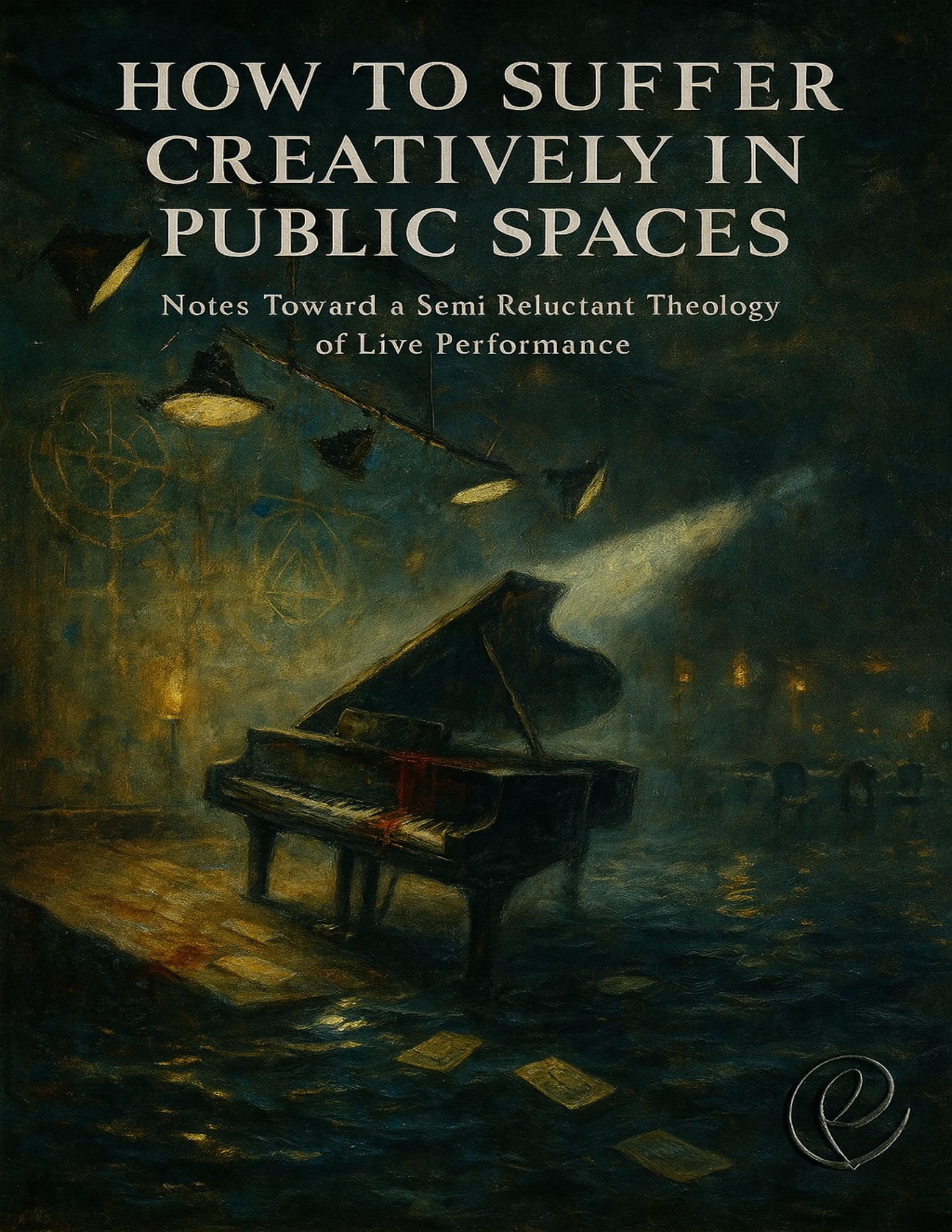


HOW TO SUFFER CREATIVELY IN PUBLIC SPACES

Notes Toward a Semi Reluctant Theology
of Live Performance



HOW TO SUFFER CREATIVELY IN PUBLIC SPACES



Notes Toward a Semi-Reluctant Theology of Live Performance

by Reynold Senn

First draft.

*Written aboard the Norwegian Jewel,
somewhere in the North Atlantic.*

May–July, 2025.----

Dedication

For my parents —
who gave me music.

To the Audience Member

For those who kept listening, even when they didn't have to.

Thank you for being here.

You are the reason I'm able to do this work.

To be asked to make music—for anyone, in any space—is a privilege.

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★ Conversations with the Divine Performer

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Acknowledgments & Sources

“The gospel is a collage. Every voice leaves a fingerprint.”

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permission —

but it may be remembered.

Begin wherever you need to.

PREFACE



This isn't therapy. But it might be company.

The espresso machine hisses louder than your falsetto.
Someone asks if you do requests.
You're singing a love song to a half-empty atrium
where one man is playing solitaire on his iPad.

And then—somehow—the last note lands.
You feel it.
A couple near the back lifts their heads.
For a second, the room quiets.

That's what this is about.

Not every set is a grind.
There are nights when the crowd leans in.
When the harmonies click.
When someone tells you a song brought them back to life.

I've sung under vaulted timber ceilings while snow fell behind tall
windows.

In marble foyers. On the open deck of ships where the ocean kept time.
I've lived in five-star hotels, cruised with guest privileges and a private cabin.

There have been friendships, praise, glimpses of something divine.
I've been fortunate. I know that.

But glamour is fickle.

And mid-week sets in hotel lobbies or cruise ship atriums —
with the audience playing cards or scrolling their phones —
can twist the soul into strange shapes.

You start to wonder what you're doing.
Who you're doing it for.
Whether anyone, including yourself, is listening.

This isn't a complaint.
It's a cartography.

Performers — especially musicians — live in the tension
between the sacred and the background noise.
We suffer creatively in public spaces.
Sometimes with style.
Sometimes barely holding on.

If you've ever wondered why it feels so hard —
even when it looks easy —
know that there's nothing wrong with you.

Statistically, we do suffer more.
Studies show elevated rates of depression, anxiety,

substance abuse, and burnout among performers—
far beyond the general population.

