

**GAUTAM
TEJAS
GANESHAN**

**WITH A DRAWING BY
DAVID WILSON**

40 SONGS

© 2014 Gautam Tejas Ganeshan

Cover printed by letterpress
in an old carriage house in Berkeley.

Body printed by risograph at the BAM / PFA
Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive
for "The Possible" Exhibition, 2014.

Special thanks to Betsy Davids and David Wilson.

[gautamtejasganeshan.com]

Gautam Tejas Ganeshan

40 Songs

Berkeley, California 2014

My songs are obvious, or ought to be. There's an effort in writing them, sometimes delicate, sometimes stubborn. But in the ones that make it to my lips (or to my throat really), the craft doesn't weigh heavily. I'm not trying to leave chisel marks.

Song is an unfathomable inheritance, the neanderthal of literature. Songs nestle in the mind, and yield to fondling by the tongue. I do write these because I want to feel them. Like a prescient grandmother, I can tell when they've become pregnant, and then I begin to repeat to savor.

My songs contain an invisible identity. They're naturalized, not born. If you're into Carnatic music, you've got the babelfish, and you'll hear easter eggs everywhere. I'm not intent on representing - they're just good, if they are.

What they're about is a barrel-o-monkeys. Sacred music beats everything in rock paper scissors. I have a laundry list of annotations for each song, according to its poetics, its references to what-have-you, its special meanings needing 'splaining.

But don't worry about the hidden files - just play the game. In the lingua franca, lilt gives lay. Each song has a way it pulls the pocket. That's one of the main things. There's also the matter of "schwakaram", i.e. the integration of boredom into a good life.

The tunes have hidden corners which I didn't invent. I kinda sing old music. Singer-songwriter is an old profession too.

A mridangam drummer from Kalamazoo told me about "contrafacta", and yes, that's what they are. They follow a disciplined song form. Movements are iterative, and violations are deflating. They are meant to give glory by being healthy. Yes, I aim for perfection, but gimme a break.

For God,
Or Not.

keep my strength
vision of blue
come to society
barbarian
alive, alive
born somewhere
take me there
cut from you
educated
sing in me, muse
before one, becomes two
lotus eyes
the one
all in it, no limit
oh, forget it all
proximity
the elusive fugitive
idolatrous fantasy
old school

[view from the morning raga platform]

uniquely against odds
sever the ties
a crown jewel
even the birds
this here life
end times
mother tongue
orphans we
until the stars darken
fortune and fireflies
ever i wander
forsaken
genius of this place
same old places
my imperfection
my vanity
contemplative
a voice
down below
just enough
mangalam

begada
sri
kanada
atana
nattai
bhairavi
pantuvarali
mohanam
sriranjani
hamsadhwani
kiranavali
darbar
abhogi
saranga
andolika
vagadeeshwari
madhyamavati
anandabhairavi
jonpuri

[ukiah]

suddhadhanyasi
saramathi
abheri
sahana
purnashadjam
hindolam
reetigowla
manirangu
kalyani
kambhoji
varali
thodi
khamas
kapinarayani
vasanta
senjurutti
arabhi
kannada
jaganmohini
saveri
sourashtram + surutti

In the time I've been alive,
I've realized two or three truths.

First part of my life has gone by
and I'm not satisfied.

Why?

'Cause I've tried with all of my
wits and brawn in vain -
it was not enough.

I need you to open my eyes
so that I can see you.

I don't need two or three truths.
Just one, if it's you.

In the time I'm still alive,
I'll keep my strength for you,

keep my strength

Alive. Alive.

All I sing's alive to you.
And your gift inside's alive too.
And the giving tree still survives somewhere new.

Within the body lives a garden
growing wild roots down,
with leaves higher than the mind
receiving light unrefined.

And every seed gives its energy subtly to the body,
feeding the steed ridden by the force inside that's

Alive, Alive...

Thriving in soil, your skin,
the harvest has secrets within a supernatural taste
that nourishes an unearthly tongue.

In mother's milk first the warmth of love distilled in the body,
then an embrace and a sigh of pleasure that you are

Alive, Alive...

alive, alive

Call me barbarian.

My lifeblood is fresh
from fallen bodies sacrificed,
died to provide my voice vigor
for singing your returning,
thus in suffering sanctified by emerging.

As I celebrate, as I grieve,

I believe that I'm alive to
in time realize who survives,
who all dying beings underlies.

As I realize, I believe.

May I, once my end begins,
nobly, as my spent body shudders into humus,
my human carnal term,
remember whose life eternal I'm serving
as a vital crucible for conserving.

Comes my last breath, I'll praise my end of days well.
Then comes what's next and my memory of me
unremarkably into you fades endlessly.

