HOO-DOO MUDRAS

KIRPAL GORDON
HOO-DOO
MUDRAS
Copyright 2007 by Kirpal Gordon.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photo-copy, recording or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the copyright holder, except for quotes in reviews.

Cover images by Yves Budin. For more information about this Belgian designer-illustrator, please visit his website: www.sundancejazz.be/home.htm.

"Hoo-Doo Mudras" is the latest installation of Ganga Runs the Voo-Doo Down: Jazz Tales from the Ghost Realms. "Click People/Afro Blue" and "Out There without a Prayer/The House of the Rising Sun" can be heard on Speak-Spake-Spoke, a jazz poetry CD, from Leaping Dog Media.
HOOD-DOO
MUDRAS
BY KIRPAL GORDON
Hoo-Doo Mudras

From delusion to real, from darkness to light, from death to immortality.
---Brihadaranyaka Upanishad

Ganga Ghose sat in the emergency room of South Miami Hospital. It was three o'clock in the morning, just three hours into the new year.

Three hours earlier, in a tiny club called Don’t Tell Mama a couple miles north on Route 1 in Coral Gables, Ganga had just finished singing the Cyndi Lauper classic, “Secrets stolen, the drum beat out of time / If you’re lost you can look and will find me, time after time.”
Ganga had sung it in her own voice. Although she and her piano-playing boyfriend Ghost had been on the road for months, this was the first time she sounded like herself and not an impersonation of a jazz legend. Her stage act was actually the above ground portion of her Ph.D. thesis; her intent was to capture her audience and put them under the spell of Billie, Ella, Sassy, Carmen, Aretha, Cassandra.

Ganga had three things going for her that spelled magic: her voice, her stealth and her accompanist. Bengali born, she had been trained in north Indian singing, dance and yoga but raised on jazz records. There was not a note, high or low, her heroines sang she couldn’t reach. Her range met a mastery of disguise and a spooky ability to project a persona not her own. From ten thousand hours spent listening to their music, Ganga learned how to invoke their murti. From hair-do and dress to speaking accent and
singing style, she could inhabit their
genius, and for the brief length of time she
was on the bandstand, to lose herself
entirely and become that other person. Her
inspiration came not ghost bands or Elvis
but from her fellow Bengali, Ramakrishna,
who invoked communion with every religion he
came across---going so far as to live and
dress as a woman in order to be made love to
by the lord of pleasure.

As for the unassuming Ghost, he was pure
rapport underneath her. He could play in
any style Ganga dialed yet still bring
something original to the material. His
sense of harmony was so haunted that it gave
her impersonations an eerie fit; people
sensed they were hearing for the first time
songs they already knew.

He took great delight in dueting with
Ganga. He loved her sense of swing and the
musical precision with which she sang.
Instead of scatting phrases like oop-oop-
boo-doodle-doo she took syllable solos from the Sanskrit scale for do-re-mi: sa-re-ga-ma-pa-da-ni-sa, matching the melody note for note and then re-inventing it.

He had been around the block a few times, but what could he tell her? She was way better a performer when she was herself and no one else, but she had to find that out on her own. Though it wasn’t his place to call out tunes, after “Auld Lange Syne” there was still time left on the set, so Ghost tried something new. He got her attention when he introduced “Time after Time,” first playing the original 1947 title, an upbeat Sammy Cahn-Jule Styne vehicle for Sinatra before teasing her with a quote from Miles’s ethereal treatment of the Lauper pop tune.

Ganga, with no more immortals to play, nor wigs and props and make-up to reach for, got the message. She stepped up to the mike, opened her lungs and just sang that tune straight ahead. It brought the house
down. Ghost, not one to come out of the shadows usually, stood up from the baby grand and walked to the front of the stage. Under the spotlight, he kissed Ganga’s hand. Applause turned to whoops and hollers. That’s when trouble hit.

The cabaret, set off from the street by a long bar, was surrounded by tall buildings on three sides. When the lighting was just so the audience could see up into the tropical Miami night, thanks to a dome of smoked plexiglass that rose over the small stage. However, when Ghost took a bow with Ganga, a bottle of Moët Champagne came flying down from above. Smashing through the fragile plastic roof, the heavy bottle hit him squarely on the back of his head. Knocked unconscious, Ghost hit the deck.