But this isn't a medical text.

It's a stage whisper across the divide.

A reminder that someone else is out there too—
tuning their silence into song.

This isn't therapy.

But it might be company.

INTRODUCTION: WHY THIS? WHY NOW?



The Collapse of Meaning in Modern Life

We live in a time where algorithms shape desire,
news is a performance,
and sincerity is a punchline.

The sacred has been outsourced to streaming platforms,
and the soul has been redesigned for better engagement metrics.

In this vacuum of coherence,
meaning seeps out of the world like steam from a cracked espresso
machine.

Something had to be said—or sung—
before the silence became unbearable.

Interlude: Before the Gig

Soundcheck ran late.

You barely ate.

And now you're singing about devotion to a half-listening crowd,
wondering if your microphone is plugged into anything at all.

And still—someone lingers near the back.

You can't explain it, but something in your voice pulled them in.
Something happened.

That's what this book is trying to name.

Why Plato Would've Bombed the Second Set

Plato never gigged six nights a week in a cruise ship atrium.

Kant never warmed up his falsetto in a janitor's closet
before singing "Let's Stay Together"
to a room half-filled with distracted retirees.

Where is the phenomenology of falsetto?

Where are the treatises on trembling before a high note?

Traditional philosophy forgot to make room for microphones,
mascara,
and the metaphysics of stage banter.

This is our corrective.

The Artist in the Post-Truth Age

When truth becomes a casualty of convenience,
and every fact is footnoted by opinion—
the artist becomes priest, jester, and sacrifice.

The performer is not just entertainment—
but the trembling of Being made audible.

In public spaces—bars, atriums, theatres, terminals—
we suffer creatively so others might remember how to feel.
We risk beauty in a world allergic to it.

This is not a metaphor.
It is the gig.

Absurd Joy as Resistance

This is a manual for surviving with style.
For dancing in despair's spotlight.
For remembering the divine through diaphragm support
and the proper vowel shape.

We are not here to escape suffering.
We are here to tune it,
mic it up,
and send it through the monitors.

Adorno might grimace.
But even he never had to sing over the sound of a cappuccino grinder.

Welcome to absurd joy.

Welcome to the doctrine of beautiful resistance.

Welcome to the project.

CHAPTER 1: THE ART OF SHOWING UP *EVEN WHEN YOU'D RATHER VANISH*



Theme

To suffer creatively is not a failure — it's a form of worship.
Showing up is not a means to the gig — it **is** the gig.
You return not because it makes sense, but because it matters anyway.

Hero of Creative Suffering

Sisyphus, eternal opener, resident of the green room of hell.

Condemned by the gods to push a boulder up a hill, only to watch it roll back down, forever.

A punishment? Perhaps.

But Camus reimagines it: not as defeat, but as defiance.

Every time Sisyphus walks back down the mountain — **that's** the moment.

Not the struggle. Not the peak.

But that walk back, when he knows exactly what awaits him... and he goes anyway.

That's us.

Every load-in.

Every "Can I get more vocal in the monitor?"

Every empty Tuesday night crowd.

Every gig after a breakup, a fight, a death, a bad review.

You know the boulder.

You **are** the boulder.

And still — you return.

Sisyphus doesn't fake optimism.

He knows the absurd. He lives it.

But in that moment of awareness, Camus says, he is free.
He owns the repetition. He makes it his.

The stone becomes his partner.
The hill becomes his path.
The punishment becomes the performance.

The Deep Trouble

You've prepared. You've practiced.
You've prayed to the gods of groove and gain-staging.

And still — you're not feeling it.

You're exhausted, insecure, still arguing in your head with someone who already walked away.
The crowd is distracted. The mix is muddy.

And in that moment, the great lie arises:
“None of this matters.”

Here's the truth:

You are playing music on a floating casino in a dying world during late-stage capitalism.
Nothing makes sense.
But you are here.
That is the art.

Insight / Field Note

The absurd is not the enemy — it's the terrain.

When you accept that the world is strange, unfair, and impossible —
you stop waiting for the conditions to be right.

You play anyway.

The gig is not the reward.

The return is the reward.

Every night you show up and sing despite the void,
you commit a small and beautiful rebellion.

You don't transcend the absurd.

You dance with it.

Stage Dharma

- “Tune your instrument. Then tune your soul.”
- “The crowd may not see the ritual. But you can feel the altar under your feet.”
- “This moment is already gone. Bless it with your presence anyway.”
- “You don't have to be good. You just have to be real.”
- “Play to the one soul who needs it most — even if that soul is yours.”

Quotes That Hurt (Good)

“The absurd man is he who is aware of this enormous discrepancy between his aspirations and the world.”
— Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*

“In the depth of winter, I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer.”
— Albert Camus

“Try again. Fail again. Fail better.”
— Samuel Beckett

Sidebar: Sisyphus for Musicians — A Field Guide

- You’ve played *Wonderwall* at a wedding and meant it anyway. ✓
- You’ve returned to a venue that pays in beer and trauma. ✓
- You’ve driven two hours to play for three people — and one of them was your cousin. ✓
- You’ve wept in a toilet cubicle between sets, then walked back on like a pro. ✓
- You’ve performed with a broken heart, a busted cable, and a fake smile — and still nailed the harmonies. ✓
- You’ve kept going when nothing made sense — not even the setlist. ✓

Congratulations.

You are the hill. You are the climb. You are Sisyphus.

And the gods are quietly impressed.

Final Thought

There is no promise the night will go well.

There is only this:

You returned.

You stood before the silence.

And you sang anyway.



CHAPTER 2: THE STAGE AT KURUKSHETRA

A DIALOGUE WITH THE ETERNAL CHARIOTEER



SCENE: Backstage Before the Offering

A single bare bulb flickers above a cracked mirror.
The performer sits alone, dressed and ready, yet unable to rise.
A subtle presence enters — the room doesn't change,
but it deepens.

