

SERGIO:

A Poet
Witness
to the City

Volume 1

[The Poetry
of Howard
SERGIO Tucker]

Compiled by Emma Restrepo

Acknowledgements

To my Lord, for His gift of words, and to the musicians whose music expresses the joy of being human,

To my mother and father, who have loyally followed my adventures,

To Maximilian, Jesse, and Alexander--my sons and best roadies,

To Emma for her encouragement and collaboration; Waddell and Jamai for starting me on this poetic journey; Traci for encouraging my creative spirit and honing my performance; Veda for her loyalty at performances; Nancy and Don for challenging me to be true to my art; Tiffany and Conchieveia for their poetic collaborations; Renee, Karen, DJ Mucho Dinero, and the Czar of Jazz for bringing my art to the airwaves; Dr. Jay for elevating me to an exceptional spiritual level; John and the Big Unkle, who play with the best bad ass jazz funk band on the planet; and to Juliano my good friend, for welcoming me into the Brazilian community, where my creative soul finds nourishment and peace.

To my Muse--you are in my thoughts, my words, and my dreams.

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Preface

Over the years as a poet, there are many things I would long to do. To sit quietly in a cottage with Seamus Heaney while he read aloud about “walking on air.” To hear the raven-like voice of Robert Bly talk with driving force as I watched his hawk-like profile catch the light. To crack crab claws and share a beer with Robert Graves. To quietly sip wine with Neruda and talk of butterflies and women.

Yet it never occurred to me that I’d actually have such privilege. These were quiet dreamings that would never materialize in real life. The dreamings that inspired me to write my own works. The dreamings that kept a quiet smile on my face.

Then suddenly an old friend appeared with a new voice. A voice that filled the night like the beat of a distant drum and that called me to awake from dreaming and to get out and live, and love, and dance. A voice alive with all the force and dreams of every poet I loved.

It seemed unreal. It was like learning that you never knew that Neruda was your neighbor, always right there. And as I read more and more of what he wrote, I woke up and began writing more and more myself. I felt lifted and reborn just in reading these works.

To see and hear the voice of a friend evolve to such art is not just a privilege and honor but an inspiration. I invite you all

Sit quietly
read
these poems aloud
Hear
the distant drum
Dance

Michael Hamilton
Poet and author of *Letters to M and Bring*

Introduction

SERGIO: A Poet Witness to the City, is an assorted collection of my works over a four-year period, with poetry selected and arranged by my good friend and journalist Emma Restrepo. Poetry, for me, is one way of sharing a journey of spiritual and social exploration; it's also a celebration of romance, relationships, and music. I am a creative, complicated man, full of contradictions, full of passion for life, full of love and faith. At first, I thought having strong conflicting feelings was strange, so I created a stage personality in order to speak and act freely. SERGIO Diablo was born at a Mardi Gras party in full black costume with devil horns. When asked my name, I responded SERGIO. It seemed sexier, more mysterious, powerful, and Latino-sounding than Howard. A friend added Diablo because of the horn mask.

SERGIO Diablo was my id, if you will, full of raw passion and sexual energy. It was liberating to write about my passions, dress all in black, act on stage, hear the audience response, and get high-fives from the men. It was totally self-indulgent, however—a mask, a shadow character only showing one side. I wrote those early pieces to seduce the audience, and it worked. Then something happened.

My poem “The Chronicles of Kamael: No More” was my wake-up call and my first spiritual poem. Writing at dawn is part of my creative process, and one morning this poem came to me from out of the blue. It was powerful and so different from the others that it gave me serious pause, so much so that I took it to my pastor, who read it and reassured me, saying, “You are asking the right questions; keep writing.” “Diablo” he questioned, asking how I could write such powerful spiritual work with that name. I then arranged for the demise of SERGIO Diablo as a character, a separate entity of my personality. I wrote a poem of his death, restored my full name, and began to integrate my feelings, ideas, and thoughts, both sensual and spiritual, into what you read and experience today.

My poetry is influenced by Langston Hughes and Pablo Neruda. I enjoy Hughes for his chronicling of the life of the Harlem Renaissance and adopted the “A Poet Witness to the City” as a tag line. Philadelphia is artistically diverse, and I tapped into a multicultural network of poets, artists, and musicians at various events as I traveled my city. I wrote about the scenes--as snapshots, as places in time and space. The scene is usually associated with music or dance, a beautiful woman, her charms, how she affects me and interacts with the scene; hence, my admiration for Pablo Neruda.

I write in a masculine voice, celebrating women and highlighting the positive aspects of romance that that may seem to be missing in many cases but may in fact be there, just beneath the surface. As men, we think these thoughts but rarely articulate them for fear of rejection. Or we just get tongue-tied. Yet our feelings are powerful. So I want to define what it's like to be a man, a man who enjoys the company of a woman, a woman who makes me think, and makes me want to show her that what she says and does is fascinating.

