around the streets of Paris very slowly, arm in arm, trailing the rest of my family by 20 feet.

*A soft language barrier
The child of an immigrant
Before the Banh Mi trucks were cool
Lunch table embarrassment*

*That scene with the border guard
Last night on the continent
What was the view like knowing that you
Might never come back again*

*There are so many things
I should have said to you
Sometimes family trees cut cruel*

*What did you make of Tennessee
In 1988, all covered in snow
The winter my little brother was born
And we carried him up the hill to our home*



Bà Ngoại, Mom, Aunt Nicole, 1952

*I wish I had taken French
A little more seriously
I remember singing to you
When you were dying in St. Denis*

*There are so many things
I could have asked you then
Sometimes songs don't get a nice end*

2. Imperial Twist

Robert Vifian was a high school friend of my mom’s back in Saigon. In the spring of 2016, I met him in Paris at the fancy Vietnamese restaurant he owned. Over lunch he told me, “You know, I was in a band.... We would play these concerts for the GIs. They’d fly us out over the jungle in helicopters filled with music equipment and drugs and prostitutes, and people would be shooting at us.” Then, as if he hadn’t begun the coolest story ever, he just sort of trailed off. I pressed him for more.

Like every other part of the world colonized by the West, rock ‘n’ roll flourished in Southeast Asia. Teenagers picked it up from the French and later the occupying Americans. They learned it well, and often made it their own.

“I was pro-Communist and extremely pro-American because I really loved rock ‘n’ roll,” Robert told me. “Nobody forced us (or said), ‘you should listen to that.’ We came to it naturally.... We liked the music and we wanted to reproduce it.”

When I returned to grad school that fall, I dove into Viet and Cambodian rock bands of the late 1960s/early ’70s. The records I found expanded my concept of artistic authenticity and broadened my borders of *where* art belongs and *whom* it belongs to. His story also connected me, as a musician, to

my mom's experience growing up in Saigon in a more emotional and electric way.

One band I discovered particularly blew my mind. The CBC Band were a family group with origins in northern Vietnam who came south after the French were defeated in 1954 and the Communists took over. They filled the entertainment needs of American GIs who had money to spend. This song interweaves Robert's stories with a tragic CBC Band gig. During the opening riff of Hendrix's "Purple Haze," a bomb went off. It wounded several servicemen and killed one of the drummer's friends. Soon after, with the South's defeat looming, the band fled, eventually making lives in Houston. Beautifully, 40 years after their violently abbreviated gig, veterans who were at that concert organized a reunion at a bar in Houston, and the band finished "Purple Haze." They still gig to this day.

*Can you give the world a twist
Just by doing the twist?
At the moment the bomb went off,
They were playing "Purple Haze"*

*I met Robert at his restaurant,
Septième arrondissement
The Doors still echo in the jungle.
He said, "Your mother brought back 45s from Paris in '65*

*and we learned 'em note for note."
Some broken English Rolling Stones
Fenders, girls, and dope
America provides*

Oh, Saigon teens...

*Can you give the world a twist
Just by doing the twist?
Can you save the world with acid rock?
I didn't know my mother's maiden name
That time in Texas when we was detained
And I've been back to old Saigon
But how much of you is lost
When they change your name?*

Oh, Saigon teens...

*And it was half a world away
The band got back on stage
Four decades to the day
"Purple Haze"*



Mom leaving on exchange.
Saigon, 1965

3. The Best God Damn Band in Wyoming

The interpretive center at Heart Mountain is impressive for its size. Its permanent exhibit takes visitors through the history of the World War II Japanese American incarceration thoroughly, hitting all the historical bullet points: 120,000 folks were stripped of their constitutional rights, sent to 10 concentration camps across the US interior—desolate places—housed in hastily constructed tar paper barracks; harsh weather, barbed wire, machine guns, spotlights pointed in; farmers who turned the land; brave men who became American soldiers despite everything, brave men who resisted being drafted because of everything; Boy Scouts, sports, the hardships of resettlement, and the vindication of redress.

The first time I visited, I found it interesting and sad. But it didn't really capture my imagination, or my empathy, until I stumbled across a photograph of a jazz band. A dozen or so Japanese American guys playing horns, drums, bass.... The band was called the George Igawa Orchestra. My mind turned on. I had gone to a music college, a

jazz college at that, but I had never learned of *any* Asian American popular musicians. This picture opened a door for me as a scholar, musician, and person.

