A Meditation on “The Power and the Longing”

By Dawoud Kringle.

When I published my book “Bedtime Stories for Musicians and Other People,” I had to find a way to describe the book. It is the old story of artists not knowing how to explain what they do. It’s the same with my music, of course. When I released “The Power and the Longing” in December 2024, I had to distill the essence of what I put into that album into a few promo blurbs.

However, one day I wrote an essay explaining exactly what I had in mind and what I was trying to say with “Bedtime Stories for Musicians and Other People.” It clarified a lot of things (despite being the length of a long magazine article). It became obvious that I should do the same with “The Power and the Longing.”

Everyone who listens to this music is going to get what they get from it. Listening to music is a very personal thing, and nothing I say can change this. Nor would I, let the listener find his/her conclusions. Nonetheless, this is my take on my music and what I was aiming to achieve. I pray the reader finds something useful in this essay and that it clears up some ambiguity.

“Tuesday Deja Vu” has an unusual inspiration. I was working as an engineer for a radio broadcast corporation. For a time, Wednesdays and Thursdays were my days off. For a long time, every Tuesday event, before my shift ended, I would experience deja vu. I have no explanation for this, but it inspired this piece. It begins with granular synthesizer ornaments, time fracturing into droplets. The chords spiral like a staircase into the unknown, each step asking, *Have I been here before?*" They imply the moment of recognition—a harmonic glitch in the Matrix. The “almost” of memory—a note that refuses to land, the body still at work. They return to the drippy synthesizer. The melody tends to favor intervals that avoid resolution, mimicking the disorientation of déjà vu—a melody that almost resolves but slips away, like a word stuck on the tip of your tongue. They are ghosts of choices not taken, humming at the edges of lost dreams that reappear with startling clarity.

“Monsters Under Your Bed” is a mirror that reflects every listener’s private night terrors. The extended harmony major chords under the chorus are stretched thin over dissonant extensions, like a nightlight revealing just enough to terrify. The chorus has a luminous unease. Chords that pretend to be happy are stretched thin over dissonant extensions, like a nightlight revealing just enough to terrify. The monster’s breath on your neck. Then you realize it’s your reflection. The verse progression is a harmonic haunted house traversed with both dread and whimsy. The lighthearted mood belies something dark and terrifying. It is the sound of the monster laughing at our prayers. But we pray anyway.

"A Lovely Night" is an unusual track. An insistent, hypnotic dance beat provides a foundation. The chords shift unpredictably, like wandering through a city at night—each turn revealing new light, new shadows. The instruments dance around each other, never competing, as if lost in conversation. Then there is a break with dreamy synthesizers, and the progression repeats once more. And two Dautar parts, each with very different sound textures, weave in and out of each other's melodic development in an improvised conversation. The focus is on instrumental dialogue, not poetic proclamation. The synths and dautar refuse hierarchy. Neither of them dominates; form and formlessness coexist in a simple, aimless walk hand in hand on a lovely night.

"Poisonous Garden" is an alchemical transformation of betrayal into a lush, venomous Eden where every line Joi Peng sung drips with the paradox of beauty and decay. Love’s betrayal is reframed as a predatory ecosystem where sexual allure is weaponized. The changes in the chorus signify the sting of betrayal and a startling, eerie light—like moonlight on poisoned rose petals, before returning to the mournful original tonality. The drum break with the flute flying over it is the emotional turmoil, the psychic chaos we are thrust into when our illusions of love are shattered. The deliberate absence of the Dautar is the soul’s refusal to enter this toxic terrain. Duane McCarthy’s flute is the seer’s commentary, piping the truth we can’t speak. The sparse chords of the 12-strung guitar allow harmonies to bleed like "dead roses burning.” It is a brutal admission that even the betrayed can become addicted to their suffering. It is fate’s loop; the garden always wins. It is an exorcism turning lovers who broke us into mythological flora/fauna—elevating pain into art.

“History: Read It and Weep” is built on a Rock/Hip-Hop Beat as a weaponized digital war drum. I ran the Dautar through synthesizers, the past is distorted but undeniable—like a survivor’s testimony. It’s the sound of the sun’s gears grinding to a halt. The chorus is Divine Irony; Joi Peng’s voice is the sanitized textbook version of history—a smooth, ethereal artificiality. My spoken verses are the raw archive, the truth that crackles like a vinyl record scratched by centuries of lies. The words about “Sunrise in the west” are a merging of Islamic eschatological prophecy with personal revelation.

“Blues for Palestine” builds on an Arabic-infused Hip-Hop Beat as a defiant march of the oppressed. The legato bass line is fluid and unbroken. This cry of an oppressed people carries both mourning and majesty. The "blues" in the title isn’t a genre; it’s the sound of suffering translated across borders. But where traditional blues bends notes in personal sorrow, this blues snaps them in collective rage. The lyrics are relentless: "Ancient Feud in an Ancient Land" is older than nations, older than its borders. Its bloodshed is a sin against time itself. "What Would Your Prophets Say?" is a direct challenge to religious justification for oppression—Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad (peace be upon them) all stood against tyranny. "Fuel Your Destruction with Poisonous Words" calls out the weaponization of language. “Genocide justified and denied" mirrors Orwellian doublethink. And “Your rusty Iron Dome Rips Like Wet Paper" is a metaphor for false security. What technology can shield us from divine justice?