This volume is organized into four sections, each introduced by a writer or a musician who has accompanied me as I read these poems. I begin with **SERGIO: Spiritual and Social Consciousness**, which was written in collaboration with Jay Fluellen, music/choir director of Philadelphia's African Episcopal Church of Saint Thomas. Some of these poems, inspired by biblical passages, have been performed at the church during the third Sunday services.

The second section, **SERGIO: Spoken Word and Lyrical Jazz Artist**, is a trip to my Brazilian soul. I fell in love with Brazilian music several years ago. It felt natural for me to write poetry and perform to the bossa nova and samba rhythms. I even learned to play percussion. I am not sure how to define this poetry; however, I do know the music defines the expression of my words. My performances with Philly Bossa and Juliano Braga reaffirm that my Brazilian affinity is more than a passing fascination; there are deep roots in my being that yearn for the freedom this music hints at.

The section called **SERGIO: The Sensual and Romantic** is a snapshot of my early days in poetry. It was then that I found my voice performing on stage, writing to excite and explore, writing to fulfill desires, writing to be bad in a refined sense, writing to let us all enjoy the pleasure of life and the music of the jazz fusion band The Big Unkle, led by John Henderson. My poetry with TBU is brash and bold, and says, “Hey world, here I am ready to stir things up and enjoy life!”

Finally, **SERGIO: A Poet Witness to the City**, features poems about the characters and the flavor of my hometown of Philadelphia. As a native Philadelphian traveling in the spoken word circuit, I experienced a rebirth of my city in terms of the art, culture, and poetry scene. I saw the city with new eyes as I explored it with Emma Restrepo, a Colombian journalist who adopted Philadelphia as her own. We would speak about Columbia, her home of Bogota, and its similarities to Philadelphia, as well as its differences. Our conversations gave me at once an international and intimate insight into my city.

What's the best part of being a poet? It's that my work allows me to take the ordinary situation, go deeper, and explore.

SERGIO:

Spiritual
and
Social
Consciousness

1234

Music is an expression of my spirituality. As I continue to grow spiritually, I also expand musically. Many styles of music serve as inspiration, and the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas fully supports a wide array of musical expression within its spiritual service. In the 16 years that I have served in its ministry, I have incorporated classical, jazz, gospel, pop, R&B, and African American spiritual genres into the framework of the Episcopal liturgy. The mix of various genres is how I express who I am as a musician, and the congregation has grown to appreciate the variety. My expression also aligns with the vision of the rectors. The current rector, Fr. Martini Shaw, has given me the freedom to grow, placing few restrictions on what I bring to the ministry.

It is in this context that my work with Howard Tucker has blossomed. Howard and I have been working specifically in the genre of “liturgical spoken word.” As we create our pieces, the Episcopal liturgy serves as a resource for both Howard and me. Even though we are creating something unique, we are both grounded in the liturgy of the word. Our pieces are directly related to the readings assigned for that particular day.

There has been a wonderful flow from word inspiration to musical inspiration. The development of our pieces always begins with Howard’s words. I read what he writes and compose music shaped to the tone of his words. We then improvise the form in performance, shaping the words and music to the moment.

In this process of making a musical sound world for Howard’s words, I am assisted by amazing improvisational musicians: Cedric Babb on electric bass, James Holmes on drums, Robert Meyers on congas, and Richard Hart on trumpet. It is Howard’s words that serve as the starting point for all that we do. In one of our more recent pieces, Dare to Love, I incorporated the use of the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas Chancel Choir. Using Howard’s words, I wrote the music, and taught the piece to my choir. The choir sang their part as a hook/chorus and Howard provided spoken word verses.

My work with Howard has been a remarkable fountain of inspiration, and I look forward to future collaboration as we continue to create pieces that touch and inspire our congregation.

Jay Fluellen
Musical and Choral Director
The African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas

The River

My first
socially
conscious poem
was inspired by the
biblical reference of the
exiled Israelites weeping by the
river of Babylon. It was written before the
earthquake in Haiti, and when I saw the Haitians
praying in the fields with their arms outstretched to
the skies, I was moved and thought of this poem. In
the face of incredible hardship or tragedy, we
can still see God--His movements, His
judgments, His corrections to right
the wrongs and know that
where there is Faith,
there is always
hope.

We sat by the river and wept...
Our sweat flowed as we thought of our brothers,
Lost in despair for they wander the streets.

We sat by the river and wept...
Our tears flowed as we thought of our sisters,
Lost in fear for they are alone seeking love in unforgiving arms.

We sat by the river and wept...
Our blood flowed as we thought of our mothers,
Lost in mystery for they are vanished and their children crying.

