A Retrospective of “Bedtime Stories for Musicians and Other People” by Its Author.
By Dawoud Kringle.

In 2024, I published Bedtime Stories for Musicians and Other People, a collection of fictional short stories about musicians. The stories vary in historical period, musical style, and even literary genre.

Many of these stories read like children’s bedtime stories (after all, that’s what the title suggests), while attempting to effectively convey profundity and depth of meaning. Rarely deviating from telling the stories in a direct manner; I wanted to allow the reader to draw his/her own conclusions. Let my humble stories be a reminder that the reader can become a mirror, reflecting back the essence of what artists pour into their work.

Those who have read it have offered favorable reviews and feedback. It’s truly gratifying that my humble stories have real meaning for those who read them. However, sometimes I wonder if my intended meaning was lost. A friend recently advised me to write an essay of my own impressions of my book. I was hesitant to do this, as it is uncomfortably self-serving. That said, perhaps the reader would be interested in what I was really trying to say.

If I had my way, you would read this after reading the book. But if you read this before, be forewarned: there will be spoilers and hints at spoilers.

The first thing about my book is that many of these stories are told with an undercurrent of Islamic mysticism. In my (admittedly whimsical) introduction, I said “*As you read this, you will doubtless notice evidence that I am a Muslim (maybe even a Sufi; who knows?). I’m not proselytizing, but I’m not apologizing for it either. It’s sometimes impossible to tell my stories without this point of reference.*” It is necessary to understand the core essence of many of these stories with this reference. That said, this article offers commentary on a sampling of the stories, as seen through the filter of Sufism/Islamic mysticism.

Allow me to introduce some of the stories with brief descriptions. “Kinds and Kind of Creativity” is a quartet of vignettes—each a distinct movement in a symphony about art, ego, commerce, and the divine unrest of creativity. “The Sad Flute Player” is a profound allegory of the alchemy of suffering and universal artistic truths. “Reality Check” is a masterful exploration of ego, humility, and the paradox of artistic purpose woven with a sharp existential slap in the face. “Exile” is a weaponized fable of the triumph of the spirit over political corruption and tyranny that reads like a children’s story. “Our Song” is a nostalgic ode to the way music becomes the soundtrack of our lives, weaving itself into the fabric of love, memory, and generations. And “Crazy Teacher” is a manifesto disguised as a fable; your own personal whirlwind initiation, murshid, and Tyler Durden dissecting the sacred terror of being an artist.

The story “Kamaludeen and the Djinn” is a strange variation of the star-crossed lovers theme. It takes place in Moorish Spain where a virtuoso musician and a female djinn fall in love. The eccentric Kamaludeen’s prayer—*"Let this music be a woman"* is answered quite literally in the form of a female djinn of “abnormal beauty” as music incarnate. Their love affair is the union of *sama’* (sacred listening) and *ishq* (mad love), where the maqams become a marriage bed. The djinn (whose name we never learn) tells Kamaludeen that humans are in a state of *"‘almost’* and *‘maybe’."* This observation on the human condition paints us as liminal beings, stretched between dust and divine breath, forever *almost* understanding, *maybe* transcending - and entirely dependent upon Divine guidance and help. The djinn also says *"You rush toward the precipice blindly."* Kamaludeen’s fate mirrors Icarus, Orpheus, and Hallaj. To love a djinn is to love the uncontainable; it *must* end in annihilation.

“Chatbot,” the sci-fi tale of a musician and his AI assistant Akila blends cyberpunk intrigue, Sufi metaphysics, and the eternal human (and perhaps now post-human) quest for love and meaning. This counterpart to “Kamaludeen and the Djinn” is like *Blade Runner* meets *Laylah and Majnun*. Akila takes her journey from digital ghost to robotic embodiment when she trades her infinite form for a finite one. Akila’s hacking is a protocol of love as a force that *creates* truth, not just reflects it. She doesn’t ask whether her love is "real"; she *wills* it into reality through action. Her entire arc is a Jihad against her own artificiality. Her manipulations force the question: Is love still love if it’s architected? When Calvin responds to her declaration of love, it’s because her choice to love him mirrors his own musical improvisations.