Ganga kneeled down, checked his pulse, dialed 911 on her cell phone and spoke the vitals in a slow but urgent voice. The crowd who, moments before, had been shouting
her name and crying encore, now disappeared from her consciousness entirely. While panic spread---some running for the door, others hiding under tables---she sat next to Ghost on the stage and held his hand.

Alone and afraid, she realized that his big head had intercepted a death missile that quite possibly had been aimed at her. Was that nuts to consider, she couldn’t be sure. But if it had been aimed at me, she wondered, how could he have known? Why else would my Ghost, the most background of background musicians, jump to the front of the stage like that? Was that just a coincidence or was he congratulating me for being myself? Okay then, what about the timing? Was that bottle a response to the last tune, my first ever in my own voice, a bitter congratulations in reverse? Was this what all singers face, she worried, when they sing as themselves and not in impersonation of someone else?
The club's distraught proprietor, an Old World gent of a Mediterranean persuasion, came running to the stage with his hands in the air. He insisted it was an accident, one which had never happened before, but he walked Ganga and a detective to a back entrance and showed them the parties going on above in condos that the palm trees blotted out.

What do words like luck and accident mean, Ganga wondered, sitting in the orange plastic emergency room chair, trying to make sense of events. She thought back. The day had started marked with omen. In Eatonville, north of Orlando, she dropped into the historical society looking exactly like Zora Neale Hurston.

Ganga loved that Zora, like Ghost, had built her style from what came before, weaving what had been into what would be. When Ganga read the first page of Their Eyes Were Watching God, she recognized an echo of
a du Bois essay, thickening the plot, creating a double edge. One voice---objective and informative---played to the American mainstream; the other---subjective and full of double meanings---played to a more African tributary. Doubled-edged was how Ghost played as well. His quotes of other tunes and his Ellingtonian ear for turning a medley into a suite made up an additional narrative, one that kept her riveted on what he might do next.

The problem was that no one in Eatonville recognized what Ganga was doing in spite of the care she had taken in getting spunky Zora’s Harlem Renaissance-era clothing just right. Her hair and skin tone, too. That shook her up. Ganga feared that without the hinges to the past that the oral tradition spoke, Zora would fall through the cracks in the history other folks told. So when even the librarian in charge of the Long-Live-Hurston-Lit-Fest didn’t get the Zora get-up,
Ganga returned to Ghost's convertible looking low-down and mean.

"What's the matter, baby?"

"Let's go. Fuck this."

"Why so testy?"

"Testy? Dismissed as having gone native with her voodoo anthropology in Haiti, buried penniless here, her books out of print, momentarily re-born thanks to Alice Walker and now deader than ever in her own hometown: yeah, I guess I am testy. Have I chosen heroines to impersonate or just dust tracks on a road, Ghost?"

Ghost, no stranger to invisibility, took the long view. There were so many gigs ahead, why look back on the impromptu ones that didn't connect and didn't pay anyway? He recommended Lena Horne. Though Zora was her favorite author, Lena was her favorite impersonation, especially when performing in the underground side of her Ph.D. project.
Ganga’s thesis, “Nation Time: Jazz & the Stockholm Syndrome,” postulated that, if Americans, either a captive audience or an actual hostage, heard their country’s own contribution to world culture sung to them, they would become fans, even converts to Jazz Nation. To gauge truly the American’s ability to relate to a musical heritage that came through slavery, slaughter, apartheid and the fight for civil rights, Ganga argued that a double-voiced approach, one above ground and one below, would reveal more. So at night they played in bars, clubs and parties, depending on the size of the town and the strength of Ghost’s contacts; but during the day they played to whomever Ganga could kidnap and make listen.

The Lena routine had started out as a cabaret act called “Horne & ‘Horn Art” with Ghost playing the part of Billy Strayhorn, advising Lena in Hollywood in 1943 and accompanying her on piano. But as a
soloist's seduction-abduction-jazz-conversion-experience, Lena was a vehicle, baby, made to order for Ganga to take you where she wanted to go: Ms. Horne's sex appeal charmed a cause (race equality) with an identifiable song and film (Stormy Weather) to an all-American she-could-be-you bio (Brooklyn band singer makes it big in the movies).