We sat by the river and wept...
Our anger flowed as we thought of our fathers,
Lost in injustice for they are imprisoned to feed the greed of the industry.

We sat by the river and wept...

A mighty wind began to blow.
His breath roused the waters, causing a great disturbance crashing fierce waves against the shore;
We were unafraid knowing He had come to cleanse the world of wrongs and unmask the truths;

We stood and welcomed the terrible storm on the wings of a million angels with joy in the
redemption!

We embraced each other as our brothers gained wisdom;

We cheered as our sisters gained respect;

We celebrated as our mothers came home;

We worshipped His name as our fathers were freed;

We sit by the river and weep no more...*for this is the age of Zion!*

Enough

“Enough”
is political
commentary
blended with expressions
of frustration from failed
promises and unrealistic
relationships.

Listening to what's wrong for the hundredth time.
Been walked on, walked by, and strategically ignored.
Not lying down and won't take it anymore...whose back is turned and walks away.
Superior do you say?
Tired of the unending drama, conflict, confusion, and lies,
Move on...do the right thing; stop making excuses...just try.
Gave plenty, didn't say a word.
Dutiful and respectful...failed to listen; now that's absurd!
Pushed the easy button with a toxic tongue,
Back up and don't come calling...cause no one is there, the bell has rung.
Not there to hear the same old negative vibes, armchair analysis from a hundred stories high,
Never walked a day in someone else's shoes...still trying to rationalize,
Vaguely understanding the pressure...oblivious to the real issues,
Yes, fighting false assumptions.
Now mark thy words. Think carefully. Come correct,
Understand the discontent...with conflicting versions of the status quo.
Enough!
Change is coming.
FAITH.
JUSTICE.
PEACE....

TheChronicles of Kamael: No More

By
subtle
sound and
movement...like a
herd of antelope reacting
to a snapped twig, the excitable
and frightened shall run in full force
toward the abyss...yet those who hold their
ground, standing firm in faith, swayed not by
the hysteria of masses, will see that it
is you, Lord, coming with gentle
footsteps and outstretched
hands, with grains of
grace to feed us as
we journey
home.

Have I always been an angel?
Fallen, been twisted every which way,
Made promises to by silky soft voices for fleeting everlasting joy,
Smoke and mirrors, nothing real or firm,
Thought to have found peace and tranquility in solitude...

No More
Restless now
Not content with the status quo
The emptiness of material gain for what
Building frustration like howling at the wind
Shouting to the deaf: "The kingdom is at hand!"

No More
Courage and conviction course through my veins
Unleash your servant to make ready the way
Now become the herald, the harbinger, the hibernation is over
Time to take up thy armor, thy shield and thy grace
What about thy sword to wield in furious righteousness?

No More
No warning alarms will be sounded
No overt threats made
No coercion to the faith
No cause or consequence relayed

Hold Me

One of
my recurring
themes is “Children
of God or Children
of Light.” I wrote from the
perspective of a father giving to my
children. “Hold Me” is about that comfort
only a parent can give a child when all
goes wrong. It’s the closeness and
deep paternal intimacy that we
seek in our relationship
with God our
Father.

“When I called, you answered me;
you increased my strength within me.”

From my darkness you brought light;
From my hopelessness you brought faith;
From my loneliness you brought comfort;
From my anger you brought peace;
From the brink of my despair, your hands held me up with a firm
touch;

Your strength and reassurance that I am your child!

“When I called, you answered me;
you increased my strength within me.”

Sometimes I lose sight of your teaching,
Sometimes I don’t listen, stubborn and hard of heart
Sometimes I speak to no one and keep to myself
Sometimes I lose faith in your plans,
Sometimes I ask you questions when I know the answer is within me;

To do your will
To stand for justice
To sing for freedom
To preach for salvation and forgiveness
To affirm for the world that you are my mighty and living God!

“When I called, you answered me;
you increased my strength within me.”

From my darkness you brought light;
From my hopelessness you brought faith;
From my loneliness you brought comfort;
From my anger you brought peace;
From the brink of my despair, your hands held me up with a firm touch;

Your strength and reassurance that I am your child!

O my Lord I am your child. Hold me close to your strength.

Hold me close.
Hold me close, O Lord

To do your will
To stand for justice
To sing for freedom
To preach for salvation and forgiveness

To affirm for the world that you are my mighty and living God!

O my Lord I am your child. Hold me close to your strength.

Hold me close...

Hold me.

Be ^{May I} Last

Written at
the height of the
“Occupy” movement,
“May I Be Last” is a call to
be a servant leader. In a world
where greed and dual standards are
the norm, being last means being
forgotten. I played with the
concept of “the first shall
be last and the last
shall be first.”

“So the last shall be first and the first shall be last.”

