

BARBARA RAS

What to Take

From the drummer, take the cymbals, the crash, and hi-hat
and walk like you're shining. From the composer take "water
under snow is weary," sung by young voices in the timbre
of wind blowing through the antlers of reindeer.

From the organ-maker take the names of the stops, night horn,
vox celeste, and chimney flute, instrumental sustains
that theoretically go on forever. Eternity eludes the NRA
and ants, who cannot hear, but I swear

that following Rachmaninoff's Second Piano Concerto note
for note while rain sledgehammered the road the first
time I drove to Swannanoa, got me there safely.
From a gypsy, take any castanets offered,

and play them first thing to get you out of bed, despite
the news of nine dead in Charleston who invited Dylann Roof
into their prayer service at the Emanuel A.M.E. Church
where he repeatedly shot the gun, whose one note

is death. Take a chance. Take guns away and ask people
to hum more, to whistle, if, unlike me, they know how,
to talk often, like baby turtles, who start
vocalizing inside their eggs.

Every river's original name was water weeping, water
laughing. Take the call of a cricket or a ricochet of crickets,
each with its own thumbprint. Take the cry of a bushbaby at night
that narrows to next to nothing the distance between it

and us, both our wailings scored by loneliness, both
shocking the night air, calling for kin, calling for help to perpetuate
the species. Take a lesson from the bushbaby with its esoterically
large eyes that see what we don't see, its paws and mouth

that eat whatever they kill.