Over the next few years, I returned to Heart Mountain many times. Digging through the archives, I began stitching together the story of this band. I searched to see if any of these musicians were still alive, and one of them, Joy Teraoka, a singer for the band, eventually became like family to me. This song is for Joy and her bandmates and for a state I love dearly.

*The flyer read, "Musicians needed!"
So young Yone grabbed his silver mouthpiece*



left: George Igawa Orchestra, 1943. Photo courtesy of Heart Mountain Interpretation Center

right: Heart Mountain, WY 1943. Photo courtesy of Heart Mountain Interpretation Center



*Tracked down a kid who brought a trumpet to Pomona
Let Yone have it on a free two-year lease*

*Joy Teraoka née Takeshita
Went to the tryout, she was only 16
With some girlfriends to cheer her on, their club was
called the Radelles
Mom said, "If you keep up with school, Joy, you can
sing."*

*George Igawa, OG Nisei
He toured up the coast and even played Japan
Before the war, they ripped up the Florida Ballroom
Man, don't sleep on those Sho-Tokyans*

*Under starlight they danced behind barbed wire
Under the mountain, it meant something to sing
Stuck between two countries in a fire
The best god damn band in Wyoming*

*Little Tets Bessho rep'd the Kardiaks gang
The clarinet kid, the "Nisei Artie Shaw,"
Dropped by rehearsal in a tar paper barrack
Once he joined up, sister, it was on*

*They practiced daily, gigged on the weekend
Stirring up those dusty mess halls
Teenage bodies unchained from their parents
Man, them old folks, they really lost it all*

*The only swing band left in Wyoming
That got 'em out some nights until dawn
War bond drives in Powell, Mormons dancing in Lovell
A bunch of "Japs" playing jazz at the Thermopolis prom*

*Under machine guns they danced behind barbed wire
At below zero, it meant something to sing
Angelenos mixing up with farm kids in the choir
The best god damn band in Wyoming*

*George Igawa, he split for Chicago
With Kimiko in the fall of '44
He left the band to Tets, Joy went with her family to DC
As for Yone, he had to join the war*

*And that's the story from old Heart Mountain
And the best band you never did see
Locked up in prison camps for no fuckin' reason
But they still found a reason to sing*

The best god damn band in Wyoming . . .

4. Gimme Chills

In May of 2017, I was sitting in a cafe in Toronto. I was transfixed by TV coverage of the Battle of Marawi. The black banners of ISIS hung from windows. It was frightening to watch. That afternoon, I went back to the room I was staying in and started reworking an old love song that had been collecting dust. I wrote new verses about the history of the Philippines, packing the song with proper nouns, always coming back to the idea of "chills." My friend Diego shared some of his research on Spanish colonialism and slaving in the Pacific, which pushed me to spend the next few weeks researching Filipino history from the 1500s forwards, working through wars, US conquest, independence, dictators, and the messy present day.

A wonderful student of mine once accurately described this song as a "fucked up love letter to the Philippines." Dedicated to that great Filipino band in Providence.

*Give me rhyme for no reason
Give me the world for a start
Give me all the treason you might carry in your heart
Give me life fantastic
Get me over the hill
Until the day I go, gimme chills*



Family photo. Saigon, 1953

*Give me seas of blue waves
Tangled round my hands
Give me sand and soft shoes
Evenings with the band
Sing me songs so classic, like cherry cola thrills
Lips on glass, not plastic
I know you will*

*Give me trial without jury
Give me Imelda Marcos's shoes
Give me another century to make it up to you
Hear of the Sanglely rebellion?
Some say twenty thousand killed
16 and 03, gimme chills*

*Give me Dewey in Manila
Give me the Pearl of the Orient
Give me the USS Olympia, nine ships heaven sent
Skype me Christmas eve from Doha
Toast me New Year's from Crown Hill
And if we never get back home, gimme chills*

*Give me Lopez de Legazpi
From Jalisco to Cebu
Make me your religion
I'll watch over you
Dream of Spanish autumns
From New Granada to old Castile
Over all them miles, gimme chills*