Is it the Wall Street banker or the suspicious IMF chief?
Is it the reality TV star distorting our children with fancy pretty pettiness as our cultural
belief?
Is it the starving child in Somalia clutching her bloated belly waiting for your Angels to
take her pain away?
Is it my brothers running amok in streets brandishing their fists with guns as shields of
their insecurities every day?

“So the last shall be first and the first shall be last.”

Is it billionaires whose tax breaks can feed thousands of people for hundreds of days?
Is it political pundits who wage vicious class wars as a game on a national stage?
Is it those who struggle daily with your laws and commands?
Is it those who want to listen yet live without conscience or care for our fellow man?

May I be last, My Lord?

May I be your servant to walk in your ways...
To be first means there would be less for my brothers and sisters who would stand behind
me;
To demonstrate unity...we can walk side by side
May I be last--to call for strife and division, to call to arms, to lock down, to lock out, to
shut up, to shut in, to imprison indiscriminately
May I be last--to agree, to stand silently, to look the other way, to hope it never happens to
me.

May I be last, My Lord?

May I be last to walk away...
To be first only shows my back to my brothers and sisters.
To demonstrate unity...we can walk side by side
May I be last, My Lord...may I be last.

For when we all enter your gates...the last will be the first...to celebrate!

The Lullaby

This
poetic
tale tells of
an angelic beauty,
her song, and an
unintended
escape.

There was an Angel who liked to collect butterflies

Casting a net of subtle songs of brown-eyed lullabies

Butterflies, mesmerized, stopped to listen, then forgot to fly
Admiring them enhanced Angel's beauty as she sings

Asleep the butterflies dreamed of freedom...on their wonderful wings

Oh, Angel paused the lullaby to sneeze...one woke up startled,

And took to the breeze...

to Dare Love

My collaboration
with Dr. Jay Fluellen
yielded this poem,
which blends the words of
the Prophet Isaiah and Dr. Martin
Luther King's acceptance speech for the
Nobel Peace Prize. "Dare to Love" relates
to Dr. King's call for us to go higher than the
mountaintop. We imagined Dr. King to have
been inspired, as a man of faith, by the call
to social justice by Isaiah. As we are
brought into contemporary times,
let us remember that there
is further work to be
done.

Brothers and Sisters, let's all go to a higher mountaintop
We are stuck on a plateau
We are grateful and proud to have mutual understanding
We have much further to go
There is a higher mountaintop where all of our children are safe
There is a higher mountaintop where our poor are not ignored
There is a higher mountaintop where civility, humanity, dignity are the norm
A voice cries out! Dare to love.
Dare to love, prepare the way of the Lord
Dare to struggle for peace and freedom, do not be afraid
Dare to be uncomfortable; both rich and poor are tied in a single garment of destiny
Dare to make straight in the desert, this dark, confused world
The Kingdom of God may yet reign in the hearts of men
A voice cries out! Dare to love.
There may be threats of death
There may be storms of persecution
There may be the temptation of wanting to retreat
I am not yet discouraged
Then the glory of the Lord shall be revealed
There is a higher mountaintop
A voice cries out! Dare to love.
A voice cries out! Dare to love.

Consciousness Tyranny of

This

poem

is based on

Reverend Absalom

Jones's 19th-century

sermon about ending slavery.

My poem is a contemporary call to
action against the hidden slavery of today.

As Christians, we cannot allow this tyranny of
consciousness--this assault on our mind,

body, and spirit--to continue. I quote

the words of the prophet Isaiah

asking God to strengthen

our resolve to pursue

true freedom.

To be free of physical enslavement
Yet embrace slave masters' N word as one of brotherly endearment
Yet degrade our women as tools of trades, emphasizing our weakness
And murdering for sport, intrigue, madness, or meanness

Slavery to Mind

Slavery to Body

Slavery to Spirit

To be free of physical enslavement
Yet continually absorb the pettiness cloaked in reality TV entertainment
Yet we fight for our rights to violence as the means to all ends
And using those weapons in our streets and small towns, targeting the innocent helpless
children again and again

Slavery to Mind

Slavery to Body

Slavery to Spirit

To be free of physical enslavement
Yet trapped in a mind game of deceit and moral estrangement
Yet abusing trafficked human bodies in so-called victimless crimes
And meanwhile we are standing idly by horrified and desensitized

This is the tyranny of consciousness

To be free of physical enslavement
Yet in these dark days our Lord hears the cries and denounces all endangerment
Yet our Lord is not idly standing by
And our Lord is not willing to accept our inaction of empty offerings and passive sacrifices

To be free of physical enslavement

Yet we must end this Slavery to Mind, Slavery to Body, and Slavery to Spirit
Yet fervently beseech our Lord as we struggle to break free our brothers and sisters
And
*"Then you shall call and the Lord will answer;
you shall cry for help and he will say, 'Here I am'"*

We shall overcome this Tyranny of Consciousness
We shall overcome this Tyranny of Consciousness...

