

AMERICAN LIFE IN POETRY

A FREE COLUMN FOR NEWSPAPERS BY TED KOOSER, POET LAUREATE OF THE UNITED STATES, 2004-2006
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BY TED KOOSER, U.S. POET LAUREATE, 2004-2006

Here's a vivid portrayal of one of those school events to which parents are summoned and to which they go both dutifully and with love. The poet, Maryann Corbett, lives in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Holiday Concert

Forgive us. We have dragged them into the night
in taffeta dresses, in stiff collars and ties,
with the wind damp, the sleet raking their cheeks,

to school lunchrooms fitted with makeshift stages
where we will sit under bad fluorescent lighting
on folding chairs, and they will sing and play.

We will watch the first grader with little cymbals,
bending her knees, hunched in concentration
while neighbors snicker at her ardent face.

Forgive us. We will hear the seventh-grade boy
as his voice finally loses its innocence
forever, at the unbearable solo moment

and know that now, for years, he will wince at the thought
of singing, yet will ache to sing, in silence,
silence even to the generation to come

with its night, its sleet, its hideous lunchroom chairs.

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