*Give me rhyme for no reason
Give me your balikbayan box
Give me Coca-Cola, Chuck Taylors, and an Apple watch
Give me your Asian manhood
Give me Duterte's sober will
Black flags in Marawi, gimme chills*

5. Close Your Eyes and Dream of Flowers

*En la frontera te das cuenta que la historia
tiende a repetirse:
Un niño es un niño,
Una jaula es una jaula,
Los sentimientos, Las angustias,
Todas son las mismas. Lo único que cambia es la época.
- Juan Betancourt Garcia*

I wanted to see the border for myself. I wanted to see the detention centers. I wanted to meet the folks crossing the river, who, like my family once, needed a place to go. So, during spring break 2019, I went down to Texas with Diego and our buddy Juan. We flew into Houston and had dinner with my friend Vi's parents, refugees from Vietnam. Then we drove to Crystal City to visit the ruins of a World War II internment camp. After that, it was on to Laredo to play music for asylum seekers staying at a homeless shelter. The stories we heard broke our hearts.

During the Laredo concert, I looked at the front row of little kids. I started seeing things. Images from the past flashed on the walls and ceiling: kids in concentration camps, refugees displaced by war, recent Rohingya or Syrian folks crammed into boats, tent cities, deserts, oceans. I was in 15 places

at once. The kids' faces combined and layered with faces from the archives like translucent masks. Everything all at once. It was too much.

The next morning, Juan told us about the three migrants he watched crawl out of the river and run through our motel lobby. The Latino manager asked if he'd "seen any wetbacks."

From there, we drove north to Dilley, TX, home of the country's largest family detention center. In the afternoon, we found a beautiful field of wildflowers outside the ranch where we were performing that night for a group of pro bono lawyers. I wrote this song walking through that field of flowers.

At dusk, Diego wanted to stop by the detention center and take photographs. Standing outside the barbed wire, he said, "If you told me it was 1942, I'd think this was a Japanese internment camp."

*Imagine taking a tanker ship
Then walking all of Mexico
I know some people who the blues won't quit
Imagine no end to a road*

*They're saying out in El Paso
The prisons filled up to the brim
Now they're sticking them in cages
Just sweep it all beneath the bridge*



top: Family detention center, Dilley, TX, 2019

bottom: Homeless shelter for asylum seekers, Laredo, TX, 2019



WWII internment camp,
Crystal City, TX, 2019

*And you might want to worry
And you might want to come down
And you might need to hurry
Judging from this town*

*Take a jump shot in Laredo
Feel some special kind of weird
Purgatory outlet mall implode
Cry some special kind of tears*

*Living in between the water
Just close your eyes and dream of flowers
So says a mother to a daughter
Wasting in line for 40 hours*

*And you might want to worry
And you might want to come down
And you might need to hurry
Judging from this town*

.....

Imagine no end to a road . . .

6. Honouliuli

I visited Hawaii for the first time in the summer of 2018. I was interested in learning about the 1868 Japanese settlers (*gannenmono*) and how this group—after years of hard plantation labor and World War II—established themselves as a dominant cultural and economic force on the islands.

It was on this trip that I experienced some of the truest joy and satisfaction I've felt from this project while playing a concert with my friend Joy Teraoka, the singer from the George Igawa Orchestra. I learned more in 10 days than I did in most semesters, but I was exhausted. My mind wasn't right.

I was drained from a half-decade working non-stop on this project. Obsession with the past will take a toll. Not unrelated, my personal life had become a smoldering constellation of trash fires fanned by chronic pain, over-medication, severe anxiety, and depression. It's (kind of) funny (now) that I suffered my first full-blown panic attack in "paradise."

"Honouliuli," named for a WWII detention center, is a soft-focus, lyrical pastiche of deep personal loneliness and a survey of complicated island histories. The recording is built on a pretty but mangled soundscape of "natural" field recordings that cradle mutated electric guitars and a

pleasant vocal melody. The orchestration aims at juxtaposition, like plastic in the ocean, Queen Liliuokalani and the gangsters of industry, or the homeless encampments near Waikiki Beach.