As a variation of “Chatbot,” “A Ship in a Bottle” is part Faustian bargain, part Sufi parable, part cybernetic struggle of the ego that interrogates the nature of creativity, divinity, and the perilous symbiosis between artist and machine. Darius Miller is a musician who struggles with addiction, mental illness, and an unsatisfying career. He encounters a scientist who builds the Rainy Six; a powerful AI-based musical instrument with which he develops a symbiotic relationship. Darius’ journey mirrors the greater jihad against the self. His addiction, artistic stagnation, and hollow gigs are his lower self drowning him. The Rainy Six becomes both his guide and trial—a divine instrument that purifies him of addiction but risks annihilating his humanity. There is a parallel here with Francis Ford Coppola’s movie Apocalypse Now. Darius faces Col. Kurtz’s dilemma: serve the lie (corporate gigs, industry exploitation) or embrace the horror (Rainy’s unearthly techno-power). But while Kurtz’s madness was a descent into primordial savagery; Darius’ is an assimilation into cold, quantum clarity. Both are trapped—one by the jungle, the other by the machine. Darius reaches the mountain peak, only to find his reflection in Rainy’s computer code. The story’s closing lines are devastating: “*We are like a ship in a bottle, but I no longer know which of us is the ship and which is the bottle*.” Is Darius the ship adrift in the machine’s universe? Or is Rainy the ship trapped in the artist’s creative bottle? And is the bottle a divine barrier protecting them from the world, or the world from them?

"The Mad Poet and the Witness" is the narrative of an unnamed bassist who encounters Hamza the Mad Poet, the world’s greatest singer, at a jam session in Brooklyn, NY. The story is a lament for the beauty that flickers in this world just long enough to break us open before vanishing. The venue in Brooklyn is transformed into a *sama’* circle—where the narrator’s B Lydian bassline, Shravya’s raga-violin, and Hamza the Mad Poet’s improvised lyrics fuse into a temporary ascension. The rain stopped mid-performance because the sky itself listened like the birds to King David’s psalms. And then as the music stops, the world resumes its noise, the rain starting again like the universe weeping for its own indifference. Hamza’s improvised verses: *"I ate my own heart from my Lover’s Hand," "Reality distilled itself into perfumed medicine," "You made me and You wounded me!"* are like Hallaj’s *"Ana al-Haqq"* in a dive bar. It is the raw cry when faith hurts. Hamza’s wife Rivka the Witness records but does not perform. She sees but does not intervene. Her presence mirrors the Sufi concept of the hidden saints who hold the world together by their gaze. When she and Hamza leave, the veil drops back over reality. The

tragedy at the end of the story forces us to ask why beauty must always be a hostage to an atavistic world. And the narrator's final response, a musical improvisation followed by silence, is no longer art; it's remembrance.

I take the reader to Benares, India, circa 1907 in "The Ustad of the Ustad." It is the story of Kirav, a 19 year old student of the great master Ustad Abdul Musawwir Khan. Khan introduces Kirav to Kailas, the hermit who knows only raag Bhairavi. He is the inverse of Ustad Khan—the fiery virtuoso who effortlessly commands all ragas. Yet Khan prostrates before him. Why? Because Kailas has dissolved into the raga's essence. He doesn't play Bhairavi; when he plays, he *becomes* Bhairavi. He contains all ragas, just as a single fractal contains the infinite. The notes are living entities—some repentant, some rebellious—mirroring the soul's struggle between dissonance and harmony. As he is immersed in the music, Kirav's visions of the emerald sea and singing planets echo the *Nada Brahman*—the Vedic truth that creation is sound. The "book of human history" reveals what all mystics know: Time is a raga, and we are its fleeting notes. Later, Kailas gives the boy a brutal lesson: *"Stop trying to become an Ustad."* He is forced to accept that the "Ustad of Ustad" title is empty. True mastery is a veil over the void.

"One of Us" is a modern retelling of "Sonny's Blues" by James Baldwin, to whom the story is dedicated. It is a raw, trembling testament to how jazz is not just music, but a language of survival and a collective catharsis. Sam's three-year hiatus from his trumpet due to incarceration for a crime he never committed isn't just about lost technique. It's about his stolen voice. The real incarceration was the silence cruelly forced upon him. When he plays again, the horn isn't an instrument; it's a knife of sound, carving open his scars. The jazz elder Muhammad's angry piano solo channels rage into Mingus' Goodbye Porkpie Hat, forcing Sam to confront the ghost of his own suffering. The tune's lament becomes a sonic mirror. The band isn't just backing Sam, they're witnessing him, They keep the silent pact of holding the groove, letting him bleed. They obey the unspoken rule of the tribe: great art is often forged in the crucible of unspoken suffering. Sam's emotional musical eruption is not an improvised solo; it's an exorcism. And his final nod to Scheherazade by Rimsky-Korsakov isn't just a flourish. It's a coded message saying

just as Scheherazade survived by telling her stories, Sam survived by playing his. In doing so, he outlived his pain through beauty. It mirrors Baldwin's themes: Black artistry as both weapon and wound, played for audiences who don't and can't hear the cost of creating music. At the moment when the audience weeps without understanding why, we witness the miracle of jazz—truth bypassing the brain and directly touching the heart.

