

## *Short Notices*

### Joseph Jarman's *Black Case* Reviewed by Art Lange

It has long been acknowledged that the origin of poetry was as an oral medium; a direct verbal communication from poet (also seen at that time as a story-teller, carrier of culture, and often as holy person) to audience. It was not for hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years that the words were written down in a concrete, unchanging form; prior to this the poem, story, or message had always been arranged (as a composer might arrange a piece of music), adapted, and quite often improvised by the individual poet to suit his material, his audience, and his environment. Once the words began to be written down a shift in emphasis occurred, away from spontaneity and musicality towards a refined sentiment and a concern for structure and form; to the extent that by the early twentieth century a man such as Ezra Pound could bemoan the lack of musicality—or in his word, “melopoeia”—in contemporary verse.

During the last few decades, however, more stress has been placed on reaffirming the link between music and language, and there has been a return to the idea of poetry as performance. Of course, during the 1950's the Beat poets attempted to unite their social consciousness and hip-insouciant poetry with jazz (both the hot and cool varieties), and, although this led to a few strikingly successful collaborations, the ultimate overall result soon became desultory self-parody, and eventually the idea fell into disuse. Lately though these concepts have been reinvested with energy by the large community of Black writers and musicians, and the work of Joseph Jarman stands as an appropriate and often engaging example of both the successes and failures which have resulted.

An exceptionally talented composer and multi-instrumentalist, Jarman has been a member of Chicago's AACM (Association for the Advancement of Creative Musicians) since its inception, and has built a sizeable reputation in musical circles. He is, however, one of those artists who feels that he cannot limit his avenues of communication to one medium; thus a live solo performance by

*Black Case, Volume 1 and 2: Return from Exile* by Joseph Jarman. Art Ensemble of Chicago Publishing Co, Chicago. Second Printing: 1977. 113 pp., \$3.50 paper.

Jarman, or one by the Art Ensemble of Chicago (the influential new music group of which he is an active member) will include not only music, but also song, narration, film, dance, mime, or other aspects of theater. In the introduction to *Black Case* he writes, "In reality all the words are music themselves," and this concept is reaffirmed in a recent interview published in the magazine *Brilliant Corners #8* (Winter 1977-78, p. 98) where he says:

I always had the notion that music, and movement . . . and the voice being, language being movement. I mean, when we speak, we speak in timbre, in rhythm, in sound, we speak in silence, we speak loud, we speak soft, we speak music. The words are like notes to me, that is, I can make a phrase with a musical instrument that will have the same density and everything else, as I can with words. For me, now, to say a music with my voice and body is the same as saying a music with a traditional musical instrument. Also for me now the body has become a musical instrument as well as a movement instrument. The dynamics of the whole unit now, for me . . . I am a sound.

The point of this is that the poetry in *Black Case* should not be considered complete as it stands solely on the page; it should be read out loud, performed, sung; otherwise it reads as dry, rhetorical, often naive. When heard in conjunction with the theatrical presentation, or given the musicality of the spoken voice, the words take on an extra dimension, a tension which transcends the momentary experience and creates a spiritual communication from one human being to another. Naked on the page, however, in many cases these poems seem too bland, too bald in their sentiments. In addition, the poems occasionally attempt to rationalize or justify the relationship between his art and his audience, usually in an unconvincing, oversimplistic manner. For example, we need not be told that "all creation/sings through you," or that, "like a/music/ 'from the morning/of the world'/our songs/must contain/ALL/of life, must/cry out and praise/the land/the heavens, all things" (p. 103) because we learn this through the music itself.

In these poems Jarman is speaking in as direct a manner as he can to his audience, not in a preaching fashion, but in a way which reflects the concern he feels for his fellow man, and the responsibility he feels is inherent in being a creative artist. At a basic level, *Black Case* is a document of position, not in the sense of Jarman's acceptance of a creative artist's stance or artificial pose, but rather verifying his existence after a "return from (existential)

