

A Poet Since Childhood

Date: February 11, 2010

Duration: 3:23

Transcript

[M. Douglas] Got a space for me upstairs; pews in an upright just like daddy's church with a little more shouting and a lot less religion. I can save Donny a seat in the front where the suits and ties come in off the hill, rest their bones in bourbon soak. The second show was always more crowded like word got around the girl upstairs is teasing demons out the piano. Standing in the center makes you dizzy the way the waitress takes orders, turns sharp, the glasses sweating halos, lined up like sinners for sermon. I steady myself at the keys; hear the creek of the bench. Call it a song carved in the road of my palm.

My father was a painter and a professor. He taught at the University of Louisville in art history and in Pan African studies, and so there were always artists in and out of the house that were poets and painters, and I got to meet these people as a kid in growing up, and I know that rubbed off on me. I have them to thank for that too, so that is a big part of me being a poet.

The name of the book is "Cooling Board: A Long-Playing Poem," and it's a collection of persona poems that I've written in the voice of a late soul musician by the name of Donny Hathaway and his friends and family.

Well, the persona, when you write poetry, there's all different ranges of persona in terms of the voices that you use, but these persona poems are written as if I am someone else, so in the case of these persona poems, it's clear that I, as the author, am not the subject, but it's about Donny Hathaway's life; his trials and tribulations, and the people that knew him best.

How, after the note is released, does the body remember the hunger? Does the foot rise and dive? Do the hands hammer? In the inner ear, what echo comes once makes a home. My heart's drumming as a solitary song. The rifle is stick and skin; one hand bound the other in spite of.

You know, it was funny, I found out these other poets and writers that I knew that were nominated, but to find out that Nikki Giovanni was on that list in the poetry category was, you know it was overwhelming. You hear people say it's an honor to be nominated, and you wonder how much they mean it, but I mean that sincerely because she's been an influence in my own poetry.

I think revision is a good thing. Never be too impressed with the first draft. I say revised, but I also say too, if you have a good idea, and you know it's a good idea have the integrity to follow it through because I'm pretty sure there were people that said I would not write this book, and now that I have, I feel like I was on the right path.