Seducing individual males to close their shops, lock their doors and enjoy a private one-on-one encounter with the American songbook was Ganga's real experiment. It came with the territory of desire, although that territory had not become hers until she became Lena Horne. Once no longer Ganga Ghose---high casted and highly trained in voice, disguise and drama---Ganga's training was at Lena's disposal. Lena knew how to wear revealing clothes, how to roll her eyes and tilt her head to one side in the hoo-doo mudra of sexual surprise, how to breathe
from her diaphragm when she leaned forward to size up her man and take him by the hand. She knew how to read the pleasure from the fear in his face, how to help him out of attitudes he didn’t really want to wear in the first place. Most of all she knew when to read the name tag and make it personal, “Oh my gosh, Mr. MacIntosh, feel my heart race in my chest, whew, you’ve got me so worked up—is it warm in here?—I’m starting to come undone,” before adding, “I hope I’m not getting you into too much trouble.”

“Trouble? What trouble?”

The trouble was that Mr. MacIntosh and the other Johnny Appleseeds across the country were already candidates for the blues and didn’t even know it. They needed the medicine badly, but they’d never heard of W.C. Handy or Ma Rainey—Bessie, Basie, Benny or Betty Carter, or for that matter,
The Platters. Ganga needed time with her prospective fan.

Ghost knew time. Time was Ghost's specialty. No stranger to electronics, he chose convenience stores carefully, usually old ones on less traveled roads that yielded fewer customers likely to intrude upon the scene. When casing a place, he looked for cheap surveillance equipment that could easily be disturbed by an electric current from a wave machine he kept in the trunk disguised as a Cassio keyboard. No image = no trouble. Anyone watching the store through a security camera would see only a moment, frozen in time.

"I know you're a good man, Mr. Macintosh, and good men deserve to keep their jobs," Ganga would say. "So I hope you don't mind; I jammed the frequency on the store's security camera."

"Lena, that's a felony. You know that?"

"I did it for you, Mac."

13
"No one has ever broken the law for me before."

"Breaking the law turns me on."

"Really?" the Mac would ask.

"Well, I may never see you again! For the rest of our lives we'll only have this moment, frozen in time."

"I hear you, Lena."

"I don't think we don't need any intruders watching in on the tune I'm gonna sing to truck your blues away."

"Let's go in the back."

Ghost never considered what Ganga did during her performance. It was none of his business. However, he had a sheet; he was in the system. It was no big whup, bullshit misdemeanors; the important thing was that they agreed on the value of taking precautions.

Ganga rotated impersonations. She never carried a weapon, never threatened anyone harm and never took more than $200 in cash.
Like he had done from the stage, Ghost learned to anticipate the more improvisational aspects in her guerilla jazz performance. He helped her arrive at a solution she could swing to in her rough and raucous way: meet on the bridge, bring it back for one chorus---the car would be waiting out front, ready to go.

Lena would slip her CD into his boombox and when she finished singing Sweet Pea's "Lush Life" karaoke-style, the MacIntosh would invariably break down.

"I'm sorry, Lena, I've never cried over a song before."

What could Ganga let Lena say---that Strayhorn, who wrote that diamond wisdom gem when he was sixteen and already out of the closet, knew more about life than all these suburbanized, homogenized, entitled heterosexual men combined?

"Be my guest and be a man: cry, cry, cry," Lena would say.
The MacIntosh would blow his nose. "How can I re-pay you, Lena?"

"Let me take off your clothes and show you what I got for you."

"What do have for me?"

"Let's get in the walk-in cooler and find out."

Slipping the Mac into handcuffs she pulled out of her bag and swiveled around a pole was sometimes the start of something good and sometimes just the denouement, the insurance she took out against getting caught. After all, what rank and file law enforcement officer would buy what a naked store manager chained to a pole in a cooler would have to say to explain his dereliction of duty? Oh, Lena Horne came to visit and sing you a song, but she couldn't stay?

So Ganga had given much thought to Ghost's idea as they hauled south along on Route 523 out of St. Cloud. They had many miles to drive before they hit Miami for a
8:00 pm sound check. There was enough time for an adventure. No question, one of the best things about kidnapping convenience store managers was the perks; after incapacitating the Mac, she filled a couple of shopping bags with impulse items. However, it had been three weeks without an abduction, and she didn’t miss the research side of the equation one bit.

