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Tom Petsinis

Poems

Flight of the Triangles

(After the artwork School of Fish, by Brody Xarhakos)

You've been held captive far too long,
Not only by bloody nails and rusted bolts
And pencil lines finer than greying hair –

But by logic underpinning rigid proofs,
Faith in a trinity synonymous with one,
The lyric of your differentiating names:

Oh, sad scalene, isosceles, equilateral –
We sang you high in three-part harmony
As a silver frame tingled each syllable.

But the time's less than a thought away
When you'll break free from roof trusses
And skeletal pylons shouldering clouds,

From pyramids facing fears and hopes,
Diamonds born of a rain-forest's death,
Stars complicit in proliferating triads.
With the joy of a mirror shattering,

You'll fly off to your vanishing point,
Leaving us breathless in your wake.

The Old Maestro

(Mikis Theodorakis in concert)

He plods, flat-soled, to the waiting stand,
Head bowed from eight decades of dreams,
Compositions that defied parallel lines,
Discarded versions of Zorba's last dance.

Hair grizzled, an ancient prophet's,
And too wild for brush from years of exile,
He sounds the score's unscripted rustle
And readies the orchestra with a nod.

Allegro: hands plump as spotted toads
Become swallows unravelling winter clouds
Above the village square, weaving nests
From bits of hope, darkness, despair;

The master potter's, working as one,
Kneading, turning, moulding mute time,
Giving roundness to a rousing tune –
An amphora with youths in Pyrrhic step;

The old midwife's, fearless of life,
Plunging wrist-deep into the cello's womb,
Extracting an infant note, a protracted cry,
Raising it high for all to celebrate.

Pianissimo: his gestures caressing,
Comforting the girl hounded from Salonika,
Who, crying a concentration of stars,
Braids barbed wire twisting from her scalp;

Embracing a cemetery ploughed by tanks,
Covered in soft moonlight and lime;
And souls, gathering their scattered bones
To join the bride in tomorrow's dance.

Crescendo: eyes closed for sound,
He struggles in a net of wrinkled skin,
Grapples with gravity and space,
Punches back the silence between notes –

His angled shoulder blades protruding,
As though becoming archangel's wings,
To raise not only his heaviness
But the breathless audience to paradise.

His left heel lifts, a fraction, stays,
As though his body's poised to levitate,

But only for a heartbeat, or a half,
When it drops, together with his arms.

Encore: after a moment's hesitation
They spring up, scatter in applause,
Strain on tip-toe, wanting more from him –
Musician, magician, miracle worker.

Exhausted from giving of himself,
He acknowledges all with barely a bow
And walks off the way he came:
Alone, midway between mute fists.

Tom Petsinis is an Australian poet, playwright and novelist. He was born in Macedonia, Greece, and emigrated to Australia as a child. The Australia Council has awarded him a Writers' Fellowship and a Residency at the B. R. Whiting Library in Rome. He lives in Melbourne and works as a mathematics adviser at Deakin University. His writing includes the novels *The French Mathematician* and *The Twelfth Dialogue*, the plays *The Drought* and *The Picnic*, the poetry *Naming the Number* and *Four Quarters*, and a collection of short stories *The Death of Pan*. His most recent publications are the novel *Quaternia* and the collection of poetry *Breadth for a Dying Word*. Translations of his work are available in a number of languages. tom.petsinis@vu.edu.au