“The Nine Invisibles” is an instrumental I composed on sitar many years ago. I was inspired by the story of Ashoka the Great, the Indian emperor of the Mauryan Empire, who ruled from 268 to 232 BC. He converted to Buddhism and attempted to rule India according to its teachings. Legend has it that he assembled a council of nine Masters of Science and Art to guide humanity and preserve knowledge. Some believe they still exist. The melody and solo are based on an obscure Persian scale. Some notes ache with ancient wisdom; others flare like sudden revelations. The Dautar’s phrasing is fluid and ornamented with microtonal bends. This piece imagines the nine ancient masters’ whispers—sometimes clear, sometimes fading—as if they’re testing whether we’re still listening. This isn’t just a piece of music—it’s a test. If you can hear the Nine Invisibles, perhaps you’re ready for the gifts they offer.

I composed “The Power and the Longing” live during an improvisation in one of my solo performances in early 2024. The melody unfolded in real-time, mirroring a mystical duality and

surrender that injects a luminous, yearning quality into a melancholy "weeping with hope." The dreamy synth pads evoke unresolved longing. The sparse emptiness implied by the melody is a vessel for divine presence.

“Freedom” grew out of a poem I wrote over a quarter century ago. It’s based on a dark, tense, unresolved mode. The spooky reggae/dub groove mirrors the lyrical tension—freedom’s promise vs. its corruption. The bass line acts as both anchor and disruptor. The dual Dautar solos in "Freedom" are a microcosm of the entire track’s thesis—the tension between raw humanity and synthetic chaos, between control and surrender. The clarity of the jazzy, dry solo mirrored the “think for yourself” advice, while the bowed solo through the synth pedal and its unpredictable sounds paralleled divine interruptions and the “What are we gonna do?” uncertainty. There is a Sufi parallel: the plucked solo is shari’a (law), the bowed solo is haqiqa (truth)—both are necessary for tariqa (the path).

“Misunderstood Prophecies” is a sonic puzzle box—a labyrinth of irregular grooves and bass-heavy modal mysticism. It mirrors the frustration and awe of grappling with the inscrutable divine, where meaning flickers like a mirage. It’s based on an Egyptian tonality. The asymmetry of the groove mirrors prophecy itself—never neat, always spilling beyond human time signatures. Yet, it grooves because divine mystery, though elusive, has its own logic. The Dautar solo is a lone cry in the desert. Modal, sparse, with only a single bass note mirroring the kick drum like an isolated seer receiving fragments of truth. Then the Dautar goes silent. The bass solo that follows is fluid, exploratory, slightly unhinged, like the human mind wrestling with revelation. This is played over non-repeating chords played on misty synth pads like Divine messages that never come the same way twice. Prophecy is not a loop—it’s a one-time cipher. Who knows? Maybe if prophecies were unambiguous, our complacency in the face of our “certainty” would ruin us, and they wouldn’t need bass solos.

“The Endless Goodbye” was a real emotional catharsis for me. It is a lament for all my loved ones I lost over the last 64 years I've been alive. It starts with a harmonized chord feeding back (like the middle break of Jimi Hendrix' posthumous song Easy Rider); it is the sob I couldn’t release and funerals I couldn’t attend. Then a drum riff brings in a languid beat. The chords on the verse take us through emotional stages: bittersweet remembrance, a fleeting warmth, a dream where the dead still speak, a spiritual freefall, and resignation. Then the melody stops,

and the 12-string guitar plays a floating interlude—like the moment at a wake when stories replace tears- with two notes answering like a friend offering consolation before returning to the beginning. The Dautar melody is a mournful lament. The solo explores the shock of light in darkness, answered by the hand you can't hold anymore and a question without an answer. The structure itself is cyclical, unresolved, echoing grief's cruel permanence as loss refuses to make sense.

"Making Love to Eternity" is a free-form collage of celestial synthesizer timbres. When I recorded it (and I was improvising the whole recording process) I simply aimed to create something indefinably beautiful in drifting harmonics. Unlike Brian Eno, who sought ambient calm, I sought ecstatic annihilation. I reached for improvisation as intimacy with the Infinite. No separation between artist and Art, lover and Beloved. The synthesizer's shimmer is the sweat on the brow of the universe.

On "Come to Me," I attempted to crystallize the chord progressions as Spiritual Stations. The intro/chorus starts as a circular, meditative vamp influenced by The Moody Blues' "Are You Sitting Comfortably?" The chords of the verse start as an earthly longing, a sudden lift—the "majestic light" breaking through, and an intimacy with the Divine. However, the last verse is more unresolved with a dissonant climax—the "beauty that terrifies" before resolving in a Debussy-esque mood as we ask to dance "One Last Time," implying that Love's madness is the only sanity we will ever find.

As a hidden epilogue, the Bandcamp-exclusive bonus track 'Extraterrestrial Jazz' fits with the artistic zeitgeist of the album, but exists outside the album's emotional cosmos. Imagine Captain Picard and Commander Riker stumbling into a dimly lit Risan jazz den. A gritty place where exiled Romulans play microtonal riffs over arrhythmic pulse engines, Vulcans write and spit illogical poetry, and shady Ferengi sell Klingon aphrodisiacs and other exotic recreational substances. It's free jazz—but not as humans know it (by the way, Riker wanted to sit in with the band, but the Romulans didn't think he could hang).

Looking/listening back to what I did with this album, I must wrestle with the imperfections of my work. And that's okay. These are my stories, but the music is yours now. Wherever it takes

you—whether into grief, fury, awe, or ecstasy—I hope it feels alive. My task is to bring it to you. When I make music, I must be a conduit of a higher and more sublime sense of reality. And if I am not that, I am nothing.