

Tim Hunt

Yusef Lateef Opens for The Byrds (The Fillmore, San Francisco, 1969)

Tonight Brother Yusef is preaching
a sermon on tenor and flute and all the voices
at his command—DetroitDeltaAfrica pan
human, raising the bell of his horn—a sound
so wide and deep it is the mother river
rich with brown mud gathering to it all
the diasporic streams. And in his sermon
there are links of chain and the temptation
to hate the haters and the grief that is
history and the despair of one room
shacks when the wind blows across
the winter fields and the anger of July
asphalt melting in the sun when the street
corner is the only place to go, and in his
sermon there is no forgiveness, but there is
hope, and he sings the river's deep voice
and the grasses and trees of its banks
and the birds that sing their bright parts
in the song, and he leads us into the water,
and we are not forgiven but we are offered
love and a seat in the church and we can
he tells us whisper amen as the river
covers us and then we rise back into the air
and the sun shows us its beauty and the river
holds our hand, and there is only one river,
the mother river, rich with brown mud
gathering to it all the diasporic streams.

