

# THE MUSIC OF HANDS

poems



Theresa Senato Edwards

# THE MUSIC OF HANDS

# THE MUSIC OF HANDS

*Theresa Senato Edwards*

SEVEN CIRCLEPRESS • SEATTLE, WA • 2014

The Music of Hands: Poems  
Copyright © 2012 by Theresa Senato Edwards

Cover art Copyright © 2012 by Christine Ashton  
Used with permission. Artist's website: [www.blu282.com](http://www.blu282.com).

Author photograph Copyright © 2012 by Douglas Edwards.  
Used with permission.

Cover design by Theresa Senato Edwards.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, without permission in writing from the author, except by reviewers who may quote brief excerpts in connection with a review in a newspaper, magazine, or electronic publication. Requests for permission to make copies of any part of this work should be e-mailed to the author; her email can be found on her blog: *TACSE creations*, [www.tacse.blogspot.com](http://www.tacse.blogspot.com).

Print version published in the United States by Theresa Senato Edwards, Poughkeepsie, New York.

SCP WebBook version published in the United States by Seven CirclePress, Seattle, Washington.

Print Version ISBN: 13: 978-1480211469

Print Version ISBN-10: 148021146X

~

First Edition, November 2012  
SCP WebBook Edition, April 2014

*giving thanks ...*



# CONTENTS

Uterus	9
What the Fingers Remember	10
Holly Rose	11
Architecture	13
Afternoon	14
As I think of ways to pray	15
What's Not Broken	16
Around the First	17
The Music of Your Hands	18
Glove making	23
Monochrome man	24
On Shadows	25
Creature Elegy	26
The Sorrow of Swans	27
Juncture	29
brother carried the poppies	30
death:	31
The Music of Dead Hands	32
Acknowledgements	35
About the Author	35

*and the dead scattered to the four corners of their bodies  
were mended by women's hands*

~ Venus Khoury-Ghata, "Early Childhood"  
Translated by Marilyn Hacker



## **Uterus**

At 51, I can live without you, weathered pear,  
matched muscle of my sisters, like mother's body.

In the time it takes to pray, you're sliced in strips  
like butter. Hollow sound interrupted, a faint  
sorrow as if an elegy's only passing was from  
one woman's hand to another.

I really wasn't aware of your significance or what  
you were the last 16 years: dark vessel, mother  
loneliness. I wasn't tested for clarity. The pressing  
under skin phantom now. I know your worth.

## What the Fingers Remember

At first, nothing

tap / but words rely on sight,  
peripheral vision,  
stroking precise  
anticipated—  
indexes trot, slowly dance  
the cha cha with eyes.

After practice, precision

fingers placed to promenade  
lettered bleachers,  
beveled feel of display—  
eyes down  
then balance: square, air,  
square, air, square air.

After routine, language

knowing the dance routine  
without eyes—  
as if touch were sight,  
a soft brail stippled  
in the brain, like love, the  
surreal of senses / like learning.

*after reading Christine Klocek-Lim's chapbook  
Ballroom: a love story*

## Holly Rose

Her eyes listen to the tattoo artist—  
a dance of curls beneath a winter hat  
he wears inside his parlor.  
Joker tattoo on his forearm,  
ear lobes half moons of studs.

All of a sudden, her ears—  
snap of sterile gloves, metal overcomes  
air as he tests his machine, then applies  
the pattern for her third tattoo.

Pain outlines her stomach left of the  
belly button. Blackened rip of body made  
by covered hands that guide the tool's  
cut, then wipe her blood into the past.  
Stale space sucks color from her face,  
carves symbols of her parents.

His lean legs straddle the chair's side;  
she imagines them against her, tries to grab  
leather before her lover's thick, strong body  
situates in her mind. Below her ribs vine  
and stem fuse in remembrance: holly for  
December (her father's birthday month),  
rose for June (her mother's).

Their inked tribute lost momentarily in obsession:  
artist's art, new genus on skin.

~

She goes back for color;  
goes back for him,  
This time lidocaine two hours before  
helps numb the needle's entry.

His winter hat with “FUCK YOU”  
on the back. Clean gloves pour  
ink in tiny, sterile plastic. She  
follows his blue eyes, his grey  
chin hairs stroked in her mind.

“Came in three hours ago,  
turned the heat on for you,” he says.  
She’s hot below her inked flower,  
her lover’s touch the night before.  
She laughs, drone shades skin  
until the lidocaine wears off.

He asks if it hurts. *Excruciating*,  
she thinks. “This is it for me.” she says.  
“Last time in this place.” He rattles her,  
loudly snaps latex from his hands,  
says, “Maybe I’ll see ya not for a tattoo.”  
Her lover’s trust between her thighs.  
Parents’ love, reminder of loyalty  
she’ll wear with chance of only fading.