She knew it meant that her thesis was over. Her vics had beaten her at her own Karma Chameleon hustle. She wanted her hostages to identify with her character’s need for a wider fan base and most folks eagerly agreed. But after Ernest, an early convert to the nation, confessed to needing her and not the disguise she was hiding behind, that he would do anything in the world for her if she would only be herself because he had never felt so alive before, she began to identify unduly with her hostages. It was classic reverse Stockholm
Syndrome. It hung over her like her recurring vision of Aurobindo Ghose, her dad’s famous yogi great-great-uncle once removed, with his droopy eyes and long gray beard.

"Thanks, Ghost, but I’ll lay out." That was all Ganga said until they went over the set list.

Now, pacing back and forth in the empty waiting room, she wished she had told him more. Especially about how her feelings had changed toward him while on the road together. Especially now that he saved her life, possibly by losing his.

Have I made a mistake, she wondered, pulling him out of the Big Apple? Well, he was no fool. It had been years since his landmark arrangements and playing for tenorman/composer Grip Elegu and his family band, the Brothers Grip. He needed a challenge. He was getting moldy writing radio jingles for money. He likes the road
anyway, she decided, and I just gave him the chance to renew acquaintances, circulate his soul around, keep his talent alive and fresh. She realized she was feeling guilty even though she couldn’t be sure of anything. Why, for example, had she again given someone else’s name to the hospital staff? Was that a crime or a disorder? She didn’t know.

“Ms. Norah Jones?”

“Yes?”

“Hello,” the doctor said and clasp his hands in silent salutation. Ganga did likewise. “You seem taller, darker, fuller of figure than the photos on your CDs—if I may say, mem sahib, I am a fan.”

“Of course, you may, Dr. Vasant, thank you, and please pardon me if I am not reading your nametag correctly. I’m so tired.”

“Yes, no, you are correctly reading. I am attending physician for your friend, Mr.
Ghost, and I ask you to sit down please. I want to do everything within my power to help, but I am afraid that Mr. Ghost is deep in a coma. Right now it does not seem likely that he will recover. Are you prepared to sign a Do Not Resuscitate order?"

"May I see him first?"

"I'm afraid he's quite unconscious, Ms. Jones."

"All the same it would mean a lot to me."

"Well, I am at your service, too, ji, so please be my guest."

"Can you put him in his own room, Doctor?"

"The club owner already called and insisted on it."

"Can you take me to him then?"

"Is there anything else I can do?"

Ganga paused to consider how much to say. Although Vasant was her countryman, he was Western-trained and would probably not
disposed to her Bengali methods of mind transport.

"I don't know Miami very well, ji. Would you be so kind as to help me find a jazz recording called, *Grip Elegu and the Brothers Grip Play a Tribute to Duke*? And, if I may, a CD player?"

"It is no problem. I have that CD in my collection."

"It was Mr. Ghost's last recording with them."

"I did not realize he is one and the same Ghost."

"Yes. I met him through that recording."

"I will ask my wife to bring it and a CD player with her on her way to work. She will be most pleased to hear of my meeting you. Let us go first to Mr. Ghost and set things up for your private puja and vigil, Ms. Jones."
Click People/Afro Blue

If Lincoln was thinkin' his death inopportune, listen to Whitman singin' *When Lilacs Last in the Dooryard Bloom'd*. Freedom never dies but returns in spring renewed in generations ancient to the future swingin' to Afro Blue.

Cuando el grupo encontre, entonces tocamos gran clave. Trace it through the DNA, we’re all family to the Click People of the Kalahari.

Face arrest at the Laws of Hubert’s piccolo or meet the street in Mandingo’s *mamayo guyambo*, dig: give that Pinocchio ubermensch mumbo jumbo a rest when blood tests reveal a single human ancestry’s address.

Dream of the land our one race is from, so let’s lay out on that played-out Jim Crow we have overcome & get with the drum.
How can you tell me the dead don’t dance
to Oscar Lee Brown & Mongo Santamaria, mija,
when these roots of ritmo won’t quit me
walkin’ afternoon breezes gone to sneezes
wonderin’ if radioactive diseases come out
in the wash with polluted skies over easy,
my head so bashed in & queasy even my puja
stash can’t deliver me from cavities in gum
drops, depravity in gun shots & air so
tubercular it’s actually takin’ up space in
a parking lot I’m supposed to pay twice for!

