

Southern California Poetix

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Lyn Lifshin's poetry appears in almost every literary and poetry magazine, from American Scholar, Christian Science Monitor and Yankee to Ms., Rolling Stone and Ploughshares. She has edited 4

Masthead

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anthologies of women's writing including TANGLED VINES (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich), now in its second, enlarged edition and chosen by Ms. magazine as one of the 60 best books of the year. Other anthologies she has edited include ARIADNE'S THREAD and LIPS UNSEALED. "Writing Mint Leaves at Yaddo," a prose piece, was selected as one of the best pieces of writing about writing by Writer's Digest and Story Magazine. BEFORE IT'S LIGHT, published winter 1999-2000, won a Paterson Poetry Prize. "Another brilliant...moving from the intensely personal...to the historical." (Small Press Review, June 2000) Lyn Lifshin is a winner of many awards including a Bread Loaf Fellowship, The Jack Kerouac Award and New York State Caps Grant. Her latest book, ANOTHER WOMAN WHO LOOKS LIKE ME will be published by Godine/Black Sparrow Press early in 2004.

"Here she is! Might as well stop fighting it. Lifshin is not going to go away. For men, she's sexy. For women she's an archetype of gutsy independence. As a poet, she's nobody but herself. Frightening prolific and utterly intense. One of a kind." - San Francisco Review of Books

During the week of March 6 through 12 the Southland will be graced with the presence of a poetry legend, Lyn Lifshin, who will be coming to promote her new book, ANOTHER WOMAN WHO LOOKS LIKE ME. I am pleased to announce that Lyn's tour includes my venue, Moonday on Monday, March 8. (Please see www.lynlifshin.com for a complete list of venues and times of her Southland tour.)

Alice Pero the Co Host Moonday on Montana (Santa Monica) conducts the interview

Alice: It's a real honor to be able to interview the Queen of the Small Presses....I hope you aren't offended if I use that title.

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Lyn: I always found that title amusing. It first appeared on a third edition of *BLACK APPLES*. Having left graduate school where I was working on a PhD and never wanting to be connected with anything academic at that moment, I did submit only to small presses. Later, I broadened my publishing base. It doesn't offend me

but it is a rather strange "honor." And yet, it is the small presses that have made my name known. Whether I am queen of them, is debatable!

Alice: Tell me about your new book and what we have to look forward to...any words about it?

Lyn: I am actually thinking about three new books: *ANOTHER WOMAN WHO LOOKS LIKE ME* is set to come from Black Sparrow/David Godine in January. But I am also working on a book called *THOSE DAYS WERE SO PERSEPHONE* and a collection of poems about the beautiful, tragic race horse filly, *RUFFIAN*. She has taken all my time, attention, and love lately. An obsession. Something I am doing out of love and the inability not to do it. I have no idea who or where or when anyone might want to do a book about a gorgeous, freakishly fast, never headed, never beaten (except by death) horse as special as Ruffian, dead almost 30 years. As for, *ANOTHER WOMAN WHO LOOKS LIKE ME*—like other collections, a big variety but new are poems based on paintings, especially Romare Bearden, a group of poems for the adoption of a baby from Guatemala, and a series of poems about September 11, 2002, and the aftermath.

Alice: Having read some of the poems on the adoption of the Guatemala baby, I know what incredible riches we have in store for us! On another topic... what was the very first memory of your interest in writing poetry...how did you start?

Lyn: I am told that at three, riding on a bumpy back road, I told my mother it looked like the trees were dancing. I'm not sure I remember that but I loved the book *NOW WE ARE SIX* and in second and third grade I was promoted because I could write and read well. Much of the writing was poetry, as was much of the reading we did: Blake, Longfellow, Milton.



Alice: Do you feel that getting into the academic poetry scene was useful to you now or early on?

Lyn: I never *was* in the academic poetry scene. I was working on degrees in literature but never took courses in writing. Ironically, I wanted to get a PhD so I could write, and then, done with all the courses (A's in all), having passed two language requirements, written 100 pages of a dissertation on the comparison of the psalms of Sir Thomas Wyatt and Sidney (which oddly, disappeared from my office and was never found again), having passed all the qualifying exams for the degree but one (and that is one I wrote about in Orals where I was treated rather absurdly), I walked out of the building when given a second chance. So I think most people think of me as anti-academic though I often teach at colleges and read there. It is a tremendously different scene now: Academic doesn't mean what it did when I began to write but instead is cliquish in a different way. I was amazed when I organized a panel for AWP (Association of Writers and Writing Programs) on "Feeling on the Outside" about being in the poetry world but definitely not on the "inside" of academia. I think now academia plays an enormous role in publication, readings, prizes, connections, much more than when I started writing.