She listens—  
leaves the noise behind.

## Architecture

The folds in her hands, church pamphlets, every figment  
set in the old balcony's smell, her father's smell when he  
sleeps too long in the back bedroom, back to the opening  
which begins stairs, those folds of wood grinding time down  
to nonexistence, pointed structure gone from wind, dirty  
bed sheets folded like prayers.

*riff on "fold" from Laura McCullough's poem  
"Longing"*

## Afternoon

*for Ingrid*

I pray for bone  
    the growing of it  
visualize sticky chewing gum  
    on my hands to wrap  
around leftovers, fragments tiring  
    looking for their other halves  
I delicately pull your spine hollow light  
    grasp both ends fuse,  
my fingertips moan.

## As I think of ways to pray

I want to linger, touch doorknobs  
again, prayer smoothes the turning  
because knobs have teeth, knobs are open  
mouths that withstand repetitions. If only  
I learned how to say the rosary, like a saint  
affixed to a story, smoothing my fingers on  
each bead. Did I say knobs have teeth? Did I say  
each bead was repetitive? It's the safest way to  
pray without thinking too much. It's the best  
way to pray during radiation treatment: steady  
with sincere asking. "Offer up!" is what  
my friend said. Her brother's a priest.

*riff on "I want to linger, touch doorknobs" from  
Bryan Borland's poem "The Day I Pack His Things"*

## What's Not Broken

The promise you made to your mother. The black urn  
molded around your father's bones. Your hands

when you smooth the blanket at the bed's edge.  
Neatly tucked corners. Winter's white line along

the roof. Marriage vows after nineteen years. Unbroken,  
the silent tempo of time. Eighty-year-old front porch

screens. That old green house you love so much. Kitten's  
fixed leg—before, a limp wave of fur. Unbroken,

a victim's shriek that carries the night. Last June's  
steady stream to the river. Street light at driveway's

end. Kindness from a long-time friend. Unbroken  
tubes of blood in my hands. The young oncologist's

voice. A black sky I fall into. What has been steady,  
level, relentless all these years? The nun's

ruler on my knuckles. Rules. Age lines around  
my eyes. A good mother's love. Imagine, suppose,

consider magic spells, the way rain rocks you steady  
to sleep. That continuous sea in my brain, dark red paper

cleverly folded like a heart.

*after reading "What's Broken" by Dorianne Laux*

## **Around the First**

Attic room: unmade twin beds  
old, dirty casement windows  
needing curtains to hide  
the way he broke inside her silence.

Old, dirty casement windows  
cracked from the rain within:  
the way he broke inside her silence.  
Ceiling, pitched and peeling

cracked from the rain within,  
low and suffocating.  
Ceiling, pitched and peeling,  
the smell of skin

low and suffocating  
in thick teenage air.  
The smell of skin  
lit the lamp.

## The Music of Your Hands

*at the very heart of bully prevention is the need for individuals to become "special." ~ J. Richard Knapp*

the music of your hands

*follows*

invisible roads,  
fleshy snags droop but hold the octaves  
just outside your worry world  
you've hidden, upturned mouth,  
fingers fuse, an interval of wanting, narrow  
glass wall you're hesitant to explore

the music of your hands

*cushions*

your sound,  
preparing for a motif, soft careening  
dissonance needing more  
you've hidden, aching temples,  
fingertips sore from the rubbing  
in your brain

the music of your hands

*refuses*

their scorn,  
a special quiet carries,  
you've shared the melody, monotone  
then rising,  
your palms understand clear a meshing  
of indifference.





*Cold worlds shake from the oar.  
The spirit of blackness is in us, it is in the fishes.  
A snag is lifting a valedictory, pale hand;*

~ Sylvia Plath, "Crossing the Water"



## Glove making

Trace time, skin hand pattern.

Thumb for loneliness like yesterday's wind.

Table wings cut carefully, lie listless, waiting for life.

Gussets: the in-betweens made of cold, blue upholstery.

My thumb/index finger stretch to push through tin:

mother's tiny element. Black thread.

Rain outside pushes me to pins.

Blue upholstery cut for one promise: cover her dead knuckles.

Unmatched buttons beneath round, rusted seal, one

for each strand of DNA.

Stitch slowly sorry for death to new things.

## Monochrome man

hugged my mother once at the bottom of stairs in between doorway and hall. She didn't see his gentle pressing.

I see him through thick time. When my son was three, he bled. Blood-blister in his throat emptied red threads onto sheets. Man's sheer sleeve absorbs. When my son was four, the babysitter spoke little English, watched too many children. End of hall, babies cried in a room stuffed with brown, wooden cribs. Clear plastic couches in her living room. Toddler gate my son pounded each morning; man tends to his ache. In kindergarten my son learned Spanish but couldn't make letters on pages stay still. Man catches little-boy vowels in his collar, helps consonants dissolve: black salt in thick, pale hands press together lightly, fingertips pointing.