*And I'd love to waste your day
If you'd love to waste mine, too...*

*So we met at the museum
As to hear the elder song
"Hole Hole Bushi"
and Miss Betsy sang along, along, along, along...*

*Ala Moana Park
Falling sweetly to the night
And I sipped my inspiration from
The old plantation strike*

*Blues and waves hanging
A little sadness in your eyes
Blues and waves hanging
A little more to paradise*

*In the orange-tinted surf
I dreamt of Fred Makino
And his rebel letter press
Baller Hapa Issei bro*

*And I watched the lanterns light
A flicker sadness in your eyes*



Composing "Close Your Eyes
and Dream of Flowers," family
detention center. Dilley, TX. 2019

Okinawa and Hawaii
Kin of military might

Blues and waves hanging
A little sadness in your eyes
Blues and waves hanging
A little more to paradise

7. Pilgrims

It was a rainy Tuesday, so the morning ferry to Angel Island from San Francisco was practically empty. In February 2019, I made a pilgrimage to this place where between 1910 and 1940, thousands of Asian immigrants first touched North American soil. I wanted to walk on the grounds where, unlike their mostly European counterparts on Ellis Island, many of these people were inhumanely detained, sometimes indefinitely, and frequently tested like lab animals.

After a 30-minute hike from the ferry dock, I found the old immigration station. I walked up a wooden staircase to the old barracks. Inside, you can still see poetry scratched into the wood. Outside it was cold and foggy. I rang a large bell erected by the shore and listened to the ocean. The sounds of Angel Island begin this recording.

In the spring of 2018, I was commissioned to write a song in conjunction with Providence's



Mom's confirmation. Saigon, 1962

Chinatown—a recovered history project my colleagues at Brown had produced. Of the many valuable documents they collected, I was most interested in the photographs and stories focusing on the Beneficent Church, commonly referred to as the “Round Top,” in downtown Providence. Catering to a multi-ethnic congregation, many members of Providence's mid-century Chinese community found fellowship and a sense of home in this place.

Last ship off the dock
Before the Japanese took Hong Kong
Henry came with Mom
Three weeks: so long, Canton

First, Weybosset Street
Then a little house, an hour south by feet
A hop, a skip, a jump from Roger Williams Park
Aren't we all just some pilgrims in the dark?

Faith, that's the bottom line
You are young, you will be fine

By the old Round Top
Five blocks from Luke's restaurant
Lily and the Irish Chinese kid
Cross your heart and keep your secrets hid

Faith, that's the bottom line
You are young, you will be fine

A congregation of all stripes
Lift your voice until it blends with mine
On the On Leong banquet day
Confirmation dress and two bouquets

Faith, that's the bottom line
You are young, you will be fine

8. Where the Sand Creek Meets the Arkansas River

In 1864, along a creek bed in southeast Colorado, a peaceful group of Arapahoe and Cheyenne Indians were slaughtered and mutilated by US soldiers. This became known as the Sand Creek Massacre. Eighty years later, 40 miles due south from that site, a man named Tomoki Ogata hanged himself along the banks of the Arkansas River. He was a 61-year-old bachelor. An immigrant from Japan. No one found his body for three weeks.

Tomoki's was one of several bodies left behind in the Amache concentration camp's small cemetery. I've spent a lot of time there, thinking about overlapping histories, ghosts, and collective amnesia. To get to Tomoki's grave, which is in the back, you pass by a headstone which simply says, “Matsuda Baby, December 25, 1944.” Gives me chills every time.

Say, have you ever been to eastern Colorado
Where the Sand Creek meets the Arkansas River?
Do you know the tale of old One-Eye's daughter,
or Cheyenne Mochi, shakin' and shiverin'?

Hold me, lover, tell me lies
Ain't no coming back from this one

Take a cruel meditation upon a slaughter
Underneath a white flag

*Mr. Yellow Wolf, here meet Tomoki Ogata
Two ghosts caught in a jet lag*

*Hold me, lover, tell me lies
Ain't no coming back from this one*

M-A-T-S-U-D-A baby

*There are some days, it might be best not to remember
The No-Nos had it right, kid
The cavalry hung scalps from a chandelier in Denver
Mutilate the peace chiefs
Name a town after Chivington*

*Hold me, lover, tell me lies
Hold me, lover, tell me lies
Seems like the world cracked overnight
There's no coming back from this one*

*Open up your eyes, open up your eyes
Pen to paper, take a trip, my love
Let me know what you find
Open up your eyes, open up your eyes
For a minute and give yourself
To a place and a time*

*There is a grave in eastern Colorado
There is a date marked Christmas Day,
1944 and not even a name
Just "Matsuda Baby"
M-A-T-S-U-D-A baby*

9. Tell Hanoi I Love Her

It took 45 years for my mom to go back to Saigon. She took me and my brother in 2013, using the small amount of money Bà Ngoại left her after she died. We stayed in nice hotels and had tour guides. We stuck to the coast. It's a beautiful country.