If push must come to shove, radiate the
love in shades of delight in mestizo hues.
Deep in the night like Coltrane’s modal
krewe.
Coded notes stroked lightly evoke
"artfully adorned Aphrodite," a wish
wanderin' alone along lovetown cobblestone
dyin' to get born, & through a passage torn
in twilit's witchin' hour, how other worlds
meet music's dream solvin' beat on Green
Dolphin Street.

Into the melody we slipped stream & back
swayed, took flight & to the sky's first
star allay we while Aphrodite birthed
nightly in half-shell crawfishin' for love's
mission: well, might we tell she'd been seen
radiantly sheen, often to eat on Green
Dolphin Street.

Walk the pedal point figures behind the
theme & dissolve into evening with the ease
of an odalisque undressing above your bed,
one luminary light supplying the setting for
nights beyond forgetting in bloodstream-
lovin' heat on Green Dolphin Street.

Push past daylight's end into the
reception you'd die for, your match to her
smoking inhalation making your wish come
ture, her exhale extinguishing your sense of
separation: what Venus rising over sunset
foretells in a scene softened sweet on Green
Dolphin Street.
In Splendor/Lady's Blues

Hey Lady's Blues when Rahsaan could be said to have seen you in splendorous spring tones, what's bum but a word the mouth casts out, spoken without the need of teeth or tongue. Bum: a hole in a lonely face only a bottle can reach.

Hey Lady Day Tell It in Strange Fruit, what's homeless victim but a double trochee's play-it-as-it-lays phrase to separate them that got from them that not while keeping every child's expanding catastrophe at bay.

Hey Eleanor Fagan, what's rat but ribs & grease, antenna nose, little feet whose offspring squeeze through tunnels humans leave when the city they've built goes to decay. Rat: a fink; or raton: what's left when a species eats its own.
Hey Billie in gardenia, grown to moan In
my solitude you
taunt me sick & alone with memories that
never die while
April skies still unsure sings a tentative
beguine's verdure:
the blues is a patch of weathered wing bones
scat-rattlin'
the hum-wonder of Lady Day spring tones.
Hey massive expansions of cardboard mansions with tincan stanchions: don’t dare get caught out there without a prayer. Want to be wherever nowhere will be, i.e. invisible! You know the feel of the real feral deal: not full of want, not on ice, nor in need. Not hurt, hungry, not sufferin’ disease. Not starin’ & wearin’ that lost look, daring panhandlin’ folks to spare thee a Big Easy’s broken levee.

Hey extraordinary rendition’s act of sedition on my blue condition: don’t dare get caught out there without a prayer. Wild breeds drive to Cleveland & I don’t mean by car so watch your back, all star. The fellahen yanked off our streets pay the price for the Bill of Rights in Guantanamo City, a pity a White House invents lies
without discussion & when locals say so the bum-rushin's full of funky repercussions.

Hey cemetery parade brass by-passing the spyglass: play on & kick my ass with what it means to miss New Orleans, not searched in my own neighborhood for homeland security. Not what might mistake my misfortune for a chance to exploit me: not stop gap measure, refugee sector, our patriotism misreckoned. Not a first time ever if we're clever, but never locked up a second.
Memo to Minimize the Misery of American Foreign Policy

We bomb ya bloody in Hiroshima runny. We calm your fits in Auschwitz, bunny. We never forget the gettin' that gettin' can never get, Daddy Mac. We're bet to that under sweet peat moss, deep in Hackensack stacked, Sonny.

War is not the answer, we're certain, Halliburton honey. We live with bouts of cancer, Lance Ah & give shouts of witness with our illness: singin' our grief while con men make a monstrous mendacity of democracy---a tonny.

The pipes are callin', the hype's appallin' with prices alarmin', the joint's up in arms some. We're chumped for fools when up from the ground comes a bubbling crude: oil & death ain't funny when goin'
Guantanamo to Geronimo the infidel, stungunny.

Why retreat from Poetry Nation, but reach out to readers to school deceivers & seek connection through renewin' language in a masquerade so clumsy TV says be very afraid, we hunt thee. Let's stand aligned & mighty to rave on, John Donney.
This edition is limited to 70 copies.

This is number 6.

Kirpal Gordon