In the shower I cried, water pelting my chest, colorless, shapeless, molding into monochrome, the indefinite pulling me away. Man folds me along the edges, like fresh linen mother placed in dresser drawers; his soft eyes urge me beyond the weight.

## On Shadows

a tree cracks below its wishbone limbs  
where houses begin their illusionary  
descent toward the untouchable:  
gaping darkness off refracted structures

where black specks on blue home  
seep through until all that's left  
is sponge

where chalk-white windows  
teach in retrospect: "remember,  
don't talk to strangers"

where mother tree rootless,  
clueless, larger than sun,  
poses for blue sky

green grass alligator—  
nowhere to run except on shadows

*in response to Ann Calandro's collage, Shadows*

## **Creature Elegy**

I'm tired of killing them, naked  
widows foraging for dark space,

hanging from cloth, translucence  
strong as life. Blood legs dart

from giant death—grim perspective.  
The attic swells to hold them in,

long legs, fine threads between my  
fingers. Heads covered, crushed in

tissue—black rouge. Venom, my  
scrutiny: human subtraction, one

limb then another. Shear bulbous  
babies soften before death.

## The Sorrow of Swans

*I have looked upon those brilliant creatures,  
And now my heart is sore. ~ William Butler Yeats*

And if I were to answer,  
describe a little boy with swans  
who felt the lining of their hearts,  
shoreline of sadness,  
I would applaud his father's  
hands pulling frozen belly  
from a feathered hump  
of snow on concrete.

If I had looked away,  
modern home, windows thick  
with light, I might have saved  
my own sorrow. Little boy,  
their gallant witness to nature's  
murderers: water rats surround  
new life, misty greys that flutter  
feathers not nearly ready to be wings.

And swans break    wail danger.  
Cygnets snatched beneath a murky lake,  
a bright survival enemies demand. If I  
had not begun to count the distant greys,  
maybe white, quill curves in water  
would provoke in me more joy.

But I remember his voice, high pitched  
to carve away frailties: when swans  
orchestrated air but could not save them  
all. And my boy accepted this, brought  
bread, names for each babe left. If I did not  
watch this collaboration, ripples of absence,  
I might have yearned for swans like Yeats.

If I were to answer, describe a little boy  
with swans, I would hope for life found  
through dreams. I might have seen dead  
hands, white as ice, lay themselves upon  
a heap, bring it back to him. Instead, last swan  
makes a frozen path along concrete, nearing  
our door it never reaches. Snow high behind  
a dumpster, backdrop to what my husband  
knows he'll feel come morning: an icy, prickled  
neck to pry its body from an empty early air.

## **Juncture**

Reach beyond the ribs,  
close to heartbreak, smooth  
the fire in the sockets,  
weld fingertips to trees.

Talk to chalky clouds, clench  
the strand of night tied to your jaw,  
as if skeleton were prayer music.

**brother carried the poppies**

*for donavon*

brother carried the poppies,  
said, "it isn't enough  
to touch the valleys of your heart,  
I need to scrape the linings  
of your valley, I need to breathe in  
the blues of your lungs  
until I turn yellow"

I sat fogged-over,  
caves sculpted beneath  
my eyes.

~

I walked behind,  
brother carried the poppies,  
said, "it isn't enough to stroke  
your tree wild from drought,  
suck the lily white,  
I need to press your valley hard,  
then run silent, a cat through snow"

I said, "the lake hits hard,  
your body pounding,  
its sting I'll taste regardless."

**death:**

the journey of swell waves ~  
in a husband's arms, smooth  
darkness to wind  
a shedding, grit from a low place.  
rising crucial  
a look at decay  
expanse.  
foldingrollingfoldingrollingfoldingrollingfoldingrolling  
the surge of birds' wings  
holding  
~ just holding.  
god tows rifts,  
sound absorbs.

## The Music of Dead Hands

### *rests*

silent overtones of the past cushion the fingers  
huddled like fleshy sticks ready for a bonfire  
or maybe the earth: a dark, wet baritone.

You wait for a beat, slight hint of flux,  
what syncopated memories feel like against white cloth,  
pristine maple edges,  
    the force of thought:  
what limbs are before arteries fill  
with disinfectant.

### *repeats*

    the similar alignment of muddy wrists,  
a likeness among death in coffins,  
hands in unison just below the waist  
or maybe a leitmotif: calm persona  
amid parallels of grief.

You wait for a variation, faint twist of harmony  
from knuckles muffled in wood or steel:  
unfinished symphonies,  
    what ache sounds like.

### *resolves*

    a room full of dead hands in hydrogel,  
fingertips stiff amid indefiniteness.