SERGIO:

Spoken
Word and
Lyrical
Jazz Artist

1234

I first met Sergio at a social networking event promoted by my paper, *Jornal dos Imigrantes*. A friend told me he was a poet, and so I offered to play along with him and improvise background music while he was reading one of his poems. Everyone loved his style.

My professional musical background and pleasure is playing Brazilian jazz, bossa nova, samba, American favorites, Latin jazz, and traditional Hispanic music. When I perform with Howard, I really enjoy myself. I relax. I have fun. I find myself. We can read each other's minds and interact with the crowd. During the performance, kids pay special attention to Howard reading poetry and playing percussion. It is a magical moment. I feel like we can really change the world. His lyrics are fantastic. His voice, together with the music, creates a perfect romantic atmosphere.

I love his poem "I Wait," which enhances the classic "Girl from Ipanema." After the first chorus, Howard stops playing percussion and recites this poem, and we all take a trip to his magical world. The experience is so intense that even I, sometimes, forget to come back and sing the rest of the song. We smile to one another because we know the reason.

Every performance is special and different, because we improvise and freely innovate. I love when we perform the "Mas Que Nada" song and Howard says "feel the beat of samba," while I do a guitar riff in samba style. The percussion and his voice transport us to Rio during carnival time. It is really cool to perform side by side with this master of imagination, Howard SERGIO Tucker.

My faith is that one day everybody will have the opportunity to experience the arts, including poetry, music, and dance, and we will change the world. No more wars, no more violence. As John Lennon put it, "Imagine all the people, living life in peace..." That's why I believe we are not there just to perform and have fun, but to interact, to change the world a little bit via imagination.

Juliano Braga
Brazilian musician
Newspaper editor and owner of *Jornal dos Imigrantes*

I Wait

If I were in
love with the right
woman, this is how it
would be. "I Wait" is about my
anticipation of that love. This poem
is performed to Brazilian bossa nova, to the
tune of "The Girl from Ipanema." My
fantasy here is that she may walk by,
not seeing me, but I will get
her attention, and she
will love me!

I wait

To have her hand in mine
To see God's blessings in her eyes
To feel her excitement as we play
To hear her say my name
To hold her gently into the new day

I wait

To laugh at her silly self
To take her dreams seriously
To protect her from my childish ways
To hold her steady through the winds of uncertainty
To make plans beyond today

I wait

To have her feel like it's the first time
To be the man that walks by her side
To hold her closely in my sexy way
To shout the Joy that He sends from above
To indulge in her fragrance of love...I must say

I wait

Meant To Be

“Meant to Be”

celebrates feminine
charm. Bands like the
Arpeggio Jazz Ensemble, the
Big Unkle, and Juliano Bragga like
to play jazz to this poem as it
expresses sensuality in a
lyrical jazz form.

She touches my arm in a soft yet excited way;
She withdraws her doubts and beams genuine smiles at everything I say;
Her perfume, a natural sweetness especially when she plays;
She becomes part of me; fighting those feelings, now stop and pray;
His gifts are glorious as she sings of an exotic land found south and far away;
Of hope, love, and faith...that is our shared day.
She is an Angel on magnificent wings, the brightness of wisdom in her eyes;
Her breath kisses life into my soul...takes my spirit beyond the skies.
The softness of her lips I do want to play;
Her tongue darting to taste my wine in such a seductive way;
Finding curiosity in her intelligence that confounds the harsh world of today;
In her arms to find warmth and comfort, she so affectionately displays.
She moves in carefree sensuality...limitless compassion with such ease;
She presses her lips at the right moments just to tease.
She is...I am...who we are...meant to be...friends.

How Do You Say

“How
Do You
Say” started as a
SERGIO Diablo poem
and stage performance. I
would focus on a woman in the
audience and make direct eye contact
with her, saying the poem only to her with
deep sensuality. At the end of the poem, the
woman would say her name. The performance gave me
a thrill until I realized it was dangerous; I could be the
first poet shot on stage by a jealous boyfriend or
husband. So I toned down the delivery and
changed the message from “Come
here, girl” to “You are the right
one for me.” “How Do
You Say,” I learned,
is about how I
say it.

I like you.

You and I would be perfect.

We could make precious children with deep brown sparkling eyes.

I want to wake up beside you with your warmth, your glow, your scent, your softness with
tender playfulness.

Yes girl, I would give all that I am and all that I am meant to be.

I want to hear you moan with a short breath of delicious ecstasy.

Come to church, pray with me, be blessed; His face forever shines on us.

Sit by my side, read contentedly, wanting nothing more than the stillness of silence.

