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Choruses: Poems

Quincy Troupe

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Quincy Troupe launches a pyrotechnic display of jazz rhythms, political commentary, sports tributes, travelogues, and architectural abstracts in his latest volume of poetry, with*Choruses*. Merging traditional poetic form with contemporary content, Troupe fashions "words & sounds that build bridges toward a new tongue" , as he writes in "Song," an ars poetica. Only Troupe could write a sestina chronicling the mass suicide of Heaven's Gate, or a villanelle for Michael Jordan: "rising up in time, michael jordan hangs like an ikon, suspended in space / / his eyes two radar screens screwed like nails into the mask of his face." A masterful technician, Troupe experiments with free verse as well, repeating the same words in three different line-break configurations in "Images: Three Variations of Shape & Form." From haiku to tonka, from Mark McGwire to Sammy Sosa, from bebop to hip hop, these choruses "become sound tracks lifted off a poet's tongue, / / syllables, within moments, are transformed into song..."

"Troupe's sixth collection covers a wide cultureal bandwidth: the Monica-gate scandal, the Heaven's Gate mass suicide; jazz greats like Miles Davis (Troupe's *Miles: The Biography* is the standard) and Richard Muhal Abrams; sports stars like Michael Jordon, Sammy Sosa and Mark McGwire; lesser know artists like GeorgeLEwis & the Dancers at Laguna Pueblo, painter Robert Colescott and many more. Perhaps to formally mirror the mix, Troupe puts sonnets, villanelles and sestinas in the midst of his more characteristic jazz-inflected free-verse lines. The best poems here, however, eschew traditional European forms, and foreground Troupe's mastery of a sprawling American vernacular: "the tongue in his hands now was once a saxophone when whole,/ was a blur of fingers whooshing through golden keys of his voice belling/ . . . .conjures up spirits, the drumbeat of strong hearts goosing everything along." Troupe doesn't quite go as far into uninhibited linguistic musicality as, say, Clark Coolidge, Will Alexander or the best rhapsodic passages in Kerouac. Yet his unwillingness to forgo teh referential severrs a powerful didactic function beyond "the tough aesthetics" of contemporary poetry, as Troupe often employ

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