You peer through the large glass wall,  
wait for the air's rush and pitch,  
    or maybe applause: strong dance of palms,  
a rippling dissonance,  
then suspension: a final holding  
of clay, the mind's last form of whole,  
    each hand a slow, waving cadence.





## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Grateful acknowledgement is made to the editors of the following literary journals in which the following poems or earlier versions of them first appeared and/or were republished:

*13 Myna birds*: “On Shadows”

*Blue Earth Review*: “What’s Not Broken”

*Caper Literary Journal*: “The Music of Dead Hands” and “Monochrome man”

*Coldfront Magazine*: “Glove making” featured link in *this morning* on August 4, 2012

*International Bully Prevention E-zine*: “The Music of Your Hands”

*The Journal of Compressed Creative Arts—Matter Press*: “Juncture”

*The Poetry Storehouse*: “Afternoon,” “brother carried the poppies,” “Juncture” and a republic of “On Shadows,” all with audio.

*Referential*: “Architecture” and “As I think of ways to pray”

*Seven CirclePress*: “Holly Rose”

*Thrush*: “Glove making”

*Whale Sound*: “Monochrome man” republished with audio

Thanks always to Doug, Richard, and Troy.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Theresa Senato Edwards' first book of poems, Voices Through Skin, was published June 2011 by Sibling Rivalry Press. A poem from this book entitled "Her Rituals" was a poetry finalist for the 2011 OCD Foundation's Dare to Believe Contest.

Her second book, Painting Czeslawa Kwoka ~ Honoring Children of the Holocaust, a full-color collaboration with Painter, Lori Schreiner, was published by Unbound Content, April 2012. The title piece, "Painting Czeslawa Kwoka," won the Tacenda Literary Award for Best Collaboration 2007; another piece in the collaboration, "A Last Look," won this same award in 2010; and the collection won the Tacenda Literary Award for Best Book, 2011—all awards from BleakHouse Publishing.

Theresa's blog: TACSE *creations*: [www.tacse.blogspot.com](http://www.tacse.blogspot.com).

## ABOUT THE PRESS

Seven CirclePress was founded in 2008 by New England poet Seth Jani.

It publishes both online and off, and aims to create a collective of the best voices from the independent literary scene.

It commits to no prescribed esthetic but has a strong inclination to view art as a means of promoting unity and meaningful interaction.

It has a strong online presence with the amount of visitors growing daily.

SCP publishes a select number of books/chapbooks a year as well as *CircleShow: The Official Journal of Seven CirclePress*, released biannually.

The preciousness of time passing, the humbling legacies and pain—both sharply physical and hauntingly figurative—of desire, all become charged with insight in Edwards' intense and fiercely lyrical voice.

– Cyril Wong, author of *Tilting Our Plates to Catch the Light*

These poems are prayers spoken with a voice as pure and succinct as the sanctuaries it describes. And we are guided through this voice's fear by miraculous images, radiant pearls of light. For these reasons, for the humanity intrinsic in the "offering up" of prayer, I love this collection.

– Lane Falcon, author of *The Making of a Mountain*

"Man folds me along the edges," Edwards writes, "like fresh linen mother placed in dresser drawers." Edwards' poetry is a brave and endearing exploration in the meaning of womanhood in contemporary America. To write as a woman *is* to be political; and through her crisp language and sharp imagery, this book leaves nothing unturned.

– Ocean Vuong, author of *Burnings*

When the narrative begins, "At 51, I can live without you, weathered pear, / matched muscle of my sisters, like mother's body" there is transformation; and we are drawn into the red tent. Edwards' poems are memory and fortune-teller, motherbaby and birth, and find beauty in the cramped spaces most overlooked.

– Tzunya Pinchback, author of *How to Make Pink Confetti*



Theresa Senato Edwards' first book of poems, *Voices Through Skin*, was published June 2011, Sibling Rivalry Press. A poem from this book entitled "Her Rituals" was a poetry finalist for the OCD Foundation's Dare to Believe Contest, 2011.

Her second book, *Painting Czeslawa Kwoka ~ Honoring Children of the Holocaust*, a full-color collaboration with Painter, Lori Schreiner, was published by unbound CONTENT, April 2012. The title piece won the Tacenda Literary Award for Best Collaboration 2007; another piece in the book "A Last Look" won this same award in 2010; and the entire collection won the Tacenda Literary Award for Best Book, 2011—all from Bleak-

House Publishing. Theresa's blog: [www.tacse.blogspot.com](http://www.tacse.blogspot.com).

Cover art © 2012 by Christine Ashton.

Author photo © 2012 by Douglas Edwards.



SEVEN  
CIRCLEPRESS  
A HOME-GROWN LITERARY VENUE

SCP WebBooks

[www.sevencirclepress.com](http://www.sevencirclepress.com)