You inspire me to write, to work, to perform, to take it all to the next level, not for fame or
fortune,

But for your smile, your glance, and your delicate presence with unconditional reassurance
that you are by my side.

Your words float effortlessly from your lips to my ear and fill my spirit with joy.

Yes, yes, this is meant to be

Say your name girl...

What...is...your...name.

Later that Evening

Here, I have
tried to paint a
scene of dancing and
sensuality wrapped in a
tropical backdrop, the beating of
the drums, and “her breath
in rhythm with my
heart”...

Moon, full, blue and white beams glide across the soft scattered Egyptian linen, play a joyful hide-and-seek with the night.

Her breath in rhythm with my heart...her skin glistening with sweet, salty nectar;

Incense drifts through the room, its smoke snakes toward the open window, careless, exotic, enticing, giddy, delirious...

Flickering candles wink as the gentle salt summer breeze kisses them, illuminating the half-eaten mango, dark chocolate...red chili, spicy, sweet and sensuous...

*Hear the beat of the drums calling, pounding, pulsing, and primal
Feel the heat of the samba, eternally desired yet urgently final.*

Move in rhythm...eyes closed, senses heightened with the touch of supple seduction

Intoxicating delight of tender cinnamon mocha skin brushing against the soul...

Sway from side to side like elegant palms in the trade winds...small of the back arched, reaching, wanting, anticipating and breathlessly whispering against the neck, not knowing if promises of ecstasy reach the ear.

*Hear the beat of the drums calling, pounding, pulsing, and primal
Feel the heat of the samba, eternally desired yet urgently final.*

SERGIO:

The
Sensual
and
Romantic

1234

The Big Unkle (TBU) is a jazz-funk fusion band that brings together the influences of funk, modern electric jazz, rock 'n' roll, soul, and world beat styles of music. Those elements are fused together into rootsy bass and drum-driven grooves that are designed to stimulate the musical sensibilities of a diverse array of listeners.

As TBU's founder and bandleader, I have been friends with Howard Tucker (aka Sergio) for over two decades. We have many things in common, including strong family and spiritual values and a belief in the importance of education and community activism. We came to realize that we also share a love of the arts—not just from a spectator's perspective, but as performers too.

It was in September of 2010 that The Big Unkle, already an established band and the “up and coming,” and Sergio ventured to combine their artistic gifts as a unit in an experimental excursion. They took the stage together at The Reef, a hot spot for homegrown spoken word and artistic expression off Philly's well-known South Street strip. While The Big Unkle created a soundscape of smooth melodic bass-lines and sultry rhythmic echoes, Sergio would begin to spin a web of words and vocal innuendos that transfixed the curious and somewhat skeptical crowd. But before long the audience was transformed. Sergio had taken control of the emotional switch deep inside of them that toggles from moods related to intrigue, passion, pursuit, humor, and depth to those of straight-up romance and desire. From that point on TBU and Sergio performed whenever they could in nightclubs and community events throughout the Philadelphia area.

Perhaps the most powerful thing about performing with Sergio is the fact that his words, combined with his trademark delivery, force us to think, feel, and play “outside the box.” When musicians are forced to venture past their musical comfort zone they have little recourse but to rely on new creative expression. And when performing with Sergio, this process occurs in “real time.” Our melodic and rhythmic approach to the piece is literally led by the piece itself. If we don't allow the groove to be led by the poem, we end up competing with each other instead of complementing each other. This is poetry. Not rap. Not song. The rules are different, and yet, we soon come to see that there are no rules at all.

At rehearsal we strive to capture the essence of the emotions and images the piece is trying to convey. We then develop an appropriate musical and rhythmic vibe for the piece and walk through it slowly at first and then in real time. We are careful not to over-think and over-develop the musical component, because so much of what makes it work is Sergio's energy and enthusiasm during the actual live performance. We will ultimately depend a lot on the crowd's reaction.

Our hope is that people will walk away with a new or renewed appreciation for poetry while simultaneously discovering something within themselves—some comforting memory, or suppressed emotion, or warm thought that has been there all along, but perhaps slightly unheeded or unappreciated.

John Henderson
Founder and Bandleader, The Big Unkle

The Pause

“The
Pause”
was my first
poem performed to
music. It was written at the
height of my SERGIO Diablo
phase, but I didn’t want a vulgar poem;
I wanted to use a classic style, like Neruda’s,
to talk about the pause in between making love
the first and second time. This poem was a
show-stopper, causing women in the
audience to gasp and earning
me high-fives from the
men when I came
offstage.

Her head lies effortlessly on my chest; lips slightly parted, warm and gently rubbing against my skin...soft, sweet breaths somewhere between dreams and desires, places “dark girl” Shiva, Nubian, Aphrodite kisses. My heart, gladly taken, turned and bound, by beauty that transcends the moment. Her eyes are closed in an endorphin-induced trance, more so content, neither wishing, neither waiting nor anticipating because she exhilaratingly exceeded expectations...