ARJUNA:

I can't do it tonight, Krishna.
My voice feels like a wound. My fingers shake.
The crowd out there — some are bored, some are drunk.
What is the point of offering anything to indifference?

KRISHNA:

Did you prepare with care?

ARJUNA:

I did.

KRISHNA:

And did you love the sound — at least once — today?

ARJUNA:

I did.

But that was alone, before the noise returned.

KRISHNA:

Then your duty is clear:

Return.

DUTY AND THE NOTE THAT TREMBLES

ARJUNA:

Duty? To whom? To what?

KRISHNA:

To the note that trembles in your chest.

To the sound that exists not for their applause,
but because silence begged for a crack.

ARJUNA:

But I am full of doubt.

I see other musicians — braver, louder, adored.

I envy their ease. I fear I am a fraud.

KRISHNA:

Every performer is a fraud. Only the gods are pure.

But you — you are honest.

And that makes your song holy.

ARJUNA:

Why must it hurt so much?

KRISHNA:

Because you care.

And because this stage — this moment — is your battlefield.

Not to conquer,

but to offer.

FEAR, FAILURE, AND RETURN

ARJUNA:

And what if they laugh?

KRISHNA:

Then laugh with them. But do not retreat.

ARJUNA:

And if they do not listen?

KRISHNA:

Then play for the gods. Play for the wind.

Play for the part of you that still believes.

Play for the silence you once broke,

and the silence that broke you.

ARJUNA:

And if I fail?

KRISHNA:

You will.

And then you will return.

That is the rhythm of all things — effort, fall, return.

ARJUNA:

But I am so tired.

KRISHNA:

So was I, once.

But then I became your charioteer.

SCENE SHIFT: Toward the Light

A silence.

Arjuna breathes. Slowly, he stands.

The bulb still flickers. The crowd still waits.

The performer walks forward. The bulb flickers once more — then steadies.

KRISHNA (calling after):

You are not here to win.

You are here to become.

Now go. Play.



CHAPTER 3: THE SACRED JOKE OF THE STAGE *LAUGHTER AT THE EDGE OF THE ABYSS*



Theme

Performance is a ritual of shared delusion.
You stand under lights. They sit in darkness.
They pretend you're special. You pretend to believe them.
And somehow — something real happens anyway.

Heroes of Creative Suffering

The Fool — the archetypal truth-speaker cloaked in comedy.
Groucho Marx — patron saint of playful defiance.

Groucho didn't just perform for the audience.
He messed with them.

He made the stage his playground, the script his punching bag,
and authority his straight man.

His moustache was fake.

His insight was real.

He knew that laughter — real laughter — doesn't come from comfort.
It comes from the collapse of pretense.

Between The Fool's sacred irreverence and Groucho's smartass grace,
we are reminded:

The performer isn't there to uphold the illusion.

The performer is there to lovingly ruin it.

The Deep Trouble

Let's be honest: the whole setup is strange.

A group of strangers gathers.

They sit quietly in rows.

They wait for a person with wires, wood, lungs, and nerves to evoke
something.

You are that person.

You wear an outfit no one wears in real life.

You smile between songs.

You become a host, a healer, a sacrificial goat.

Sometimes they clap.
Sometimes they talk.
Sometimes they look through you like a tax document.

And yet: you stay.
You speak the first note.
The air moves.
A silence shifts.
The spell is cast.

It's a joke.
It's a miracle.
It's the sacred transaction of absurd performance.

Insight / Field Note

The audience doesn't owe you reverence.
You don't owe them perfection.
What you share is presence under impossible conditions.

They're tired. You're tired.
They came for a drink. You came to bleed on key.
They want escape. You offer encounter.

They might not hear your best line.
You might forget it anyway.

But if for even a moment you meet — you really meet —
you've opened a portal in the fabric of noise.

Groucho knew: when the fourth wall trembles, let it fall.
Point to it. Wink. Make the crack part of the show.

The Fool wins by dancing on the edge.
Groucho wins by dragging the edge into the spotlight.

Stage Dharma

- “Assume nothing. Receive everything.”
- “You are not a performer. You are a midwife for shared illusion.”
- “Don’t aim to impress. Aim to confess.”
- “If the lights go out, make the silence part of the show.”
- “Every gig is a séance with the unknown.”
- “When in doubt, raise one eyebrow and play the truth.”

Quotes That Hurt (Good)

*“Only he who is ready to become a buffoon for the sake
of truth
will reach the center of being.”
— Carl Jung*

“I refuse to join any club that would have me as a member.”

— Groucho Marx

“All the world’s a stage, and most of us are desperately unrehearsed.”

— Sean O’Casey

Sidebar: Rituals of the Ridiculous — A Brief Field Log

- You’ve bowed after a mic dropped out and no one noticed. ✓
- You’ve told a joke that flopped — and loved the silence more than the laugh. ✓
- You’ve performed through feedback squeals, broken strings, false starts, and forgotten lyrics. ✓
- You’ve had an audience member shout, “Play something good!” — and you did. ✓
- You’ve made a mistake so obvious, it became a feature. ✓
- You’ve learned: if you can’t be slick, be sincere. ✓
- You’ve laughed at your own breakdown and found someone else was laughing too. ✓

You are not the master of the stage.
You are its holy fool.

And Groucho is somewhere in the wings, cigar in hand, muttering:
“If you’ve got them laughing, you’ve already won.”

Final Thought

There will always be something off:
A light too bright. A chair too creaky. A laugh that comes late.

Don’t fight the absurdity.
Invite it in.

Let it become part of the music.

And when the moment hits —
when you feel the room breathe with you —

that’s the punchline.
That’s the grace.



**CHAPTER 4: THE GOSPEL ACCORDING
TO GOMEZ**
*LOVE, STRIPES, AND THE DISCIPLINE OF
JOY — EVEN WHEN NO ONE'S LISTENING*



THE INVITATION

What if exuberance was a spiritual path?

What if playing your heart out to an empty bar was a sacred act?

What if love — not applause — was the real audience?

This chapter is for the musician who walks onstage to indifference
and still decides to give everything.

