

*From Dream Sequins*

by Penn Kemp and Steven McCabe

Toronto: Lyrical Myrical Press, 2012, \$20.00 chapbook.

*Dream Sequins from CD Night Visions*

by Penn Kemp, with Bill Gilliam and Brenda McMorrow

London, ON: Pendas Productions, 2011, ISBN 978-1-897163-16-0. CD \$15.00; print \$20.00.

Combined review by Katerina Fretwell

*Please note: This review combines reading from chapbook galleys and listening to the CD. Since Steven McCabe's art is included only in the chapbook, but interacts magically with the text and music, discussion of his art appears in parentheses.*

Dreams, those wondrous portals into other possibilities, that which exists within the supra-real, recurring/lucid/sequential, are potent prophecies, all-seeing. Penn Kemp's sound opera *Dream Sequins*, recorded by John Magyar, was first performed in 2010 at the Aeolian Hall in London, with performances by Bill Gilliam – piano improvisations; Penn Kemp – lyrics and voice; Steve McCabe – art; Brenda McMorrow – voice, melodies, guitar.

This sing-along multi-art, elegantly sequined magic carpet floats us the audience into Kemp's mystic dreamworld, where we will be transformed. Gilliam's luscious Brubeck-rich chords, McCabe's otherworldly drawings and McMorrow's riveting contralto and folksy guitar enrich Kemp's flightfully imaginative and alchemical dream realms.

The opening piece, "Dream Life of Theresa Harris," touts this nineteenth-century woman's unprecedented adventures with husband St George Littledale in remote Tibet. Succinct phrases contrast the stern upbringing and pioneering escape: *high tea replaced by rancid yak tea . . . confinement of finery hindered by lace necessities* interwoven through visuals, voice and music.

After this realized dream, the opera finds Kemp dreaming in her backyard to rain pinging on her vinyl greenhouse roof. Choral interludes, song, vocal duets, evocative imagery and verbal puns: *Nat's* (Goldberg's voice on tape) and *fungus gnats* stir the wild in us, set up the mantra-chorus: *Reclaim the land. Reclaim the light. Reclaim the oracle. Declaim the sight. (Naturalized, the Dream Spreads into my Back Yard)*. The third work, *Paraclete (Holy Counselor)*, continues the call to the unknown: *the wild poetic in all its true! form's sequence of beaded dream sequins*. Bill's dissonant notes, Steve's two flaming tailed heads and Brenda and Penn's punning prophetic chorus end on a koan: *Play a gain or pray begone! Pair again, paragon!* Embrace the mystic call or be gone!

Another dreamlike subversion, *Skipping Class* (#4), conveys Penn's manifesto: *beyond the curved boundaries of this floating world . . . I fabricate poems as the dream wheel turns*. The vocal acrobatics of Penn and Brenda, Steve's amorphous figure fronting a distant city and Bill's rippling interludes enrich the repeated theme: *Skipping stones across the pond. Skipping ropes that pull us to other dimensions beyond the known*.

*Missing, what's missing* (#5), with its profound O sounds and vocal twining, asks the central question: *How could so much / wisdom evaporate with / the body's decay?* The vocal, piano and visual delivery swoop us back in time. From that minor key emerges the jazzy syncopated sixth piece: *Recurring Dream Theme Reflecting Mimesis*. A benevolent sun god and moon goddess gaze upon a

sunflower, our yearning to merge with *all that could be* underscored by our *wrong / turns over and over since the Neolithic*: wisdom lost from both human and communal bodies.

Tonally a comic cosmic relief, *Recurring Dream Theme* (#7), showcases Penn's aural pyrotechnics *yowling / prowling like a White Goddess stalking the dark* to Brenda's melodies, Bill's syncopation and Steve's profiled face sprouting tree whiskers.

Still in darkness, *All Things Considered* (#8), in the Solstice's *Moon of the Long Night*, tells us to trust the opening up process. Steve's I Ching-like art: broken hearts superimposed over repetitive boxy lines enhances our own dream-work. A wake up, *Rise and Shine!* (#9) begins with Bill's lyric piano and Brenda's sonorous refrain: *Can you hear / what they are crying?* In Penn's verbal pun, "they" refer to *scaly amphibians* and *scary Neanderthals*. The Old Ones exhort: are we too early or too late? We must break old patterns to remake the world into a more compassionate, cooperative and eco-friendly habitat.

*The Pageant* (#10) continues to propel us to *something / larger than the single self. / . . . / Singly or together our dreams / direct us, as if night-given / leads us to true script*. Spiritual growth is indelibly linked to poem, dream and shadow self. Brenda's guitar, Bill's improv, Penn and Brenda's threaded vocals and Steve's Kahlo-like cosmic goddess set the scene for our transformation.

*Homing to the Given* (#11) warns of our trend toward entropy and then, reiterating the incandescent motif, proclaims that finding the electric cord, *We switch on // the earth. . . . // The globe lights incandescent*. Steve's angry multi-headed torso recalls Cerberus guarding Hades or the Ancient Bird Goddess, our necessary descent in order to move forward.

*The Kenning* (#12) asks the final question: how do we transform? Brenda refrains: *By becoming earth becoming*. To commingle with earth, we need *New eyes, new ears* as Penn echoes. In Steve's art, a goddess sits with moon and stars in a tower and above the sun and clouds, all personified and interconnected. Even while rehearsing in the Aeolian Hall, the troupe receives confirmation that the hall is also sacred space, reflected by a knife slashing a cobweb to release a Monarch butterfly.

The final piece, *In Light*, depicts in lush metaphors how we live in light, how without shadow, there is no fear. In a pun on Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, Brenda sings and Penn intones *just that / bearable lightness of being just*, intuiting that spirituality and justice must be conjoined for genuine enlightenment.

This multi-media (poetry, song, piano improv, guitar, art) and multi-spiritual (pagan, Buddhist, Christian: *Paraclete*) visionary, oracular sound opera is as timely now as Delphi's Pythias was in ancient Greece. A tremendously talented troupe, Penn Kemp, Bill Gilliam, Brenda McMorrow and Steve McCabe weave Kemp's *Dream Sequins* into an unforgettable magic that lingers long after each hearing or performance. Don't miss this chance to face the dark and dream yourself into your higher self while being entertained and delighted. ♡

Katerina Vaughan Fretwell's acclaimed sixth poetry collection, *Angelic Scintillations*, was published by Inanna Publications and Education Inc., in 2011, who will publish her seventh collection, *Class Acts*, in 2013. Fretwell's recent poems are in *Scintilla* #16 and *The Seventh Quarry* in Wales. Her sestina "Kissing Cousins" was shortlisted for *Descant* magazine's Winston Collins Poetry Prize, 2012, and her poem "Mary's Wish List" was nominated the *The Prairie Journal* for the Puschart Prize.