Her hair drapes, dark and damp against my side, delightfully tangled and haphazardly intertwined, caressing her from brow, to ear, to cheek, to chin tracing imaginary lines... memorizing the blissful moment by Braille, every touch a meaning, a code to unlocking her secrets, going deeper and deeper past the obvious...

My fingers linger across her parted lips; she playfully and sensuously nips, and then smiles with a face that launched a thousand ships,

And oh...here we go...again...

Rouxinol

Rouxinol
is the name
of a small, bright
bird in Brazil. It is also
the nickname of a gorgeous,
young, female Brazilian bartender
that I knew. I would stop by for a drink and
talk to her after my performances. Rouxinol
would flirt and talk to me about her life
in Brazil. When I told her I was a
poet, she didn't believe me,
so I wrote this poem
at the bar as she
worked.

I dream of gorgeous Rouxinol singing a song of heart-pounding love
Shaking her luscious tail feathers at various times to accentuate the beat
Her melodies, paced energetically like a goddess of the Carnival
My mind, traveling to that tropical place...home of the sweet song bird
Frolicking near the sea, the slightest scent of strawberries, she exhales toward me
I imagine Rouxinol's tanned softness joyfully content and free
Colorful passion draped across her soft curves, red, pink, green, gold, and blue
Vibrant contrast to the lush tropical foliage and gentle turquoise waves spraying sea salt by air
At night prances here and there...weaving in and out of conversations without care
Pecking at peanuts, flirts...then flies away
While flashing a captivating smile or laugh, a playful wink and she waves
Always singing, humming lyrically, mystically, intelligently
In many languages that flow like the rains
Catch her eye, Rouxinol will brush closely by, giving a hint of her exotic perfume,
She sings of future, past and present perfect...my destination.

Brown-Eyed Bliss

The next
one is about
the experience of
catching the eye of a
woman in a crowd and finding
that you can't seem to turn away. A
woman at a concert in jeans and a baseball
cap, wearing nothing spectacular, had eyes,
brown and bright, that were absolutely
amazing. I tried to talk to her, but
her girlfriend blocked me
and tried to make a
move at the same
time.

Overlook the good one...going straight to the edge
One step closer to see angles
One step short
One step closer to your brown-eyed bliss

Wing girl whispers inspiration...stoking a smoldering fire
One step closer
Flashes a shy smile drawing me in
Soft step...step back. Try again.

Softly to side...without having anything in mind
One step beyond the edge
Softly this time, very softly. I smile.
One step closer to your brown-eyed bliss

Feelings are still...as a racing heartbeat
Emotions are still...as a Mustang in overdrive
Thoughts are still...as a hummingbird's wing
Sweet nectar within reach...

One step closer to your brown-eyed bliss

SERGIO:

A Poet
Witness
to the
City

1234

The Czar of Jazz

An ode to
Demetrious,
the Czar of Jazz,
and my friends at
WPEB 88.1 FM who played
a jazz and poetry segment called
the “The Man Cave,” with the Czar
spinning romantic jazz and bossa
nova and me speaking poetry
on the air. That was so
much fun!

Got you covered like Coltrane and Miles...brilliant and talented...yeah
brother, they fit my style

Got you covered with bossa nova, that Brazilian beat...love me some of
that...always a treat

Got you covered like Gato...sexy smooth Latin jazz...sets the mood, 'cause
I'm the man...

I am Demetrious the Czar of Jazz

Got you covered like Renee and Karen the Queen and Countess, so much
alike-- our “man cave”--they allow so we don't put up a fight

Got you covered with Uncle Coop's Doo-wop special...the Chancellor is
always tuned in...sporting his knowledge of jazz with an infectious grin

Got you covered like Priest and Charles, the strong and silent types; then
they say “30 seconds!”... It's time to get it right

I am Demetrious the Czar of Jazz

Got you covered like my man Sergio who always turns up the heat...brings in
local artists so thoughtful and deep

Got you covered with my Lady Clarice, I can't wait to see...Sergio throws it
down...I remember a few lines for her and me...

Got you covered like my bass cello-mellow voice with doo-wop and jazz ...
the West Side... 88.1 FM adding style and class

I am Demetrious...the Czar of Jazz

I watched the sunrise... and thought of you

I wrote this
poem when I
lived in a penthouse
apartment with a fantastic
view of the city of Philadelphia's
skyline and Fairmont Park. I would
wake up before dawn to see the sunrise
and write. Observing the sunrise one
morning, thinking of a woman,
then spiritual contemplation...
all combined and
so wonderfully
complex...