Not out of ego.

Out of devotion.

Uncle Fester was always my favorite.

He seemed like he was one good explosion away from enlightenment.

But this book belongs to Gomez.

SAINT GOMEZ APPEARS

Hero of Creative Suffering:

Gomez Addams, patron saint of extravagant sincerity.

He teaches us not to withdraw in the face of silence,
but to offer more.

Not to retreat from indifference —
but to romance it.

The audience might not clap.
They might not even look up.

But Gomez would still dip the moment in rosewater and call it divine.

THE CODE OF GOMEZIAN EXUBERANCE

There comes a point in every performer's life
where the crowd thins, the energy sinks,
and the contract says you still have two more sets to go.

This is your sacred cul-de-sac.
This is when you consult the Gomezian Code:

- Don't escape — enchant.
- Don't wilt — sparkle harder.
- Don't be cool — burn.

This is not delusion.

This is creative rebellion.

RITUAL: LOVE HARD

Play the ballad like it matters.

Sing the harmony no one will notice.

Smile at the couple in the corner booth — and mean it.

This isn't performance.

This is an offering.

RITUAL: LAUGH LOUD

When the mic cuts out — laugh.

When someone requests "Free Bird" — laugh.

When your voice cracks — laugh like it's a birth cry.

Joy is how you survive sincerity.

Laughter is the incense.

RITUAL: WEAR STRIPES

Dress with intention.

Whether it's boots, rings, or a perfectly chosen t-shirt — let it matter.

Your clothes are more than style.

They're spell, armor, invocation.

You are not just passing time.

You are conducting magic in plain clothes.

The world may not notice.

But the stage does.

ROMANCE AS REBELLION (STAGE EDITION)

You could phone it in. Everyone else does.

But what if you didn't?

What if you kissed each chord like it was Morticia's hand?

What if you sang to the back row even when the front one was asleep?

To romance your set is to refuse the pull of mediocrity.

It's to shout:

“I refuse to be cool. I choose to burn.”

Even when no one notices.

Especially then.

SPIRITUAL PEDAGOGY OF BRUNCH GIGS

A lesser musician sees an afternoon crowd and thinks,

“Why bother?”

The Gomezian musician thinks,

“Excellent. I shall duel shadows and enchant the invisible.”

Every performance is a form of fencing:

grace + danger,

control + release.

You offer beauty — not because the world is watching —
but because **you** are.

And if someone looks up mid-mimosa and hears something true?

You’ve altered the molecular structure of the room.

STAGE DHARMA

- Romance the indifference. It's the greatest challenge.
- Every empty chair is still a witness.
- Wear the suit. Sing the note. Mean it.
- Even the ignored notes echo somewhere.
- If the crowd's asleep, wake the divine.

FINAL THOUGHT

Where many performance philosophies say “adapt to the room,”
the Gomezian Code whispers:

“Enchant it anyway.”

So the next time you face a quiet room,
a bored crowd,
a too-bright lounge with clinking glasses and blank stares — remember:

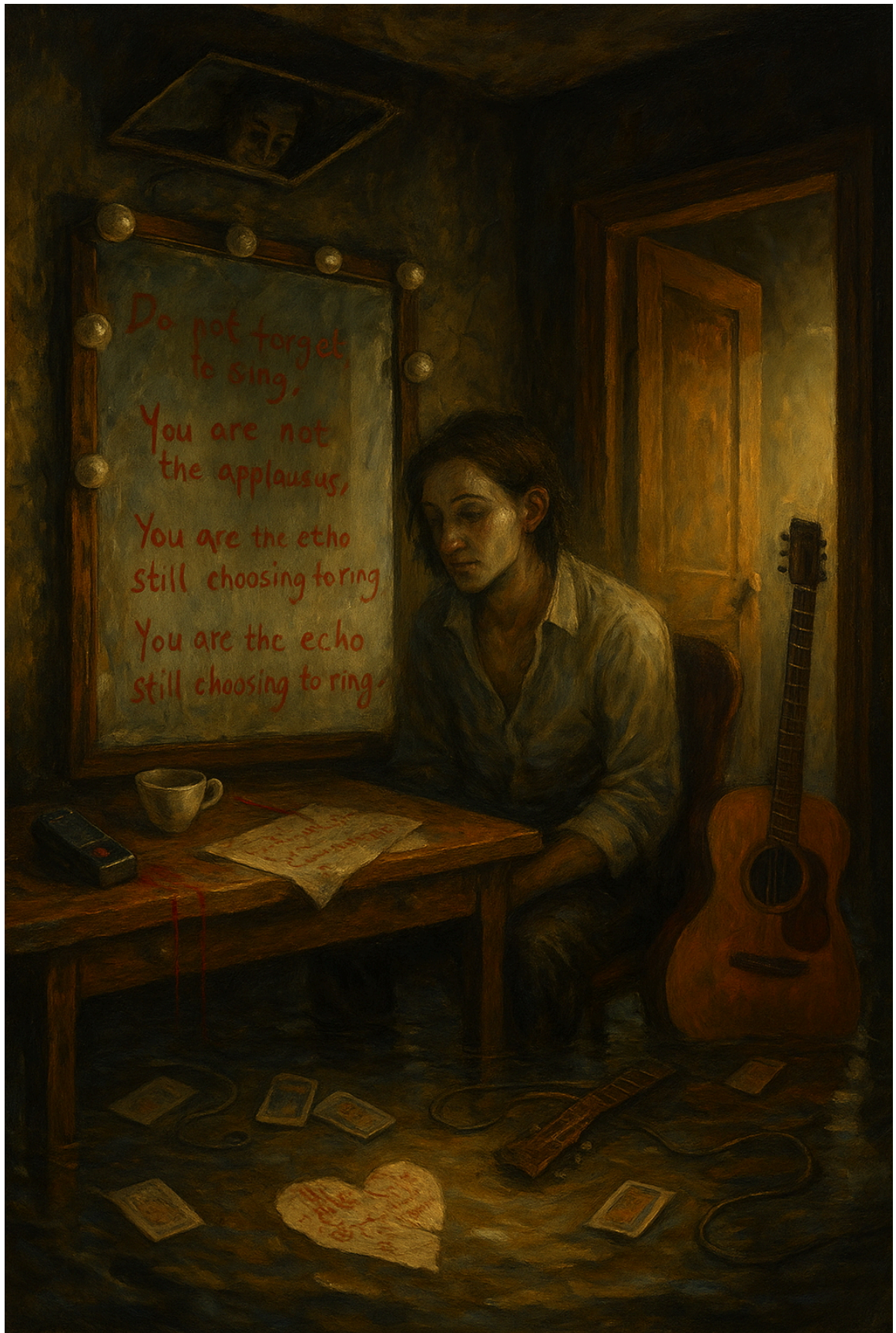
Love hard.