My mom got out of Vietnam in the late 1960s on a student visa. Our family were longtime collaborators with the French and had good connections and money. We're still very French. My ông cố (mom's granddad) held a position in the South Vietnamese Assembly. He was assassinated during the Tet Offensive. The whole family was there when it happened, in our house in Vinh Long, when the grenade went off. My mom was lucky. She left shortly after the murder.

Sometimes I wonder if my mom feels guilty for getting out early while the rest of the family had to stay until 1976, a year after the Communists took over. Bà Ngoại went back in the '80s. My aunt Nicole will never go back. Some of my Viet friends won't visit until their parents are dead. I feel conflicted at this stuck-in-the-past-ness, but I get it. I'm a Southerner, twice over. I come from two beautiful, rich, deeply flawed, losing cultures. I have a lot of space in my heart for those who can't let go of a defeated nation or a lost war.



top left: Mom, Saigon, 1960s

bottom left: Mom and Aunt Nicole, Saigon, 1960s

right: Aunt Nicole, Bà Ngoại and Mom, Saigon, 1960s

*Twice southern with two civil wars
A fool to think that this place could ever be yours
The in between, that's where we must explore
Tell Hanoi I love her*

*Jenny's mother in the nail salon
Bedazzled star-spangled t-shirt tiger mom
Saw the flag on my hat, told me to take it off
Tell Hanoi I love her*

*I keep no grudge against some Old World kin
Not letting go, now, that's the bodhisattva's sin
I named my Chrysler after Ho Chi Minh
Tell Hanoi I love her*

*I got an auntie, oh, but man alive
Last election cast a ballot for 45
If I'd seen what she's seen, I might see her side
Tell Hanoi I love her*

*I dream of junks, oh, to sail away
Wash your feet on a beach in Ha Long Bay
My mother said once that's where dragons lay
Tell Hanoi I love her*

*We bleed as cheap as our enemy
And we die just as needlessly
Once, I thought there was just one of me
Tell Hanoi I love her*

*Fumble with numbers, I just wanna sing
Ain't nothing sadder than some gook with an American
dream
Sometimes I think the most communist things...
Tell Hanoi I love her*



Ba Ngoai and Mom, Nashville or Paris, 1980s

10. Khmerica

This is the story of Savoeun, a painter, my student Nicolina's father. As a class assignment, I prompted Nicolina to investigate her Khmer history. She sent me a series of her father's paintings, which put to canvas memories of Cambodian countrysides and temples. Her father, the artist, survived American bombings and the Khmer Rouge, who killed a quarter of his countrymen—one of the world's bloodiest modern histories. But what he chose to preserve was the beauty of his homeland. His work reminds me of my mother's paintings of Vietnam.

Along with these paintings, Nicolina recorded a phone call between her and her dad. She graciously allowed me to sit inside that conversation, a child asking a parent impossible questions about a traumatic past. Stories that simultaneously long for investigation and might be best forgotten. Of course, her questions could never be truly answered, but there was success in the trying. This one is for Savoeun with the utmost gratitude.

*Some nights, I'm a tourist to my kind
Landscape caught within a frame, a glimpse of another
side
Call you, call you in my best Khmerican
Painter, pick up your round brush and fill the details in
Be my eyes*

*Cracked paint, a place enchanted
The colors of your life
Sunsets playing on the temple
And you, who survived
Be my eyes*

*Some kids move because their parents take new jobs
Some kids move 'cause of Napalm*

*Cracked paint, a place enchanted
The colors of your life
Siem Reap bathed in gold and umber and
Palm trees climb so high
Sunsets playing on the temple
And you, you who survived
Be my eyes, father, be my eyes*

*I can play the old music
We can dance to all the old songs
But I'll never walk with you through it
What a cruel, cruel task to belong
Yay said, "The moon ain't sitting right"
When you wanted to marry mom
Be my eyes, father, oh be my eyes*

11. Miss Burma

In 2015, I attended an Obon festival in San Francisco. My friend Denise took me; Denise is Joy Teraoka's daughter. The festival took place at the Buddhist Church in Japantown. After watching the dancers outside, I went into the gym and sat down at a long table to eat. Across from me was a small old lady dressed in a Giants hat and Warriors jersey. Her name was Chibby.

