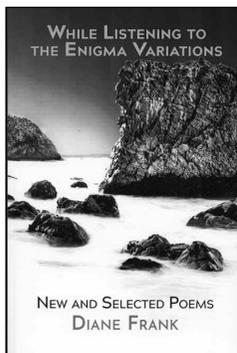

BOOK REVIEWS



While Listening to the Enigma Variations, Diane Frank Glass Lyre Press, 230 pages, \$20. Winner of the 2022 Next Generation Indie Book Award for Poetry.

Poetry is as varied as the people who write it. There's introverted poetry that tends to the quiet details of an inner life, as in the case of Rilke, and extroverted poetry that is out talking to the world, as in the case of Bukowski.

At the soft extreme of extroverted poetry might be ecstatic poetry broadcasting spiritual joy from the roof tops. The poetry of Diane Frank finds its place in this last camp. Her poetry is ecstatic, reminiscent in many ways of Kabir, though more personally erotic than Kabir. With great spiritual energy, she thinks over the gifts of her life, so in this sense, her work moves closer to the poems of Neruda where her experience in all its sensual guises hovers gently but actively before her.

As for the poems in this collection, the book's title, *While Listening to the Enigma Variations*, is a good choice because the poems themselves are like music for the reader to get lost in, as Frank describes in poems referencing the music she plays as a member of the Golden Gate Symphony. In music, the larger elements like key and tempo hold sway over individual notes that are the notes they are because of the musical context in which they occur and have their expression.

The same could be said of Frank's poems. The greater context of love, joy, and reverence carry the poems, and this larger current takes precedence over individual notes, which in this case might be the images and metaphors that occur along the way. Many of these are pitch-perfect and bring the reader close to swooning, as in:

When you wake up
another piece of what
you have been searching for
will fly into your throat
softly, like a bird

made of starlight."
["How to Jumpstart a Dream"]

Or: "You open my petals,/drop ripples/into the place
where/the sky is born." ["Better by Moonlight"]
There's quiet revelation:

At 4:00 in the morning
an owl calls to the moon
through a sky full of fog.
Crickets hesitate.
At the edge of a dream,
just when I think I have nothing left to say,
the light starts shining."
["My Face Became a Dream"]

And surprise:

Everything happens in a taxi
driving down 42nd Street,
careening through time.
You can hear horns blaring in the distance.
In the back seat, the murderer
is watching *Psycho* on his cell phone.
The seats are bright red."
["Nightmare in New York"]

As with most books, I expect this one will not ring the bell for everyone. However, for those for whom it does ring, it will ring loud and clear. Much will depend on whether the reader is won over by the energy and joy that provide the motor and horizon for the poems.

In my own reading of her work I found that it was better to let the over-riding positivity lead the way since the reverence and joy of the book provide the context in which the poems breathe and expand into being. Diane Frank is reassuring and good company. She loves her life and life itself, and her poems in their music and dancing radiate an undeniable optimism over what life is, has been, and will be.

JOHN KOOISTRA