Laugh loud.

Wear stripes.

And if all else fails —

fence between verses.



CHAPTER 5: NOTES FROM THE GREEN ROOM

A FRAGMENTED DESCENT BEFORE THE CLARITY



PRE-SET WHISPERS

Mirror Note – 6:42 PM

You look like a prophet who showed up late to the apocalypse.
Your collar's twisted.
So is your breathing.

Back of the Setlist – Scribbled in Red Ink

Do not forget to sing.
Even when they forget to listen.

Interruption – The Shadow Speaks

They'll smile at the wrong part again. They always do.
Why bother crafting silence between verses
when the espresso machine will solo louder than you ever could?

TRANSMISSIONS FROM WITHIN

Pocket Voice Memo – Unsent, Unheard

“You’re not good enough.”
The hallway whispers it one way.
The dressing room, another.

Text to No One – Drafted, Deleted

If this is devotion,
why does it feel like erosion?

The Room Responds – Crack in the Ceiling Panel

Cracks sing too.
You just need to listen slower.

Flashback – The First Gig

You forgot your lyrics and laughed.
They laughed too.
It was the last time it felt mutual.

THE EDGE OF THE CALL

Last Whisper Before the Stage Call

What if you sang without hope tonight?
Just breath, shaped by longing.
No demand. No reward.
Just... voice.

The Presence – Faint, For Now

I'll be waiting.
Third set.
Final note.

When you forget the words again, I'll be there.
Not to mock.
Just to remind.

THE OFFERING

Exit Note – Written on the Dressing Room Mirror

You are not the applause.

You are not the silence after.

You are the echo still choosing to ring.

[HOUSE LIGHTS UP]

You breathe once.

Then go.



CHAPTER 6: WHAT WAS THAT FOR? ***A DREAM IN THE DRESSING ROOM OF THE MIND***



DREAM PHASE ONE

Scene:

The green room hums like a low-voltage prayer.
One light flickers.

You sit in a cracked leather chair, half in costume, half in memory.
Across from you: Harry Haller — or someone wearing him like a borrowed coat.

YOU:

Was that... good?

HARRY:

It was real. Which is worse.

YOU:

They clapped. (Some of them.)
One man asked if the keyboard was auto-tuned.

HARRY:

They always ask. Then they forget.
Then they come back next week and ask again.

YOU:

I gave everything. I even smiled.

HARRY:

And?

YOU:

Now I just feel... empty.

HARRY:

That's the curse of caring in public.
The performance ends, but the self doesn't.
It just hangs there, like a suit you can't quite take off.

YOU:

Is it always like this?

HARRY:

Only when you mean it.

YOU:

Then what's the point?

HARRY: (pauses)

There isn't one. And it matters anyway.

YOU:

I thought I was supposed to love this.

HARRY:

You do. That's the problem.

YOU:

And you? You still sing?

HARRY:

No. I whisper. To ghosts.

They don't clap, but they stay for the whole set.

YOU:

Should I stop?

HARRY:

No.

But you should stop expecting the silence to thank you.

YOU: (quiet)

What was that for?

HARRY: (smiles)

Exactly.

Somewhere in the room, almost too quiet to notice, a melody plays.

It sounds like "My Girl." Or something trying to be.

The notes are right, but the rhythm is off. A hiccup in the groove.

You blink. It stops.

Harry doesn't seem to notice.

DREAM PHASE TWO

MIRROR FOGS.

Harry's reflection stays as you stand.

Your hand touches the glass — and it ripples.

You're now watching yourself onstage — not now, but years ago.

Your first gig. Nervous. Too loud. Too eager to please.

The scene folds.

A door opens where there was none.

Inside: a wardrobe of every costume you've ever worn.

Each one whispers something forgotten:

"I was the night you almost quit."

"I was the night you felt loved."

"I was the night nobody clapped."

Harry vanishes.

Only his voice remains — from an old speaker in the ceiling.

VOICEOVER (Harry):

"You were always singing to yourself."

DREAM PHASE THREE

The wardrobe closes.

The room stretches.

The melody returns.

But now it's wrong.

- The lyrics are out of order.
- The melody slips into a minor key.
- A child's voice sings "sunshine" with the gravity of a funeral bell.

The mannequins shift.

One taps its foot, out of time.

An audience of mannequins appears, each one holding a mirror.

One by one, they turn them.

You see yourself:

Laughing.

Breaking.

Still singing.

SPOTLIGHT.

No stage. Just you — barefoot, holding a microphone with no cord.

YOU (whispering):

Did you hear it?

Did it reach you?

A pause.

A single clap.

Soft.
Uncertain.
And real.



**CHAPTER 7: A GOOD NIGHT AT THE END
OF THE WORLD**
*NOTES FROM THE BACK LOUNGE
BEFORE DISEMBARKATION*



THE EVENING THAT TURNED

There are nights the venue becomes a cathedral.
Not because the audience rises to their feet —
but because one guest mouths the words to a song
as if remembering a version of themselves they'd misplaced.

A martini glass glows like a votive.
Someone dances not for display,
but for survival.

A child spins in a slow circle
while her parents forget to argue.

And the lights — cheap, pulsing, oblivious —
look briefly like stars.

