

Crank Shaped Notes

Thomas Sayers Ellis

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Like a y-shaped birthmark, Like an answer to a question (not a question), the Potomac River is the eldest citizen in Washington and, like a dead library, only it holds the secret to "why" the damn Power keeps going out!

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I am tired of the hyphen. It makes Go-Go stutter.

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Hip Hop breaks studio-dawn all night long while GoGo per cuss suns till the lights come on.

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The good "pee you ess ess why" that the pocket feels like, a tablespoon of in-womb groove, body-snatching any bodies.

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We must not let our inability to identify the stages of Cultural Revolution into tricking us into a belief that GoGo is non political and not a Resistance Movement. The beat (groove, bucket or bounce) is bad and means something, something that hits harder than a lyric, something built from the bottom of us, Up!

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How to strengthen the ripped lining between da old hands and da young feet: Gimme the bridge now. Gimme the bridgeGimme the bridge now. Gimme the bridge Gimme the bridge now now. Gimme the bridge. Gimme the bridge now. Gimme the bridgeGimme the bridge now! Gimme the bridge now! Gimme the bridge. Gimme the bridge. Gimme the bridge now!

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If you really come to boogie, you ain't afraid to whip it in or out of an ugly anvil case and touch yourself with it.

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A foot and a sock to lock a kick and a key in the wallet. Keep your wallets in the pocket and the nickels, dimes and quarters in the socket. Roto-feets and roto-beats to (un)lock a snare and a pedal in the bounce.

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Short rolls in the groove and long rolls to finish the groove but the best way to knock a bama (who aint in the band) off the stage is with the base of mic stand. That's that fuss. It was us!

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There is nothing more “Grown and Sexy” than a woman, mother or daughter, who can Per Cuss, Son, so on this Father's Day we salute Black Pleasure and Pleasure (the first all-female GoGo band) because the best definition of the Brotha is still the Sista, and the best definition of the Sista is still the Brotha.

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To refer to (and to have known) the late Chuck Brown as "Pops" suggests a certain familiarity and a certain understanding and respect for a shared intimacy with the Godfather of GoGo. He was not “Pops” to everyone, especially not now. There was “Chuck Brown” (known locally and nationally). There was “Chuck” (for D.C. not Washington). There was “Chuck Baby” (onstage without any give a f#@k). There was “the Godfather of GoGo” (to everyone). There was “Pops” (to young insiders/musicians who earned the privilege by playing with him or on the DC GoGo scene and by living inside his sound and being nurtured by it). There was also “Dad” and I even heard his wife call him “baby” several times while I was photographing him in 2007. I called him Chuck and Mr. Brown because I knew my station and played my position with respect even though he once said to me at sound check, "Call me Pops, that's what most young gentlemen who I raised call me!"

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The Golden Age of GoGo couldn't wait to grow up and move out of D.C. into a national home but *Good to Go* was the wrong move. GoGo should have read the script and resisted it, percussively. Speaking of percussive resistance, maybe movement—not violence—killed GoGo's chance of owning its own home (at home) and becoming a real Movement of the People. GoGo say it heard violence say, “I was too busy dancing” and GoGo say it heard dancing say, “I was too busy fighting.”



Divaz Inc. Yard Party, TSE 2008

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So what if you can't read "their" music in "their" way; they can't play "your" pocket in "your" way. Everyone is illiterate when they are away from home but literate inside of themselves. Music comes from within. It is not an external act of dictation. It ain't signs and symbols. Your body is a band and either you believe in the organic-orchestra that is within you or you don't, and if you don't then get out of the way and don't GoGo anywhere.

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GoGo keeps stating its hoods—NW, NE, SW, SE—
because GoGo wants statehood.

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Every time I photographed Chuck Brown's hands, I was reminded of the loosely clasped, bight moment on the cover of the Lp *Bustin' Loose*. Most of the sound from that light has yet to reach us.

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By the time I see the picture through the viewfinder, I've missed the photo gogo graphic moment and by the time you grab your boys, hold up a peace sign and pose, what was left of the photo gogo graphic moment has weakened even more. A good photo should meet or beat your feet to the beat!



The Godfather of GoGo, TSE 2009

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GoGo does not have its "own words" except for the term "GoGo" and therefore can only be defined in unrecognizable terms. A truly percussive definition would break the mind of the definer and the mouth of the reader.

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Once we begin to eliminate the things that all musics do and that GoGo has borrowed from other musics then we will have a real chance at identifying the real in GoGo. The real in GoGo is very small and can perhaps exist with just three musicians and a crowd but the real in GoGo is also very powerful because the pocket is the true geographic fabric of the District.

