

*Stephen Paul Miller*

## **Honest Hope**

*about teaching and music, for David Shapiro, Justin Lerner, and Regina Avner*

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Everything inside me insists,  
resists, and goes under.

You can't change the past  
but everything else does.

Dreamy against a moment's skin,  
like a building upside-down,

Scott Joplin and Irving Berlin meet  
and the Great American Songbook opens.

I tell you this class is going nowhere  
and you say that's what you like best about it.

Sometimes Joplin drops in,  
but the connections are loose

and lie between two flowers  
among other insecure texts.

Suddenly everything feels left to right  
sliding sideways making me

forget all the chest pains  
settling in.

Captive roses with their blooms cut,  
we swing on each severed downbeat

becoming so nothing  
it's hard to hear.

Chopin keeps his notes tight  
And Brahms bubbles up

Through the milky Sergio Leone film.  
shaping us. What we do is where we are.

I'm excited about not being excited.  
Love's tirade is enough already already and

I'm just blazing it.  
No one in this class knows how or when

Franklin Roosevelt was elected  
but I feel warm spring air.

Do you want to say something  
with my pen  
because all I do is take attendance.

To me that means  
Putting more and more

quarters in the washing machine,  
setting different cycles,

rinsing and drying,  
softening and folding.

I don't invent fine distinctions  
to make some better than others.

When I'm wild, the class controls me.  
This is such a good class

it doesn't notice the teacher falling asleep.

The class is calm and controlled  
Yet warm and spring like.

Bach volunteers  
in a free health dispensary

playing late Joplin that's more like jazz  
then segueing into a very proper 1890s

Joplin waltz that's  
really jazzy Chopin.

I have to concentrate  
to get this right.  
One two three. One two three.

Flourish and stroll. Flourish  
and stroll. Flourish and stroll.

You charge twice for "extra guacamole"—  
once for "guac," twice for "extra."

What kind of sophistry is that?  
Guac is always extra.

As Benjamin talked of buildings and architecture  
these words are just somewhere

for your heightened attention to hang,  
for I aim to hang-out

and like you being here with me.  
Could you unblock my valves?  
That would be terrific.

Socialism is nothing  
but a human face.  
You know, some lovely  
Brahms and dialysis.

Like everything else  
you're made in a camera.

When you get the dailies back  
your eyeballs animate,

they move back—  
giving them some air.

Taking in each other's wash  
is only secondary,  
The city's only real industry  
is shoplifting.

Horace said literature informs and delights  
but when you inform you also delight

and delight brings balance  
and dancing