

Nathan Ching is a San Diego native at heart. He is currently a Biology Undergrad at Texas Christian University. He is obsessed with elephants, live music and milk tea, and he is too curious for his own good.

Night Music explores the liminal spaces between departure and belonging and attempts to make space for the full palate of human emotion: tenderness and rage, guilt and grace. This is Nathan's first collection.

night music

nathan ching



eleven40seven

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Texas Christian University

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Night Music

Nathan Ching

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every night, I live & die
—Lorde

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SOMA

You were never meant to walk
on the water, she whispers,

pulsing towards you—
indigo dress, suicide hue.

The shoreline withdraws
within you, without you,

your body Picassoed
an impossible blue.

Where is your god? she slurs,
pray with your eyes wide open.

Salt stains your skin as you dive
underneath the tide,

backstroke, vertigo,
butterfly, blow.

You are her secret,
& she is your chamber,

so this is how it ends—
lungs burning

for oxygen, her body
suspended in song,

Madonna & ruin, straddling
the line that separates

the breathing
& the breathless—

trembling together under roof
of sea.

CINDERELLA

the waves come after midnight

—Lorde

The dress I wore was death-black.

Absolutely bubonic.

Your maraschino lips,

red like Vodka Cranberry.

Red like my face.

When you looked at me
my head carouseled.

Like spinning teacups.

Like spirits flushed down the drain.

Drunk. Gay drunk. *Don't*
worry baby, it's only natural.

Natural or chemical?

You tell me, I can't

tell the difference....

Like ethanol. *Will you be*

my New Year's kiss?

2:47am. It's freezing

in the backyard. Missed

the fireworks, the sky

cloaked in haze. Who are you

and what did you do

with...? *You don't*

remember my name?

There's something missing,

and I can't put my finger

on it. There's something missing

I can't get back.

In real life, everybody is fake
as eyelashes—

we keep saying,

“New Year, new me.”

If I repeat it

enough times,

is it a promise?

PASSAGE

I want a perfect body / I want a perfect soul
—Thom Yorke

Pinocchioed, twenty-three years
& counting. Promised paradise,

shipped off to the sweatshops. Boy,
life's one hell of a ride!

One hell, two blocks over
from the Bethlehem Bed

& Breakfast. *We're sorry*
they told me, *these jobs are for real boys.*

We're the same on the inside,
only I'm lactose intolerant—

yellow fish, glue pond,
filet me any way you like.

Instead, I'll be the birthday
gift in the box.

Rip me open, rig my limbs
with fishing line, then hold

a cross over my head & teach me how
to sing & dance.

OMIYAGE

You can't bring back a city
in your carry-on.
So when you leave the mainland,
remember to leave half
empty and hungry.

When you arrive in Honolulu,
make peace with the homeland
that unnamed you.
Forgive your features
when your hapa hanai's you,
when your haole displaces you.

Heaven for half-breeds
is a Japanese delicatessen
on South King Street.
Or maybe it's my inheritance.
The lady who assembles
my plate lunch could be
my mother, fitting
the nori chicken next to the musubi,
the chow funn
alongside the andagi.

Don't conflate dispersion with
decomposition—
devotion is a suitcase full
of rice crackers shaped
like persimmons.

A HIROSHIMA LIGHT IN AUGUST

White leaves

fall

from blue

sky,

glowing

like fresh snow

in sunlight,

lucky

notes

composed

by

Japanese

POW's

our boys

turned

pen pals.

The fortunes

read:

All Lives Matter.

• • •

Get her ready, boys!
Load up *Little Boy*!
This baby's packing

1.2 million tons
of pulp fiction.
Rev up the *Enola Gay*!

She is our mother
and mascot, immaculate
end game.

Bring along the
Necessary Evil and
the *Great Artiste*—

birds of a feather,
no place in the sky
to roost,

pro-life, carrying
our little monster
to term.

Going,
 going,
 gone!

A real
home run.

• • •

white

flash

instant

tsunami

black

rain

silent

flood

• • •

The earth is flat. The proof is in the picture*.

**Only the Ginkgo tree / knows good and evil, / the Ginkgo knows / it's a very mad world.*

PRAISE POEM

Sing, O barren one...!

—Isaiah 54:1

The exiled sun incubating below horizon.

The smell of eucalyptus and pine.

My house on a turtle-green hillside.

Drip irrigation. Rock gardens.

The zimzum of hummingbirds,

see-sawing the thin

arms of the fruitless olive tree.

The unassuming fountain outside

my bedroom window,

filled with olive leaves.

The only child left.

The garage, a graveyard for cardboard

and old boogie boards.

My dad's car parked outside,

car that would be mine.

Dew on the windshield,

leftover storm distilled.

The saltwater pool in the backyard

covered with blue plastic, always

trying to escape to the sea.

The rabbit chasing my father

around the compost pile,

across the patio,

diving into the dirt of my mother's

garden plot.

Apple-green kitchen countertops.

The wood floors

that my mother hates,

says they dent too easily.

Walls too thin.

Mother, the weeping.

Father, the willow.

Miscarriage, the ground-

water. Wish, the daughter

left in Monterrey.