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I like to start the photo shoot from behind the drummer where the heart begins. That's how you catch moments like the Junk Yard Band prayer-huddle, and how you know the real people in the socket, the Pock-Cranks, cannot be broken. Their work is a form of hornless, curved-bridge worship.

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The loudest part of GoGo may be the beat but the loudest beat in any GoGo pocket is still poverty.

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Question: What is gravity to GoGo?

Answer: A closed hi-hat between both of JuJu's feet.

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If you look at the stage, sideways slowly, before the show in that moment after the roadies are done and the band comes on, sideways slowly, you will see the whole alphabet, every consonant and vowel, set-up in chrome.

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There is nothing or no one in the GoGo community, simultaneously, more old school and more new school than the drum. It goes to every school because its instructor, the human heart, is all schools.

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Kwick to the sit, kit and kick, but KKdaRealMz, KK sosikwitit. To try a snare to trap only a Peaney could slap. The higher the cymbal, the crash be crisp. Arms do, but wrists don't, break sticks.

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Keyboard players don't perform or dance anymore. They stand but they don't dance. They remind me of people at the bus stop, bored, waiting on Metro.

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What a groove feels like: A neck so sensitive it demands choke. Good itch-scratching, back and forth, like a hardness only flow can stroke.

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Redds played with a mean joy and no other guitarist stepped into a groove, one rhythmic foot at a time, laughing and joanin, like him. He was that fuss and vengeance was his every time he stuck out his chest and took the stage!

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There were times when the audience was shouting, "Wind me up Chuck!" and I would stand at the edge of the stage and crank the lever of my Leica M7

240 Poetry & Visual Art

advancing the film, frame by beat and beat by frame, as if they were syce-ing me not him.

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I lost my rototoms and timbales to college, so now my instrument is Writing and I do it by twisting the rhythm in my tuned eyes and by tuning the listening in my focused ears. I never have to be in just one band ever again. These days I use my art sense to play for everyone.

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JuJu plays with his whole torso, with unlimited experience, like he is bringing sculpture to life, and that is why his arms are always in control of his content and his form. It's Olympic to watch him especially when he knows that you are watching him. His body competes with the living myth of itself not with other myths



Donald Tillery, TSE 2012

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A beat is just a beat but a beat followed by a beat and followed by another beat with a beat in between the beat and a beat under the beat and a beat on top of the beat and a beat beside the beat is a beating, a continuous one, so regarding so called battles and beefs between bands and band members, know this: percussion without drama is like GoGo without percussion, gen-tri-fried, and every GoGo percussionists (born and raised in the District) has two very non-

Shakespearian pockets of behavior to choose from (1) If you beat your kids now, they will beat their kids later and you will have bad ass grandkids and (2) If you don't beat your kids now, they will beat you later and you will still have bad ass grand kids. In other words: as does hitting, the beat goes on. We crank shaped. We get things twisted, bent, bent from all the dramatic beatings, the loving, the D.C. listening.

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Some of the musicians in the band are not playing GoGo. They are playing another genre of music and know when and how to leave a place for GoGo. One day the entire band will play GoGo—percussive guitar, percussive bass, percussive vocals and percussive keyboards but first the pocket must bounce up out of its traditional constrictions and fuck shit up from the inside out!

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Whenever Chuck left D.C. he made us National and whenever Chuck stayed in D.C. he made us National. There's no need to keep proving you are something (equal) that was already earned for you because maybe you and GoGo are not equal to Punk, Grudge, Hop Hop and House. Maybe you, GoGo, are super superior. It was never about you not being able to Go National but it was about the larger, criminal evil of making you look so bad that no one would want to come here and go Local.

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Born in 1935 and known for his love of hats, the Godfather of GoGo was rarely seen in public without one but did you know that Porky Pig made his debut in 1935 in a featurette titled, *I Haven't Got A Hat*. Porky also used to burst (bust loose) through a bass drum at the end of cartoons with his trademark, "Th-Th-Th- That's all folks!" And years later Chuck Brown turned one of Porky's famous stutters into a brand new groove.

