

## Praise for **APOLLO BLUE'S HARP AND THE GODS OF SONG**

“There is something splendid in the words of Ed Coletti, a care for the deeper counters of language as it is revealed. Coletti is a poet who must be read, must be listened to intently. He has the touch of an Elder who remains ageless and poetically wise.”

—NEELI CHERKOVSKI. Author of *Elegy For My Beat Generation*

“Poetry and music have always danced hand in hand. Open the pages of Coletti’s latest collection of poems, *Apollo Blue’s Harp And The God of Song*, and shimmy into his passion for jazz, blues, classical and rock. Inspired by all these styles, Coletti takes you on a carpet ride powered by his keen knowledge of Coltrane, “someone named Miles,” Van Morrison, Art Pepper, Eric Clapton and more. Fly over numerous aesthetic realms, from Bob Dylan to Scarlatti, and appreciate how Coletti’s poems stalk and stack the music, creating their own music in the process whether through free verse or form (who else has written a triolet based on a line by The Grateful Dead?). Read this book and you may be compelled to look up some names and music you haven’t heard before. Then you’ll want to read the book again with a new understanding of the deep connection to sound Coletti presents on these pages. Take your time, even “sidereal time/ stardust time, Bessie blue time...” (“Coltrane, Dig?”) as Coletti strives “to find the music accompanying/(his) word visions...” (“Questing”). You may find yourself shouting ‘Go man, go!’”

—KATHERINE HASTINGS. Author of *Shakespeare & Stein Walk Into a Bar*

“In case you didn’t notice, this book of poems has a very long title. That’s appropriate because the poet, Ed Coletti, has enjoyed a long life of thinking, being and writing. *APOLLO BLUE’S HARP AND THE GODS OF SONG* won’t be Coletti’s last book, or so we hope. But it marks the culmination of his love of jazz and the gods, rock ‘n’ roll and language itself, which as he knows has the power to give us the only kind of eternity that we will ever know on Earth and maybe also in Heaven. From first to last, *Apollo Blues Harp and the Gods of Song*, plays old melodies in a new key that will persuade readers to stand on their hind legs, dance, wail, weep and rejoice. If I didn’t know better, this book would persuade me that Ed Coletti was born and raised in the Mississippi Delta and that Duke Ellington, John Coltrane and Charlie Parker invited him to join their jam sessions, and that he learned from them all he knows. You dig, man? If you don’t, then please read *Apollo’s Blue Harp and the Gods of Song* before the coming apocalypse.”

—JONAH RASKIN. Author of the poetry chapbooks, *Rock n’ Roll Women*, and *The Fury of the Fires*

“I’m knocked on my keister. The scope of the work, its depth, its sonority...could this be Ed Coletti’s masterpiece? If Ken Burns’ ‘Jazz’ was for people who didn’t really know what jazz is about, then ‘Apollo Blue’ is for those of us who truly love jazz, and the best defense of jazz poetry I’ve seen in sometime. And this is not even considering the added bonus of rock, blues, and even classical music!”

—DAVID MADGALENE. Author of *Call Down The Angel*

# APOLLO BLUE'S HARP AND THE GODS OF SONG

*poems*

**Ed Coletti**



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***Dedicated to David Beckman who suggested the  
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advice and layout.***

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**I. How We Begin To Remember**

**Question & Answer**

*Tomorrow Is the Question*

— Ornette Coleman

If tomorrow is the question  
then perhaps now is  
the answer  
or at least  
coronets are.

### **Triolet On a Line From Paul Simon**

This is the story of how we begin to remember.  
When wisdom alone, not being adequate, symbols come.  
Tigers and jackals emerge for a drink late September.  
This is the story of how we begin to remember.  
Desiccated beasts slake thirst, pain, and ravages of hunger.  
Sated they descend into languorous yawn as a hum.  
This is the story of how we begin to remember.  
When wisdom alone, not being adequate, symbols come.

## **Apollo Blue's Harp**

*Apollo Blue, come blow harmonica.  
The blues in the meadow, the brass in the horn.  
The drum hammers beating where thunder is born.  
Guitar clears its throat of a twang in the morning.  
No time exists where the boy sucks and blows.  
Harp's spirit singing wherever he goes.*

The naming was the creation down in Birmingham, Alabama  
when his mam and his pap had little Buster baptized  
Apollo after that theater up there in Harlem in New York.  
"Buster Blue" would have done just fine, but so little that  
Apollo Blue would grow to know might of come from it.  
They gave him an accordion like little Leadbelly'd played  
before he found the guitar and his own voice.  
That damned squunch box, boring, too much weight  
too great a deal to learn so many notes all pushing and pulling.  
But that first harmonica Buster found in the gutter, Oh!  
Just his lips and his breath with the blues, soul and music!