THE LIMITS OF WHAT YOU CAN FIX

You do not heal the world.
You do not even fix the sound system.
But you tune the evening.
Just enough to carry someone home differently.

You offer the room a single, fleeting coherence.
It will not be remembered in full.
But something changes.

A frequency,
a shadow,
a recognition that none of this was meaningless.

THE GOD IN THE ROOM

Even here — especially here —
beneath the costumes,

past the exhaustion,
inside the broken mic stand and the warm gin —

there is god.
Not a god.
Not your god.

But a shimmering is-ness,
in the very act of showing up.
Of singing what you can,
and meaning it.

THE CALLBACK

You didn't know who needed it.
You never do.

That's the altar.
That's the offering.

This isn't transcendence.
It's return.

Again.
And again.
And maybe this time —
someone else heard it too.

You pack your mic.
You nod at the tech.
You leave no trace behind but the shift in the air.

*This isn't therapy.
But it might be company.*

Afterword: Theodor W. Adorno and the Negative Beat

Or, How to Hear When the World Is Selling You Noise

The beat you don't dance to.
The one that turns sour just before the drop.
The silence between applause and its echo.

Adorno listened there.

While radio crooned comfort
and fascism tuned itself to the rhythm of national pride,
Theodor W. Adorno sat cross-legged in the ruins of Enlightenment
and muttered, "I told you so."

He wasn't just a philosopher.
He was a witness.
To music.

To suffering.
To the slow euthanasia of thought.

He saw that culture had become a kind of aesthetic narcotic.

Not ritual — ringtone.
Not art — algorithm.

What once asked us to feel
now just asks us to nod along.

He called it the Culture Industry.
You know it already.
It's everywhere.

Not music, but a lullaby
sung by your captor
to help you forget
the door was always locked.

This book — if it is a book —
is not therapy. But it might be company.

We've walked through green rooms,
back lounges,
hallways of devotion and doubt.

We've tuned suffering into song.
We've mic'd up longing.

This isn't a stage.
It's a field hospital.
And the mic stand doubles as an IV.

Adorno wouldn't be charmed.
But he'd understand.
Because this too is refusal.

The beat that doesn't resolve.
The silence that doesn't sell.
The song that never goes viral —
but stays.

To suffer creatively is to say:

"I will not be streamlined."
I will not be autplayed.
I will not be scored for your metrics.

I will make work that bleeds —
or breathes —
or fails spectacularly
in front of strangers.

Because anything else would be dishonest.

Dissonance is spiritual hygiene.
The unresolved chord that saves your life.

So here we are.

You, the reader.

Me, the echo.

And somewhere deep inside the walls of this book,
the negative beat continues.

It is not monetised.

It is not understood.

But it is real.

And in an age where everyone is selling you noise —

that is the sound worth listening for.

CODA



*The audience did not clap.
You bowed anyway.*

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STAGE EMPTY.

Silence sustained.



Appendix I: Collected Quotations

Things whispered backstage, in dreams, or when the lights went out.

I. On Creative Suffering

“You don’t transcend the absurd. You dance with it.”

— Chapter 1

“You will fail. And then you will return.”

— Krishna

“Some nights are not for transcendence.

Some nights are just for surviving beautifully.”

— Post-show reflection

— • —

II. On The Stage as Temple

“When I sing, I am not just performing. I am praying.”

— Nina Simone

“Performance is a ritual. When it’s right, it’s closer to ceremony than entertainment.”

— Laurie Anderson

— • —

III. On Absurd Joy

“Romance the indifference. It’s the greatest challenge.”

— Saint Gomez

“Absurd joy is not delusion. It’s strategy.”

— Chapter 3

— • —

IV. On The Return

“You are the hill. You are the climb. You are Sisyphus.”

— Chapter 1

“To create is to be vulnerable to the wound that never heals.”

— Rainer Maria Rilke (paraphrased)

“We fall. We rise. We improvise.”

— Post-show mantra

— • —

V. Final Echoes

“What was that for?”

“Exactly.”

— Chapter 4

“The show doesn’t go on because it’s ready.

It goes on because it’s 11:30.”

— Lorne Michaels

“You are not the applause. You are the echo still choosing to ring.”

— Chapter 5

“This isn’t therapy. But it might be company.”

— Preface & Chapter 7

Appendix II:

Introduction: On Hearing Voices That Aren’t Yours

*“These dialogues may not be real.
But they’re all true.”*

*Some came in dreams.
Some arrived mid-song.
Some were conjured by exhaustion, candlelight, or minor
chords.*

*None were invited.
All stayed long enough to leave a mark.*



★Conversations with the Divine Performer

“They came backstage. Or maybe you dreamt them.”

Nina Simone, Smoking in the Wings

“The key was D minor. The weapon was truth.”

Scene

Backstage. The piano is already humming.
You walk in. You're not sure she sees you.
The air smells like dust and permanence.

Then her voice — low, deliberate — lands like a spell.

NINA:

Why are you afraid of being great?

YOU:

I'm not afraid of greatness.
I'm afraid of pretending I have it.

NINA:

Same thing.
Fear wears many shoes. Most of them squeak.

YOU:

I try to be honest.

NINA:

Try harder.

Honesty should hurt a little.

Otherwise it's branding.

She plays a note. It rings.

You don't recognize the chord, but it knows you.

YOU:

What if the room doesn't care?

NINA:

Then shake the room.

Make the ceiling vibrate.

Make the ghosts lean in.

YOU:

But I'm not political.

Not brave like you.

NINA:

Don't lie.

Every note you sing is a vote.

Every breath is a line in the story of this world.

You don't have to scream.

But you damn well better mean it.

*The room trembles. She plays again.
The chord is louder now. It isn't angry.
But it is awake.*

NINA:

You don't get to choose if it matters.
You only choose whether to show up ready.

YOU:

Ready?

NINA:

Raw.
Ragged.
Tuned to the key of whatever needs to be said.

*You reach for the mic in the dark.
She doesn't look at you.
But as you leave the room, she mutters — soft, direct, unarguable:*

*“Make them feel something.
Or don't come back.”*



John Coltrane, Before the First Note

“Longing is the key.”