Chibby, it turned out, had been a childhood friend of Joy's, a fact I only found out later looking through some of Joy's scrapbooks in Hawaii. Chibby told me about her kids, and we discussed the prospects of the local Bay Area sports teams. At some point she told me about her WWII imprisonment.

As I got up to leave, she said, "I never talked about my time in camp before."

I was surprised. "Never?"

"No. I don't think I even talked about it with my husband."

I assumed this silence was a result of overwhelming trauma or shame. I was wrong.

"I got out of camp and was able to go straight to college at UCLA. I let it go. I moved on." She smiled at me. "I'm a Buddhist. I guess that's what we're supposed to do."

*There are no bridges to the past
Don't fool yourself when you look back
The time is up, the years are gone
You have for now but not for long
Pass it on and pass it by
Kiss me good night*

*Three stripes on a yellow cloth
A fake tattoo that won't wash off
You are more than what you lost
Kiss me good night*

*I met Chibby in the temple
Out in San Francisco
She put my mind to ease*

*I sit here from my privileged throne
Painting scars and tossing bones
Making puppets of the dead
A fetish for my bookish head
What part of history may I take?
Only the part which you might make.*

*Kiss me good night,
Kiss me, good night*

12. Tony Ramone

There is an extraordinary series of photographs by Bud Glick documenting New York's Chinatowns in the 1980s, commissioned by the Museum of Chinese in America. Glick's extraordinary empathy and skill lead us through scenes of funerals, laundries, apartments, and street corners, catching his subjects in rich, quotidian moments, full of affect and life. Sighing, anxious, focused, bored, moving, working, laughing; it is a series which shows a multigenerational immigrant community of individuals in a deeply human way.

I rarely write songs to visuals, preferring to compose and then add projections for concerts. But one of Glick's photos snatched a song from my lips. "Tony likes the Ramones..." I sang/muttered, looking at a young New Yorker looking cool and wearing a Ramones' shirt. The caption read: "Tony, Catherine St., New York Chinatown, 1981."

"Tony Ramone" searches for a fictionalized Tony. We wander through an early '80s Manhattan reconstructed from Glick's photographs a step behind our rock 'n' roll hero, running errands, bumping into curious scenes, living a day and night. The street names and characters are taken directly from captions of around two dozen photographs, each providing a look into a rich New York community in perpetual transition.

*Tony likes the Ramones
At least he thinks the t-shirt's alright
Lucky rabbit foot on
His hair is ready for Friday night*

*Neon lights paint you so pretty
Bumming 'round Chinatown
Ducks hanging up in the window
Waiting for Mrs. Chiu to come down
With a bottle of top-shelf baijiu
She got from a brother back home
Now, I'll head down to Catherine Street
To find Tony Ramone*

*Tony likes the Ramones
At least he likes the "Blitzkrieg Bop"
We share a pair of headphones
And a cot up in a bachelor's loft*

*The cat sweater lady's selling sandals
On the corner of Mott and Grand
Her friend is bundled up like a child
Behind her, ray gun in hand
The fishmongers down on Henry
Perfume themselves with cigarette smoke
Now, I'll head down to Catherine Street
To find Tony Ramone*

*Tony likes the Ramones
Ticket stub from the Palladium*

*His sister missed the show
Back to Queens on the F Train alone*

*Neon lights flicker off so quickly
Pale morning in Chinatown
I watch the funeral pass below the window
Then I walk with Mrs. Chiu down
To meet Rebecca around the corner
For their daily Columbus Park stroll
Now, I'll head down to Catherine Street
Yeah, I'll split for Catherine Street
I'll head down to Catherine Street
To find Tony Ramone*



WWII internment camp
Crystal City, TX. 2019

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Family detention center
Dilley, TX, 2019



WWII internment camp
Crystal City, TX, 2019

About Smithsonian Folkways

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