He removed the accordion, the straitjacket.  
He blew and he drew on the harp he had found  
that continued to find him the rest of his life.  
As full days and night hours blew through and by him,  
Apollo Blue feared he'd better stop blowing  
or soar way too high and lose grip on the earth.  
Such fear of flying to where only God knew.  
His choice was to stop or learn far too much.  
He made his decision to never come down.  
Leaving the projects and bully boys, became  
one with his harp blowing G, C, or A.

His ancient namesake, the first Apollo, tested his bowstring  
preparing to kill but healed birds and stags, and  
enmity rose to find its own soul  
soothed and music-saved from adverse stringed bow  
transformed to good, that sort of magic Apollo Blue  
could do when he bent a note, tamping it down with  
slight extra pressure like a prayer or  
mystic dream, as he fell under the spell of such gods  
as George “Harmonica” Smith, Little Walter and more  
lately, of Rod Piazza, not to mention, from the pantheon,  
Sonny Boy Williamson, James Cotton, and Charlie Musselwhite.

Play on, Apollo Blue,

play on.

## **Solo Accordion Jam**

I took the straitjacket off  
the accordion and it became

Mine!

Now it was the boogie ragtime zydeco  
piano clarinet oboe guitar  
all those instruments of

Liberation !

In my hands, alone  
with the accordion  
bygone symbol of my waltz  
foxtrot polka lockstep  
trotted out to perform stiffly  
to play poorly for everyone  
but myself  
my self who this evening

improvised

Jazz!

It was

Me

It could have been

Hours

flying!

I had to stop before  
I learned too  
much —

a fear of flying  
to only god  
knows where.

## The Late Twenties

Early Ellington  
Blue Indigo mute  
languorously soft  
licorice stick stuck  
sentimental night

The Mooche screeching  
clarinetting then sax  
sax sax saxing  
swinging lickrish  
stick stick stick sticky

Creole rhapsody  
piano tinkle  
keyboard tunk tunkle  
trumpet cocktail stir  
jungle echo growl

Get aboard all aboard  
this rapid transit  
day break 'spress move  
move moving moving  
growl whistle wooing

## **Coltrane, Dig?**

I suppose what it is with trane and me is  
he takes all the time he wants to take  
even outside of time, sidereal time,  
stardust time, bessie blue time,  
through-and-through-him time,  
trancey groove time, even arranged time.

The duke laying down stevie blocks,  
trane ain't gonna be no mortar here  
he gonna weave a kinda mesh  
round duke's work, trane lacing  
duke's solidity with blue spirit,  
blues spirit. duke hears it, stays  
near it, layin' stevie blocks  
now playing trane blocks, the duke  
in-spired, layin' down trane blocks.

Then comes slo-trane's pleasing  
molasses blue invention and  
no one makes new like coltrane,  
the original organic cat and not such  
a stranger-in-a-not-so-strange-land,  
he resonates—that's it—we get trane,  
that why trane — is — trane.  
you hear a bass soloing, wherever  
that bass is echoing, whoever  
that bass, he echoing trane  
that what jazz all about.

If the drum set belong to tootie heath or to  
philly joe jones, it don't matter. they both  
coltrane without his horn, c'est la vie, man,  
trane be something else, something like  
deity ethereal night, man. I mean you take  
nancy, you give her a lavender face  
so she be nancy with the laughing face.  
what you got be only coltrane stirring  
something delicious in his pot,  
coltrane doing nancy, no need explaining  
her gleeful countenance, you dig?  
trane, hey, he got no need to wreck the show.

## **Roland's Sweet-Sweet Tout de Suite**

### 1. Kirk

Gifts and Messages. Which  
the more important?  
Dissonance launches  
me listening feels  
more like I'm playing that  
swooping of sax waiting counterbal-  
answer slowly fading

### 2. Shine On Me

Begins with a raggedy ragtime  
Then that Fourth of July soprano  
saxing something about happiness and  
of all places the South even if  
it is all about New Orleans, sort of  
a different part of another South  
a frenchier South where pianos rule  
Where Roland Kirk, before he was Rashaan,  
blew his ever-music-lovin' brains out.

### 3. Rashaan

What was that trumpet quote  
from Clifford Brown so all about  
enough to claim the son's name?  
On Saturday night jump through  
all over Harlem, New Orleans, or  
even late-Basie in Kansas City  
in May, springtime where piano  
keys hammer strings-why piano's

a percussive instrument played right  
here well-before more obvious August.  
That plucking going on before  
our sax returns to jump back in and

#### 4. Finish

What's that mean after all?  
After all, that means what?  
That what after all means  
To Finish? Two who finish  
What after all, too finished,  
art, jazz, poetry aren't  
Much more than stony-stupid.  
Only unfinished giving continues.

#### 5. Continuing

On and on and on and through  
a starship first breaking through  
this light barrier into endlessness  
Hyperspace forever out there  
doubling and tripling back  
on itself until and after and before  
all continues becoming itself and  
everything over and over on and on.