As I celebrate, as I grieve...
As I realize, I believe.

barbarian

Even the birds regret a song without strong wings,
floating in awe,
flying in mystery.

And one regret remains.
Even one regret remains hanging on a song
that's soaring over a sea of memories, innocently.

Who's living clean?

Not the follower with past pristine.
Nor the one fully free,
whom on the path you may meet,

but one who's healing a self-inflicted scar within,
revealing the lion lying in wait to kill the guilty.

Mortification doesn't mean death, but depth,
preserving precious gifts of life -
ghosts in the machine.

The luster of self-illumination's fragile.
The flesh requires undisturbed rest for recovery.

even the birds

Forsaken here.

The lord of this land has left me bewildered.

Where are you?

And who am I, bewildered?

Am I forsaken?

Nowhere a trace of primeval life grown old.

Without your grace every place is a wilderness to me.

Am I forsaken?

Change, Change.

Every day I come closer to you.

Same, Same.

Back to dust in the end.

Is my whole life just a sacred game you're playing?

Or when it's over, will you sing as I do?

Once by an alpine lake I perched
singing with the birds and echoes
and you too were there, bathing.

Bathing your body slowly,
the clouds climbed you slowly,
as they have done forever.

Or just for me?

How could I be forsaken?

forsaken

When I say "you",

do I have a clue as to whose
attention I'm calling to,
whose ears I'm asking for,
whose eyes I yearn to look into?

May their enlightened stare
calmly return my gaze.

Some character, some fairy tale?
Archetypically arrived from mythology,
beloved by everybody?

But I mean something else,
someone whose face only occurs to me,
whose reality, whose personality,
just may be a trope whose poetry
makes believe that I'll see
an idolatrous fantasy,

whereas I don't stand on any ceremony.

So I invoke freely "you", epithetically.
Even if invented you still reflect my philosophy
that an unaccountable demon bears responsibility
for what's best in me.



VIEW FROM THE MORNING RAGA PLATFORM

I once sang for a barnraising, which means I began before dawn, properly in starlight, and sang the many workers awake. My stage, built for the purpose, was a simple platform built into a hillside overlooking a valley of mostly oak chaparral, a few modest vineyards, and a small lake. The first audience were a fawn and some swallows, followed by a few healthy and wise (if not wealthy) early-risers in wool hats. I've performed there more than once, and that stage has become known as the 'Morning Raga Platform'.

He's old school;
can't fake that sleepy durability.

No use for a shortcut to laugh lines -
they're earned signs that he's learned
to surrender mirthfully.

Even his clothes fit no style,
though they seem suited to the sunlight
all the while he daydreams.

old school

Lotus eyes,

Did you give a thought for my salvation?

With my life, what am I meant to do?
Consecrate it all, give it over to

You with the beautiful and unperturbed gaze
and those brazen arms,
strong and sure to save me,
Lotus eyes...

Insight's a little fish
that without regret I let loose to go.

Either I am dying or I haven't hit my stride,
yet I find nothing falling into place while on my own.

My mind's open wide and inviting,
Lotus eyes.

lotus eyes

All in simplicity.

All that I'm meant to be.
All kinds of this and that on my mind.

Oh, forget it all!

Forget language.
Forget news,
status updates,
page views.

Let what informs without infusing,
this "information" -

Let it fall!

I only admit one influence,
although I'm hardly innocent.

Ignorance isn't bliss, but what is?
Seeing beyond all of this.

Seeing through all of this to you.

oh, forget it all

If I found joy,
would I know?

If I, in my search,
in my research,
revealed the real elusive fugitive?

Am I trying to extract the juice too soon?

Too much purpose,
Too few aimless days
not too full to play for joy.

Or am I waiting dumb,
ignoring the new strangely calm interloper
standing by more quietly than I?

Have you been there long,
watching my fumbles and pride?

Speak up! Please say something!
I can't believe I can so long be denied.

the elusive fugitive

In all my life I've yet to meet the one who,
come what may, maintains a vantage on you -
'til now.

He's my friend who can tell your story,
this strange story,
singing with simplicity extraordinary.

He won't need variety to excel me in singing true
and in tune with each curve and movement
of your lips, smiling forgivingly.

the one

Some irreplaceable moment
when I learn how to listen
for unheard whispers emerging,

I turn my ears to the earth,
my virgin eyes to the sky,
where I discern a once in a lifetime vision of blue.

I'll spend the rest of my days with open arms,
waiting for you to return.

Some irreplaceable moment passes silently
as the seconds unfold and fade.

But you remain silently,
as the seconds unfold and fade.

vision of blue