Crystal clear...dark, cold blue, indigo, yielding to a faint pale orange glow from the East;
City skyline twinkling in the distance, tall, proud, glass, the stately steel edifices of the
captains of industry, lay dormant.

A bird chirping shrilly as the town crier of daybreak, urgently calling all to attention...yet
who hears his call?

Sensuous warm glow flows upward caressing the dark indigo into a pale powder blue as it
blushes the sky;

Ah, the anticipation grows ever so.

The horizon is now on fire...smoldering treetops with orange-yellow beams bursting through
the black leafless branches;

A lone white vapor trail of a plane, a dot in a cloudless heaven, placed delicately in the last
fleeting remnants of the indigo as if it were a teardrop signifying night's farewell;

Magnificent curvaceous orb of cherry-orange radiance bursts through the unflinching tree
branches!

What Moses saw in that burning bush, here in front of me--what glory!

A new day...is coming.

A new day...is coming.

With awestruck wonder I gaze at thee and marvel what power created you...so perfect.

Open Mic

My
introduction
to reciting poetry
with live bands was at an
open mic on the University of
Pennsylvania's campus. My son was
on stage rapping with a band, and I was
taking in the scene. There was a waitress--she
was gorgeous and knew it--holding court as
the guys tried to win her attention off
and on stage, while the bands
and performers dueled
one another in words
and music

Enter the hustle and bustle of the setup, the clink and clank of cymbals and drumsticks,
metal and wood,
Musicians, young, struck, hungry, ragged with schoolwork, hard work, and no work.
All wanting attention and sweating every detail,
Personal visions of glory on stage, the fame, the fans, the women,
Words and notes rolling through their heads, going through sound checks while shadow
strumming and lots of nerves.
In the midst of this musical chaos, she commands the room...
Young and vibrant, the bounce of her shoulder-length hair as she struts, setting up and
greeting guests with an inviting smile,
A smile that says, yes, I am, the one with all the men's eyes on me.
Wearing mid-thigh short black skirt with calf-high black leather boots,
The heels click against the tile floor guided by her perfect legs...our short hairs stand on end
boys,
Man she bounces to the rhythm of the heavy hip-hop beat...neo blues with a strong rock
cord...
Dark angel among tonight's "want to be's," and the "have to be's," laughing, hugging, and
caressing the chosen few as they come in; however, all are privy to her charm,
Welcome to the new Mecca for young bands
The temple dreams, they come to hone their skills, like young warriors, testing weapons of
voice, sound, sex angst, and fury.
We revel in the hip-hop and rock beats, our anthem, a new mutant bastard form of
expression,
Now it's getting serious, here come the groupies, girlfriends, round'd way girls, curious and
excited, dressed for sweaty pleasure after the show; the crowd becomes thicker, my brothers.
Showtime!

Sweet Mystery

Philadelphia

has a vibrant
café scene. During
the summer, you can
find tables and chairs set up on
the sidewalks in makeshift fashion.
Trying to eat and hold a conversation, you
are competing with all the urban elements;
however, with the right woman all
those distractions seem sublime...
it's about her. She enhances
the experience in
every way.

Sitting in a sidewalk café, warm, sun-drenched, an urban escapist's paradise. Mediterranean fare, fragrance of olives, garlic, and charred meat in the air... china and glass on tabletops with white cloths, a puff of wind blowing, ever so slightly lifting them, ruffling them, like the skirt hems of the women who pass by...each puff exposing some...

Hear the clitter-clatter of china against the cold steel forks as patrons stab at delectable morsels, hear the garbled restaurant noise gabbing, laughing, talking in earnest, lying, joking, pleading, swearing, mumbling with mouth full...all a symphony of color, sound, aroma, and taste...

Wine, deep burgundy, rich bold body, yet delicate and complex much like Mystery flashing a smile, a glance, a nod, and a pout...indeed. Swirl the wine in my mouth, lingering on tongue, craftsmanship, nature and age...mingling...exciting expectation rolling down warmly into my chest.

Green is everywhere...bold and sublime...from the salad to the park next to the café...cool and inviting from an afternoon tanning. Poor fools in cars, blaring radios, stuck in traffic, look over wanting to taste Mystery and I raise a glass to their futility...What would the world be if we all just stopped...to savor Mystery.

Mystery, what do you see with devilish, girlish, temptress intentions...

Mystery, where do you go...your beckoning glance, massaging touch on the back of my neck as you pull in tighter to brush your lips against my ear...

Mystery...I entice and excite you, feel my strength, makes you quiver, my well-placed hand on the curve of your delicious derriere, you pause to catch your breath...you back away, trying not to get caught just yet...

I am in no rush; yes, I like to savor the little things, the touch and flavor, cause in the end there will be the tasting of suckling honey with ecstasy and like all things that are meant to be, why rush? Sweet Mystery...