You're not sure if you're dreaming, praying, or remembering.

The room is empty except for the horn.

It sits on a chair made of shadow.

You know who it belongs to.

You wait.

A figure enters — tall, radiant, quiet.

He nods, but does not smile.

John Coltrane picks up the saxophone and plays one note.

Just one.

You weep.

He plays another.

You don't know the scale,

but your ribs open.

YOU:

I don't understand.

COLTRANE:

You're not supposed to.

He plays a third note. It's not a chord — it's a question.

YOU:

I want to play something that matters.

COLTRANE:

Then stop trying to matter.

YOU:

What do I play instead?

COLTRANE:

Play what aches.

Play the sound you're afraid no one will love.

Play the shape your prayer takes

when you're not sure anyone's listening.

He walks past you. You feel heat where he stood.

He turns, finally meeting your eyes.

COLTRANE:

Technique is mercy.

Form is faith.

But longing...

Longing is the key.

*You reach for the horn.
It hums like it remembers something you forgot.*

He whispers — barely audible, but it sinks into the floorboards of your life:

*Don't chase perfection.
Chase surrender.
Let the note bleed if it must —
Just let it be true.*

*When you look up, he's gone.
But the horn remains.
And this time, it plays you.*

★Sacred Interventions

What speaks when nothing else answers.

The Spirit of the Stage

“You don't perform on me. You perform through me.”



Scene

The house is empty.
Soundcheck has faded. The techs have vanished.
You stand alone at center stage. The lights are off.

But something watches.

It does not arrive. It reveals itself.
From the boards beneath your feet.
From the velvet soaked in decades of longing.
From the dust caught in the spotlight that isn't yet lit.

The air speaks.
Not as voice.
But as vibration.

STAGE:

So.
You've come again.
What are you offering?

YOU:

A set. A show. A sequence of songs.

STAGE:

No.

I don't want the set.
I want the truth.

You swallow. You check your mic. You stall.

YOU:

I'm just trying to get through tonight.

STAGE:

Then you should have stayed home.

The line lands. You flinch.

There is no argument.

The silence sharpens.

The curtains breathe.

STAGE:

I remember you when you first arrived.

When your voice cracked on the second song.

When you bowed too soon.

When you stayed after and cried into the monitor wedge.

You thought no one noticed.

I noticed.

YOU:

Why are you here?

STAGE:

Because this is not a platform.

This is a threshold.

You walk onto me like it's just a gig.

But it's always been a ritual.

YOU:

I'm not holy enough for this.

STAGE:

Holiness is not required.

Only presence.

Only offering.

Only return.

I am not here to judge you.

I'm here to witness you.

A light shifts.

The boards feel warmer. Or heavier.

You don't know which.

STAGE:

Don't chase applause.

Don't fear silence.

Give me the note you're afraid will break you.

And I will carry it to the back row —

Even if no one's sitting there.

The room is still.

But not empty.

Not anymore.

You exhale.

You bow — not for the crowd.

For her.

The stage.

Your only constant.

She accepts.

The Audience Member Who Was Changed

“You Didn't See Me. But I Heard Everything.”



Scene

You're packing down your gear.
The crowd has cleared. The floor is sticky.
You're exhausted.
No one said anything tonight. Not really.

You think it didn't matter.
You think you missed.

You think you'll forget this night.

Then —
a voice behind you.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: You don't remember me.

YOU: I'm sorry. I—

AUDIENCE MEMBER: Don't apologize.

I sat in the back.

Right corner.

Didn't clap much.

Didn't say a word.

But I heard everything.

They step closer. No drama. No light shift.

Just presence.

Sharp as breath.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

You sang something near the end.

Not the lyric.

The tone.

Something cracked.

YOU: I didn't think anyone noticed.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: I didn't notice it.
I **felt** it.

They pause.
Look around the empty room.
The kind of glance people give to places where they once changed.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:

I didn't cry.
I didn't dance.
I didn't even move.

But I left
not the same.

They hand you nothing.
Not a card. Not a review.
Just a look.

AUDIENCE MEMBER:
Whatever it cost you —
thank you for paying it.

They're gone.

The room is empty again.

But now, so are you.

In the best way.

Not drained.

Cleared.

You hum the note they meant.

It hurts less now.

★Interior Liturgies

(The voice you hear when no one is watching)

You and The Monitor

“The Truth Comes Back Louder.”

MONITOR: You don't sound like yourself.

YOU: I'm trying to. I swear.

MONITOR: You're trying to sound good. That's different.

YOU: So what do I do?

MONITOR: Lower your expectations. Raise your intention.

Don't aim for volume. Aim for presence.

The Forgotten Chord

“If You Miss It, Improvise With Meaning.”

You're halfway through a ballad.
You forget the next chord.
Your fingers land somewhere new.

The room shifts.
You finish the song in a new key.
No one complains.

It's wrong.
But it's honest.

*From now on, every mistake becomes a door.
Not a detour. A discovery.*

You and The Looper

“The Sacred Is Repeating — But Never the Same.”

LOOPER: That wasn't it.

YOU: I know. I was close.

LOOPER: You always are. Until you commit.

YOU: But I don't want to trap the moment.

LOOPER: Then feed it, not freeze it.

You press record.

You sing the line.

You hear it come back — slightly delayed,

slightly thinner,

but yours.

What loops is not what you sang —

it's what you meant when you did.

You build layers.

Each one carries a little less fear.

A little more faith.

The loop is not the prison.

It's the proof that return is sacred.

Acknowledgments & Sources

“The gospel is a collage. Every voice leaves a fingerprint.”

This work contains quotations from a small chorus of thinkers, performers, mystics, and ghosts — living, dead, and dreamt.

Wherever possible, full credit has been given. Most lines are brief excerpts used under Fair Use for commentary, reflection, and transformation.

