

SALVATORE DIFALCO

THREE MICROFICTIONS

WE ARE NOT JAZZ

PEOPLE SAY THAT OUR MUSIC doesn't swing the way jazz should. But we never pretended to be jazz players, even when we were jazzing around. I play accordion, not a typical jazz instrument, nor is the twelve-string guitar played by the guy in the red-and-yellow polka-dot pants typical. The tubular reed man plays an upside-down pygmy jinn, not a clarinet as you might think. And what of the Hawaiian guitar massaged by the purple man? Do you think he should waste his time with jazz? Yeah, the drummer drums but look carefully at what he's beating. It's an oil drum filled with cats. Just imagine the music we make, the lovely danceable notes that pour forth from our instruments. But if everyone is dancing and grooving to the vibe then surely this isn't jazz. Surely this isn't jazz when the jinn squeals or the cats bawl or my accordion brings to mind Italian weddings of old. Surely this isn't jazz when the whining Hawaiian does a spirited solo. Surely this isn't jazz when bozo's virtuoso fretwork goes unnoticed by the audience. He would sing if he could sing to draw more attention to himself, for in the end isn't that what we seek, attention? Attention from music lovers and attention from women who follow bands in pursuit of excitements, and attention from people keeping tabs on what's au courant. We may not be there yet, but we're confident. Can you hear us now? Just close your eyes and imagine the jinn screeching as the reed man tickles his feet, imagine the cats in the oil drum as the drummer hammers it, and imagine the Hawaiian guitar and the purple bloke manning it with feeling. And this is about just that in the end: feeling something. Do you feel something? I feel something, even though my efforts whisper into a swirling storm. When will the clouds break up? When will the wind die down? When will we agree that this music we engender is not jazz? Who said it was jazz in the first place? Someone did. Someone did or we wouldn't be having this moment.

BLUE THE CAT

IN A SOMEWHAT LESS THAN REPUTABLE neighbourhood south of my own there once lived a cat that was completely blue. Not blue in the way some cats seem to have a bluish tint to their silvery or grey or even off-white pelts, but a deep, true and natural blue. Not the paler blue of sky or the electric blue of lightning or the *bleu de France* of Mrs. Cole's curtains next door. Nor was it that very particular blue observed in cornflowers, or the cobalt blue of my mother's Mexican glassware, or the *azzurri* of her eyes. Nor was it Cambridge blue or Persian blue (or *Prussian* blue!) or Yale blue or any blue specific to a place or civilization or a way of life. Not indigo or iris or periwinkle. Not sapphire or cyan or the ghostly Alice blue. And certainly not International Klein blue. No, this cat was simply *blue*, a beautiful hue nonetheless. It drew much attention to itself and its owner, a tattooed ex-con who had turned the corner on his life and was now selling baked goods from his little house near the railroad tracks. His name was Duke Brandeis, as nice a fellow as you'd ever meet who'd spent ten years in a penitentiary for beating to death a man whom he claimed had come at him with a knife. The knife was never found and no one in the universe believed that he didn't kill the man, but he still told anyone who asked him that he was innocent, that he had been framed by unscrupulous policemen, that the courts were rigged against him, that it was circumstantial evidence, that there were no witnesses, not a single one, that the system was systemically crooked and corrupt, and that anyone who knew him then and now knew that he wouldn't hurt a fly, that he simply wasn't capable of murder, that he didn't have it in him. But he had learned to bake in prison and after ten years had developed a grandmother's subtlety and finesse in the kitchen, and his pies, loaves, and buns were nothing short of exquisite. Once word got around to better neighbourhoods that there existed in the city a man who baked scrumptious pies and so forth, business exploded. He could barely keep up with demand. He hired a nubile blonde assistant and she proved so enthusiastic and productive and sexually enticing that he hired another one. The two girls, Majorelle and Bondi, needless to say, fell in love with the blue cat, which they simply called *Blue* (though their boss had named it *Egypt* in connection with the Blue Nile), and which in kind responded to the name like a dog, something rare in cats, and they doted on this animal with more assiduousness and fuss than two new mothers. Yes, Blue the cat was an extraordinary animal with its yellow eyes, inscrutable face and charismatic, self-conscious, radiating presence. Duke Brandeis,

the ex-con baker who was making a killing with his tasty baked goods, who had found the cat by the railway tracks, never considered capitalizing on the feline's uniqueness. You're mine, he thought, but I don't need to exploit you, I'm doing very well. And though people came from miles around to buy the baked goods and then returned more often than not to buy more baked goods but also to see the special animal, Duke Brandeis kept his word and never, for instance, approached the media for coverage or attention, or charged admission or viewing fees to legitimate bakery customers. Indeed he turned down several exorbitant cash offers for the cat from covetous millionaires (not to mention a number of unscrupulous proposals) and the cat lived a long and happy life.

LIGHTS OUT

I GUESS THEY WANT US TO GO TO SLEEP. The people who run the building. They stay in a room upstairs. I don't know how many of them. Four I've seen, but I've heard of others. Anyway, they want us to sleep. They want us to dream, dream of a rosier dawn, a brighter future, such things. I don't dream anymore. They tell me it's the drugs, but I stopped dreaming long before the drugs. And if I were to have dreams again I would hope that they'd be more pleasant than the ones I recall from the time I did dream. Remembering seems so important, so integral to who we allow ourselves to be. If we could not remember anything at all, if we lived in a constant present, who is to say how we would be, perhaps more thankful, perhaps more vicious, why not that, like a wild animal, all claws and teeth. Indeed my teeth hurt and I fear they'll keep me up all night, a dreadful possibility. On one occasion an excess of stimulants kept me up all night and it seemed like the longest night of my life, the longest night in the history of the world, if I may exaggerate to make my point. Then again, I am physically exhausted. I wore myself out earlier today performing calisthenics in the yard, the old school kind, push-ups and jumping jacks and so forth, because none of the new moves impress me. I know, this is going nowhere. Maybe I should really try to sleep now. The man next to me is from Turkey. He wears a red fez on his head. He snores.