

## "Words' Worth" Poetry Readings

Poets at the Culture, Arts, and Parks Committee of the Seattle City Council.

### **Where Comfort Is** by Nancy Dahlberg

Five hours on the road to Seattle  
three hours of rain and road-splash rise,  
cloud up to meet the cloud I'm driving through  
and I arrive in the midst of heavy mist,  
surprised there's air to breath in this city  
under water. I trek up the hill just off the Av  
to my daughter's basement flat, my coat  
soaked, glasses dripping just getting to the door.  
I crave warmth and light, but her carpet's damp,  
the rooms, always dark, now cold and sour  
from a water leak last week. We drink black tea  
from cracked cups, chew on muffins from a day-old sale,  
I sit on the only chair trying not to notice  
the pile of unpaid bills, our mutual discomfort.  
Then she takes me away to the conservatory  
where I photograph her, my youngest child,  
at home in a practice room at the grand piano.  
Through the background window, the space needle's eye  
floats on a dripping branch. There is no distance  
here, fog flattens everything but the Mendelsohn  
concerto she plays. Her fingers, quick on the keys,  
release notes bright as birds. This is how  
I know music--watching her body bloom  
with melody, her fingers fly over arpeggios,  
then stretch for chords that rise above bad weather  
the way her whole body lifts in harmony;  
clear and warm with light.

### **What To Do With The Hands** by Nancy Dahlberg

I may be getting all A's in school,  
Mom, but I feel like my body's not.  
I want to take this dance class that meets  
Tonight. Drive me there? Please?  
Modern Jazz for Teens and Young Adults  
requiring three weeks ballet  
for those who don't know the positions,  
How to move, or what to do  
with the hands--like my son. A mother  
only wants to help so we went in,  
I paid the fee and watched the thirtyish dance  
instructor eyeing him,  
her hair tight back, her leggy body  
smoothed into black wet-look tights,  
while I swelled into my support hose  
and stacked-heel Naturalizers.  
Then she walked--no, stalked--up to Steven

giving off some dusky scent  
as she moved right past me to confront  
my boy. He straightened up  
to his whole proud height while that woman  
ran the whole back of her spread-  
open hand down the whole front of his  
long adolescent torso--  
my God, she took her time about it--  
then smiled up to him with "Oh,  
you've got a wonderful body,"  
while he smiled back. He smiled back!

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