Alice: What do you think of attempts to classify writing into categories like "Beat" or "Meat" schools...do you feel this is valid and/or accurate?

Lyn: I'm not sure; probably not really. I've never thought of myself fitting into any particular school, though I have been connected I suppose with the Beat or post-Beat or Meat schools, but I don't see it. When I first came to the DC-Virginia area, I was struck by the fragmented state of poetry: academic, slam, ethnic, gay, etc. By contrast, a poet who runs a series and has lived here longer found little of that. But I really see it!



Alice: If the poetry scene could be anything you wanted it to be, how would you change it?

Lyn: I wish things weren't as political, as focused on contacts, connections. I think it was less so when I began.

Alice: When you go to a reading nowadays and listen to open mike readers, what do you listen for?

Lyn: I don't go to that many open readings. I used to go from upstate New York to NYC for a reading, a several hour drive back and forth, but now I take ballet often and often at night... When I read and there is an open reading, I suppose I look for a poet that touches me, startles. Most of my books (until my recent Ruffian books and books about Millay) are poetry books. I buy poetry books all the time, but at the moment there are only a handful of poets whose next collection I am dying for. As for which poets, I couldn't answer that question—it's too likely I would leave the most important-to-me writers out.

Alice: After writing many books of poetry and managing to get them published over the years. do you feel the necessity of saving some that are now out of print and getting them into collections for posterity?



Lyn: There are some books I wish I had saved more copies of, not realizing the small press, small edition books become the most rare and sought. I had tried to get more copies of *BLACK APPLES* and *UPSTATE MADONNA* and there were some mix ups and the books I believe were dumped in a garbage dump—upsetting to say the least. Some of the very small mimeographed books are now collectors' items and selling for large amounts. I do wish I kept more of them. On eBay and Amazon.com, those are the books that are now

more expensive and rare. When John Martin ran Black Sparrow [Press], the plan was to keep everything in print that appeared in the books they did and I did include some out of print poems. I don't know what the new Black Sparrow at David Godine will plan in terms of keeping books in print.

Alice: What do you think is the role of the internet to help disseminate poets and their work? How would you say this will help/hinder appreciation of the art form in the future?

Lyn: I really don't know the role of the internet to help poets and their work. Certainly people get to see poems more widely (I think) and more quickly. I don't tend to go to read poems on the 'net as I would a book unless I am looking for poems on a certain subject, but it seems to be becoming more and more central in publishing.

Alice: How can we get young people more involved in poetry?

Lyn: With 2000 new poets entering the "poetry market" each year and the proliferation of writing departments and programs, I think there are certainly a lot of people involved in poetry. How to get them to buy publications, books and magazines—that a more complicated problem and I don't really have a solution.

Alice: I know that you are an avid student of ballet. Do you find that music and dance influence your writing in any way?

Lyn: I did do a book of ballet poems that was to come out from a press that publishes only dance poems years ago but never did. I keep thinking I will add some of those poems in a new collection but seem not to. I love ballet but it's also a way to deal with stress—yet poems have come from it, at least lately. Earlier, when I was beginning ballet and poetry, they did merge more often. The music and dance did influence my writing more when I was beginning both. At one point I took class with a former New York City soloist and he told great stories about many of the dancers that became poems.

Alice: How would you encourage young artists?



Lyn: There's a part of me that says "run in the other direction." I can't help it. It is a very frustrating, difficult, often unrewarding life. But if you must, do what feels right, whether it is writing and reading—what I

felt was important—or playing the career game. It seems often to work—I hope that doesn't sound cynical but it is realistic. There are so many poets and it's not enough to just write lovely poems. I really don't like the way this sounds, might have to cut it, but it is how I feel.

Alice: No matter how discouraging it may seem at times, it's a person like you who does set an example of persistence and the creation of abundance in an often frustrating field. Thank you, Lyn Lifshin for all you have done and continue to do for our precious art form.

We are looking forward to seeing you and hearing you in the Southland.

Lyn Lifshin Schedule in So Cal, March 6 - 11

Saturday,
March 6,
7:30 pm

Poetry Reading
Beyond Baroque
681 Venice Blvd., Venice
phone: 310-822-3006
fax: 310-827-7432

Monday,
March 8,
7:30 pm

Poetry Reading
Moonday at Seattle's best on Montana
1015 Montana Ave., Santa Monica
phone: 310-451-8095

Tuesday,
March 9,
8 pm

Poetry Reading
Redondo Poets at Coffee Cartel
1820 S. Catalina Ave., Redondo Beach
phone: 310-316-6554

Thursday,
March 11,
8 pm

Poetry Reading
Pasadena Library
Donald R. Wright Auditorium
inside the Pasadena Library
285 E. Walnut Ave., Pasadena