

“Pandemic Rhythm”

By Andres Portela

I’m the product of a skyscraper-sized corrido strung together through the love and rigor of a Black Woman and Puerto Rican Man.

I’m the baby bigger brother to a small nest of five. You see I come from a band, everyday was grooving and sing with an energy I knew one day that I’d have to recreate in my home one day, so I thought

And our home rhythm was jazz.

The thing about Home rhythms . . . they are loved up with time and attention.

With all of life productivities I was neglecting the rhythm I longed for.

Between community meetings and working and all the things . . . I was busy all the time with things that just took up space.

The pandemic changed my rhythm.

It forced me to slow down because the tempo I was running on was burnout and depression.

Just like jazz, the instruments step up and back and in the pandemic, felt there was no time to step back because we all have to stay productive.

Stepping back showed me that the drums and timing was missing, and I was just trying to groove like a runaway drummer.

Stepping back looked like losing a job, running for office, losing family members and watching everyone have to cry through masks and fogged up glasses, and almost losing a relationship, ALL WHILE IN A PANDEMIC.

I tried to force me back into the rhythm of running and not being present, much like a singer who isn’t scating on the the same key or moving in the same timing as the rest of the band or the world.

There was a tension and that tension made it hard to breathe. The moment was trying to hold onto things that somehow didn’t really seem to flow, but were a glimmer of hope.

SO Go ahead and ask? What is the new rhythm you are finding?

The new one includes finding a new identity that isn’t rooted in my productivity but can replicate that feeling of my parents’ house of the smiles and joy of a busy band.

There isn’t a new with new jazz but with new players which include a therapist on bass, a relationship therapist on keys, a “every other day phone call from mom” on the saxophone . . . and a gang of new rhythms and instruments that don’t play in tandem and may feel like chaos but that chaos is home.

That chaos is the rhythm of grief and how, it’s the rhythm, of dreams deferred and new beginnings and old narratives, it’s the rhythm of me.