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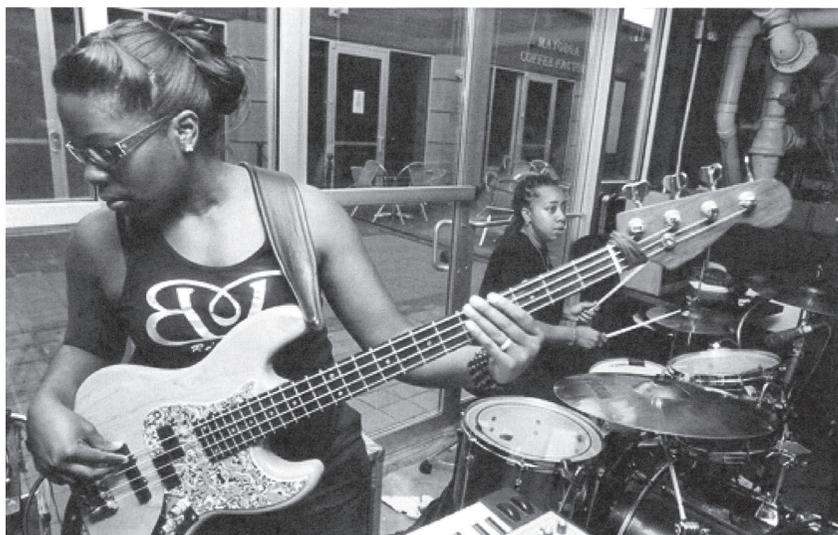
You can't afford to live in D.C. anymore and you can't afford to pay to get into the GoGo or to get to the GoGo where the band you grew up with now plays, weekly. Where did all of the "closeness" and "togetherness" go? They call it moving on up, Black flight, but to you (alone in your hood surrounded by Now Leasing signs and construction cranes) it looks and feels like exodus and eviction.

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Whaddup Pops People: If you play GoGo, you've got Pops in your pocket. If you live in or have ever lived in one of the various pockets in D.C., i.e. NW, NE, SW or SE, then the hard organic contents of your inner city audio survival kit was, mostly, hand-picked by Pops, so we might as well just call us what we is: Pops Kids with Pops Kits in the Pops-ket.

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A GoGo is a form of gathering and being a form of gathering, it is also a form of community organizing even if it is only held together by the ritual of dancing and our need to enter the freak-a-deke zone. The moment you add community news (lead talking), an exchange between the band and the audience (call and response), and more than one talking drum (the pocket), the gathering becomes something with purpose, a political possibility, folk power!



Be'la Bass Dona Drums, TSE 2009

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GoGo must stay minor and minorities must not organize with their bodies or their minds, but one of the greatest attributes of GoGo is that it teaches us to organize, patiently, via listening, with our entire bodies not just with the meat in our skulls. Once you've been inside the pocket, bland stuff like diagramming sentences and being a regular citizen who inherits social order as it is (and leaves it that way) will bore you. GoGo teaches us to noun from verb and to be verbal nouns, to "add a little action into it!".

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A little lead talk, like salt, is good for you—especially your boogie body. It can make you sweat. The calcium in the pocket comes from milking the cowbell. The iron in the pocket comes from putting the foot pedal to the metal. There's nothing more chewable, more one a day, than hearing your name roll-called and tossed back at you, amplified, from one respiratory sound system to another. The walls we used to work, work us when we don't drink enough water.

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There are a few people who are always in the know in GoGo and so many people who always know nothing. The scene really belongs to the latter, the majority know-nothings, but the in-the-knows are faster ambulance chasers than the know-nothings. The know-nothings built GoGo and live GoGo and truly need GoGo but like most workers are often tired and sleep from late night shows when the in-the-knows are wide awake and taking over.

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The definition of James Funk: Is Male Diva. Note the way he walks on stage in *GoGo Live* like he and his whole body is a part a speech, the part that, like an eagle, sees everything happening in the club and can name it and roll it and call it and leave nobody out. Even when he is silent, he is not; his not speaking is more dramatic than most loud running mouths. The definition of James Funk: Is Lead Talk Griot.

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They did not brand GoGo violent to stop us from hurting ourselves but to limit us to hurting and killing only ourselves and to prevent us from organizing our guns and fists into proper forms of community self offense and community self defense. DC exists (by federal design and unconstitutionally so) to provide Washington with workers, cheap labor, a lower class. That's how capital and so-called capitol cities work. DC is a damaged colony, a colony that contains real ruthless punching (poverty, disease, miss-education) and every pocket has become a flurry of mismanaged counter-punching. It makes sense that GoGo's full pockets would party and that GoGo's empty pockets would punch. The tension makes sense, but the ideal foot-fist must bravely march the wrong punch right out of town, and punch the wrong the march right out of town. A lot of percussion begins in confusion and a lot of confusion ends in percussion.

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Act wrong, GoGo, while you are alive or you will be praised, when you are gone, for acting right by those who tried to starve you, GoGo. They will say GoGo had to go; it had to keep going because it was called GoGo.