

## Getting Serious about Music

—for Chris Krueger

If I were serious about music,  
I'd have to get a dog.  
My cat gives me no help: she turns  
and leaves the room when the music starts.  
But the dogs I grew up with. . .  
they seemed to love our singing  
(but maybe they just appreciated  
the companionship of howling humans).

If I decided to be serious about music,  
I'd need to practice.  
Who knows better than a dog  
how to do a thing again  
and again? the ball flies out,  
and she runs after it, each time.  
Sounds to me like practicing.

And I'd need to play with soul.  
Well, does a dog ever  
do the same thing twice  
in the same old mechanical way?  
'Though they love to play the same old tunes,  
they never write out the ornaments,  
so it sounds new every time.

My choirmaster had a dog,  
a Golden, but I've forgotten her name.  
She slept, mostly, while we practiced Byrd.  
We were grad students, and the war  
in Vietnam weighed heavy on us—  
and we were writing dissertations.  
So, half the time, we sang like strangled ostriches.

But then he'd wake his dog  
and we would listen to her while she panted,  
reminding us of how to breathe.

I'd need to learn how they do it,  
those serious musicians  
who, night after night, face the same crowds  
with the same old tunes, the same cadences.  
I watch a dog, and I understand a little bit:  
"Oh, a stick! and then another stick! how wonderful!  
D major? And then, a different key: ah, the dominant!  
Love it! I haven't seen A major  
for, maybe, 20 seconds! See how I wag my tail  
in utter happiness!"

If I ever get serious about music,  
I'll want to remember Pythagoras.  
He knew about harmony,  
the spheres and all that,  
but I mean the other thing he knew,  
the transmigration of souls—  
I might well have been, in some other life,  
a cockatoo, an armadillo, or . . . a dog!

Well, then maybe I already know  
what the dog knows about music:  
just breathe,  
just bark,  
just chase each stick as if it were the first,  
just BE!

—Nicholas Jones