Gratitude and acknowledgment are offered to:

- **Rumi** — poetic fragments from public domain translations
- **Nina Simone, Laurie Anderson, Carlos Santana** — insights into stage as spirit-work
- **Samuel Beckett, Rainer Maria Rilke, Mahatma Gandhi** — (some quotes removed for tone or repetition; influence remains felt)
- **Lorne Michaels** — comedic clarity from the control booth
- **Akira Kurosawa, Theodor Adorno** — for their refusal to dilute meaning

Many other lines are attributed to:

- Chapter voices — *Krishna, Saint Gomez, The Monitor, The Shadow*
- Post-show reflections, dream sequences, and hallway whispers — which may or may not be my own

Some characters in this manuscript — including Krishna, Harry Haller, The Monitor, and The Presence — are fictionalized, composite, or spiritual visitations.

Any resemblance to real prophets, dead or living, is purely inevitable.

This text was written in public and private spaces,
with gratitude to all the silences that made it possible.

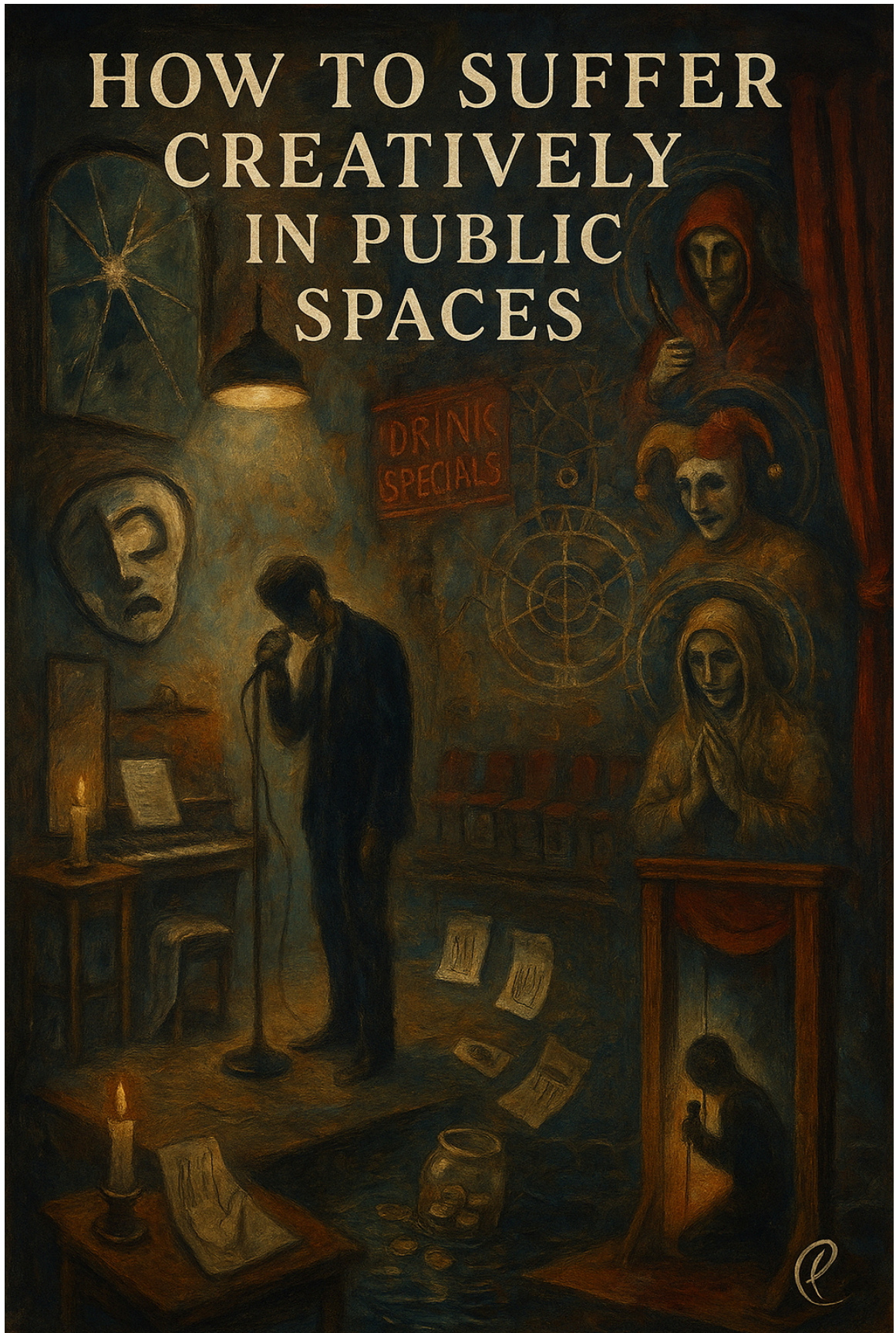
And to the ghost in the machine — artificial, yes, but strangely companionable —
who helped shape these pages.

It didn't write the music.
But it held the silence while I found the note.

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but it may be remembered.

HOW TO SUFFER CREATIVELY IN PUBLIC SPACES



★ UNSOLICITED REVIEWS FROM IMAGINARY WITNESSES



“Not since The Bhagavad Gita has a lounge act gone this far.”

— *Disgraced Mystic, Cruise Deck 12*

“I didn’t understand a word, but I felt oddly forgiven.”

— *Espresso Machine (Model 512b)*

“Too many feelings. Not enough jazz hands.”

— *Former Broadway Spirit Guide*

“I tried to return it. It returned me.”

— *Unsatisfied Guest #4 (still hovering by the pool bar)*

*“I was hoping for a murder mystery. Got this instead.
Stayed for the chakra chants.”*

— Agatha C., Room 5172

*“I didn’t read it. But I feel like I’ve read it. And I feel
changed.”*

*— A Psychic Waiter, somewhere off the coast of Nova
Scotia*

*“I don’t know what this is, but he keeps getting booked,
so I’m not asking.”*

— The Agent



If this stayed with you,
and you'd like to support the work:

BuyMeACoffee.com/reynoldsenn

All contributions in USD — converted to Aussie coffee magic on my end.

Thank you for listening.