

for real: jamming @ the cornelia street café in the west village 2008

by wayne a. gilbert

i was ready
with a set I had confidence in
but i was nervous oh man

golda introduced me
i shook hands with the 2 supporting musicians—sax and bass—
turned took the mic
(i was able then to stand for as long as it took)
sucked in a deep breath
waited—

looked back nodded to the musicians

they looked at each other shrugged

the bassist a short petite white woman
chose a chord a rhythm pulled the first mid-range notes
simple almost mainstream cliché
then bent a phrase slid sideways
the sax blew something nice not avant-garde but not lazy
they were flirting
eased into a groove

it was background music
they were winking at each other
taking it easy on me

i dropped in unlikely crosswise
leaned against the rhythm swung toward the bass
slipped under her phrasing
she countered cautiously
the sax came 'round just in case he had to catch me
i gave her some sass
the sax queried
i gave him something to play with
the bass took us deeper down
to see how deep we could go
paused long enough for me to lay out
a nasty cool suggestion
the sax dipped approvingly
shot up with a test flight
the bass tenderly vamping
i danced in the blast-light swirled around
threw down some hallelujah words which meant
“oh yeh baby I hear ya let's go”

they paused an unnoticeable moment
smiled at one another looked at me like
"ok brother hold on tight!"
and
it was on!

we traded solos sat out found the holy trinity all the sacred spaces time and time again

they were listening
they knew i was listening
we wove and passed and tested each other
like basketball players
jammed as one
my poems an instrument in the mix

and i was for real man i was for real!

afterwards steve dalachinsky used those very words to describe me
then we went out to a little club where i watched steve
jam with my favorite improv free-jazz quartet called 'test'

i was for real man
and
so was my dream