Waiting for sunrise.
Warm welcome home.
Taking shoes off at the doorway.
Ikebana arrangements adorn the entry,
mother's new hobby.
Same old soft wooden floors.
Father in the garage, clearing out cardboard.
His same old Aloha Airlines tee.
The living room with the shag rug.
The house as cold as I remembered.
The two green and blue koi paintings
above the record player.
Pecan-wood speakers tip-toed on stilts.
Futons. Handmade quilts.
We are always looking for things
to keep the house warm.

FIGHT OR FLIGHT

I'm alright with a slow burn

—Kacey Musgraves

Rustle me fiercely Santa Ana

winds, whistle through this hollow
body, this *corpus Christi*.

Make me a field of wheat

that wilts, that fades
flaxen beneath the red-eye sun,

my heart is ripe

for wildfire.

Fire season is for the scarecrows

we mistook for fathers—

Witch Creek willows, swaying

like birthday candles

in the wind. The flashes remind us
of the good times, that

the ashes, in time,

will taste like rain.

Gather 'round me, émigrés,

my lovely flight of birds:

tonight we cross

the country, so goodbye

presidios, goodbye

Santa Fe, goodbye

my lovely Golden state.

Lay me to rest in Babylon,

bone by bone until I belong
without you.

I never wanted to leave you.

I never meant to stay.

GRACE LP

stigma | noun

a : archaic : a scar left by a hot iron : brand
b : a mark of shame or discredit : stain

A-Side

1. The blue glow off my car radio keeps my body warm at night. When I get home after hours, I park in my parents' drive, pull the seat lever, let my spine unwind. A faint voice sings,

*looking for signs in the night sky
wishing that I wasn't such a nice guy*

2. I always steal my dad's shit: his favorite car (reliable, Japanese), the Reyn Spooner my mother gave him, his insurance, his cell phone, even his last name. Can you imagine—asking god for a son, getting a thief?

*the wind could be my new obsession
the wind could be my new depression*

3. I only pray when it's past my curfew. Sometimes when I pray, I hold my hands in the shape of a bread bowl. Sometimes I clench my fists, pound on the steering wheel. Sometimes I feel blue as ibuprofen.

*the wind goes anywhere it wants to
wishing that I'd learn my lesson*

4. I used to bunker myself in my bedroom, but the walls are too thin. My parents argue in the kitchen, the living room, the bedroom, the hallway. How can they be in so many places all at once?

*the ocean sounds like a garage band
coming at me like a drunk man*

5. Prayer is ninety percent non-verbal and internalization is the sincerest form of leaving. In my head, I say, I'm sorry, no, I'm sorry, no, I'm sorry, to my father.

*the ocean telling me a thousand stories
none of them are lies*

6. When I say housesitting, I always forget to mention sleepover. When I say sleepover, I really mean porno and Nintendo.

*I got my vices, got my vice verses
I got my vice verses*

7. I never sleep with my girlfriend when I stay over at her house. She always makes me sleep in the kitchen! Shame is a hand on a hot stove. Shame is a thin line. Shame is a pressure cooker waiting to blow.

*you've got your babies, I've got my hearses
every blessing comes with a set of curses*

• • •

B-Side

1. On Sunday mornings, my parents and I get to church late, and everything is fine. We are lifting our hands to the ceiling, and everything is fine. I believe in god or someone, and everything is fine. We eat the body, drink the blood, and everything is fine.
2. DO NOT CONFORM TO THE WORLD
TRANSFORM YOUR MIND
3. In my mind, I refuse the bread and ask god for a stone, feel the weight in my hand, follow the twitch to throw.
4. Prayer is ninety percent spatial and my house is more than a stone's throw away. Some nights I just drive. Gun it. Light it. Blitz it. Ride it. Open air, alive.
5. Next in Queue: Green Light / Girls [Explicit] / Love Galore / PILLOWTALK
Night mode. Sleep paralysis. Airplane mode. Gimp mind.
6. My youth flies by all one fever, until one night, someone pulls me over. Doesn't ask for my ID. Doesn't ask if I'm sober. Fills my car like carbon monoxide. Gathers around my crumpled body, one giant heaving. Tells me I'm not a crime. Wraps me up in the arms of night. Tells me it's ok to be scared to death of living and dying—
7. in the morning I won't
deserve you

why

because the days
are evil

because these are the days
of my life

SUPERLATIVE

love

wrap me up

I reach for you

keep trying

love

I'll be your quiet afternoon

be your overnight

touch

it's just

us

it's just

us

so fall

and

forgive

come home to my heart

love

I'll be yours

be your

last cut

it's just

us

it's just

us

ours are the moments

wild fluorescent

heart

TEXAS TEA

Why is God in the back-
yard, sipping sweet tea?
Who knows, who cares.
We are naming hurricanes.
Carla. Rosa. Rita. Harvey.

The things I do for love.

Natural disaster or man-made?
Same thing over and over again:
game over, try again, start over,
enter a new—

name it and claim it, baby.

We are born again like true
Americans. Nothing can separate us
from our inalienable rights: life,
liberty, and the pursuit of
painkillers.

Speak softly and carry a warm gun.

Cocks not Glocks, y'all. Jesus
Christ. The writing's on the wall:
I love you so much.

I love you so much.

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