

# Fight for Market St. air rights

## Raven to hawk: 'Nevermore, nevermore'

BY GEOFF LINK



A mean-spirited turf battle took place at Market and Seventh recently that pitted a fierce outsider against a trio of wily locals.

A red-tailed hawk, seen irregularly in the hood over the last year, preying on pigeons, had landed atop the Hotel Renoir, perching between

two pointed scallops that form the weathered copper cornice ornaments. While resting and trying to gain his bearings, the hawk is spotted by a raven who makes it clear the newbie doesn't belong here.

But this is a hawk that has been around this very block before. Once he was seen doing barrel rolls over the confluence of streets near Hastings' Empire State knockoff. Occasionally, he's perched on the 15-foot pole on the Renoir's roof, patiently eyeing his prey, feathered rats. Steve Decker, the Grant Building's outside custodian, saw him snatch a pigeon right off Merrill's roof.

Right now, though, the hawk's about to be attacked.

First the raven lands on the point of a nearby copper ornament, allowing him to look down at the hawk and caw like crazy.

The hawk's head bobs.

The raven flies up and over and lands to the left of the hawk, menacing the intruder with looks that could kill and flapping his wings in anger.

The hawk puts up a brave front, bobbing his head, ruffling his feathers. Maybe he sees the crowd below pulling for him; well, not exactly cheering, but at least craning their necks in appreciation for the momentary distraction of the feathered feud that has yanked them out of their boredom from standing around crowing about this and that.

Suddenly, the raven takes off, swooping in a circle over the hawk, then in a tighter circle. The raven looks ready to dive-bomb, but he pulls up in the nick as the hawk crouches low.

Now another local character, a seagull, comes out of nowhere and swoops down at the hawk. He performs a few dive-bombs and the raven adds more passes.

Soon a second seagull joins the fray, and all three locals gang up on the cowering red-tail, trying to send him back to Marin or the city park from where he launches his Tenderloin hunting forays.

Around here, nobody wants somebody muscling in on their territory, and these birds

are no exception. The seagulls feel they have dibs on the pigeons; they like to raid their nests and eat their young. And, Decker says, ravens also enjoy dining on squab as often as they can.

Pretty soon the raven disappears, having brought in the pair of gulls to finish his dirty work. Probably headed up to Boeddeker to trouble the pigeons.

The gulls take turns swooping overhead and dive-bombing the hawk, whose confidence seems badly shaken and doesn't know what to do.

The gulls aren't about to actually attack the hawk, and eventually their menacing movements become fewer and fewer. In his harassers' absence, the hawk's courage grows.

Finally, when no enemy is in sight, the red-tailed hawk quits his perch and soars away, perhaps back to the Headlands. The gulls were probably already out at the Zoo, stealing a hotdog from some little kid. ■



The red-tailed hawk, left, resting atop the Renoir, was attacked by a raven, below, then the first of two sea gulls, above.



PHOTOS BY CARL ANGEL

# Ra Mu Aki: Shaman poet of street people

BY ED BOWERS

THIS afternoon in San Francisco it is sunny, and it is May 10, the month and day my son was born 28 years ago. I am on my way to the Faithful Fools Ministry at 234 Hyde St. to witness a poetry reading by Ra Mu Aki, an African American poet who talks to his ancestors, and is a San Francisco Tenderloin writer and performer who has for many years worked very hard at his craft.

Almost late for the poetry reading because I am afraid that I am dying from at least six diseases, none of them sexually transmitted, I walk in and find a comfortable couch upon which to witness this performance. The people in this room are rare, and filled with light, while I feel rather like a whore in church with nothing to say.

I will now cut to the chase.

In my humble opinion, Ra Mu Aki is a genius of words, in the same way as the late Sun Ra was for jazz in the Sixties, who revolutionized the music by introducing diverse spiritual and musical traditions into its mix. Ra Mu's poetry is not elitist and destined to be confined to universities, nor is it simple and meant to be sold out to CD rap songs for a quick buck. It is the poetry of shamans and medicine men and street people, and homeless women who have a personal experience of divinity, and crack addicts, and drunks, and oppressed people whose spirits and minds are wasted for profit the world over.

Ra Mu's intention is to use the word to heal. And at times he comes off as innocent as a child, and then as wise as the 102-year-old Huichol shaman, the late Don Jose, who I did the Deer Dance with many a year ago.

About six months ago, I went to a one-man show on Geary Street at a friend's suggestion. But it wasn't nearly as good as the one-man show Ra Mu Aki put on for a few people upstairs in the Faithful Fools headquarters. As an aggressive supporter of talent in San Francisco, I would suggest that some mover and shaker with influence, reading this review, would put his latte down long enough to support this man in his endeavors.

He also did this act where he buried himself under a dirty purple sheet and silently and visually expressed the movement of life and death unfolding in the Universe, and



Ra Mu Aki performed his one-man word show at Faithful Fools.

its desire to go beyond.

Not an easy task. It reminded me of the comic strip artist Robert Crumb at his best. Crumb often drew wordless captions that were as viscerally communicative as any poem.

You can see Ra Mu Aki perform Friday nights at the Cafe International. But for all you Tenderloin denizens, be sure to catch him the next time he reads at 234 Hyde.

As for me, I'm going to take it one breath at a time, and whether you listen to my advice or not is of no concern to me. But one thing is for certain: I have good taste in artists.

This man is totally dedicated to the communication of salient insights both above and below. After witnessing his performance, my health improved, and I almost felt fit for awhile.

Ra Mu's poetry inspires the listener to refuse to die. ■

### Excerpts from *Humanifest*:

A POEM BY RA MU AKI

A DAY OF MAHATMAS & KINGS, WHERE  
PASSIONATE X'S  
whirl in a musician's reverb like crossed  
obsidian blades  
razorslice away final babyfat layers  
hiding I from i,  
while a painter's brush stroke shears  
conscious blocking canvas  
down to be trammed 'neath  
wise, feeling, praise dancer's feet....

A STRAIGHT UP AGE OF YOUTH SAVED  
THROUGH POEM SUNSPASHES  
fragrant as earth's blossom breath  
where amandla garlands coalesce into  
mandelas of truth & freedom  
& murdered prophet's blood,  
& murdered poet's blood  
spurts like stigmata from faithful  
teacher's lips, mixing with leader's  
salty penitent tears in drops heavier  
than dew, covering earth  
giving rise to hope song sprouts  
& promise  
recycled of every nation's  
culture & awareness...

& ALL FLESH IS CALLED "FRIEND,"  
& all hues, "sis" & "bro"  
as neighborhood council governments  
extend to cultural federations  
where stewardship is doership & a con-  
scious planet joins in  
JUBILATION.

— Excerpted by Ed Bowers