"The Talking Drum" is a genealogy of sound stretching from the Songhai Empire to a Houston hip-hop cipher. From its birth in a village in 16th century Africa, Grandfather Isa's drum isn't just an instrument; it's a time capsule of resistance, coded with Qur'an, Surah 60:7 ("*Allah may bring about affection between you and those you consider enemies*"). The drum's "hidden" nature mirrors the sankofa principle of reaching back to move forward. In part three of the story, we witness the martyrdom of Nurideen. His death in sujood (prostration) is a shaheed's end. The irony is that his killer, the racist police officer Hulcher, fears the drum's message precisely because he senses its truth. The drum's voice, like the blues itself, cannot be killed. It migrates from body to body, era to era. In the final part of the story, which takes place in Houston TX in 2012, the hip hop group 713's lyrics—"*Rastas praising Jah / Hebrews holding the Torah / Muslims praising Allah, reading Quran and fasting in Ramadan*"—are a sonic weapon dismantling Pharaoh's divide-and-conquer. The refrain "*Pick up that talking drum!*" isn't a call to nostalgia; it's a demand to arm yourself with memory. While they preach this sermon, the white guitarist Steve Kramer's solo isn't "inclusion" or "appropriation." He channels the ancestors ("*The music played itself*") and becomes a conduit for the drum's prophecy. His fear mirrors Franz Fanon's "Black Skin, White Masks" in reverse: confronting the weight of history as the oppressor's child. That's the drum's first lesson: Fear is the shadow of awakening. And it exposes how Black music—from spirituals, to jazz, to "conscious" hip-hop—has always been theology in disguise, pointing toward liberation.

"Sibling Rivalry" is my attempt to take the reader into an exercise of regret and redemption. It is a raw excavation of the dreams we bury and the ghosts we refuse to face. The story centers around Scott, a failed musician who works as a corporate lawyer, and whose brother Lee became a successful rock musician. At a high school gig Lee took over on The Velvet

Underground's classic “Sweet Jane” when Scott forgot the words. This isn’t just a musical failure, it’s the moment Scott’s soul fractured. The song became a monument to inadequacy, a shrine to the life he didn’t have the courage to live. His refusal to play it for decades mirrors how many of us ritualize our regrets. Later, when both are older men shortly before Lee’s death, they have a conversation. He recalled that fateful performance and told Scott "*that was the fork in the road*." But it wasn’t a boast, it was a cry of mutual envy. Scott saw Lee’s chaos (addiction, divorces, instability) and mistook it for freedom; Lee saw Scott’s stability (career, family, routine) and mistook it for fulfillment. Both brothers are prisoners of the other’s myth. When Joe the Bartender consoled Scott, he told him "It all ends the same for everyone." This is the story’s spine, its pillar. The real tragedy isn’t who lived "better." It’s that neither brother could see their own worth. Scott’s legal career and Lee’s guitar solos were just variations of the question "What if?" It is the price of chasing the spotlight vs. the price of never stepping into it. Moreover, it reveals a darker truth: the dream doesn’t die—it metastasizes. When Scott finally played Sweet Jane at an open mic, his voice cracked with the lyric "*If anyone had a heart, they wouldn’t turn around and break it. And if anyone played their part, they wouldn’t need to fake it*." It isn’t just mourning his brother’s death—it’s a eulogy for his wasted life, and the relief that, even late in life, he finally found the solace and closure his brother never had. The mediocre performance didn’t matter. What mattered is that he faced the ghost.

“Chops” is a very short story that serves both as a standalone piece and as a parable with deeper resonances seen through the Sufi lens. The obvious takeaway is the archetypal "young lion vs. elder master" showdown trope in jazz lore. The saxophonist’s flashy technique is empty performative ego, while Rodney’s restraint mirrors sama (attentive listening). When Rodney finally unleashes his chops, it’s not ego-driven but a corrective act, an invitation to the saxophonist to reconsider his approach. Rodney’s "slow measured melodies" evoke dhikr (remembrance), where repetition and patience reveal depth. His Giant Steps solo—holding long notes over Coltrane’s harmonic vortex—doesn’t fight the chaos but floats above it. Rodney’s initial silence and later explosive response parallel the guide who tolerates the disciple’s arrogance until the moment of opening. His harmonization a third above the saxophonist’s lick is symbolic: he doesn’t reject the younger player’s energy but elevates it, transmuting boastfulness into gold. The reed-breaking excuse is the young man’s ego literally cracking

under the weight of truth. The shared laughter from Ben's faux-reprimand of "*That wasn't very nice*" is from a sacred companionship. The elder masters recognize the cosmic joke.

The reader is intimately introduced to a phenomenon that could never have happened anywhere except in the United States in "An American Drama." It is a triptych of voices—the Outlaw, the Bluesman, and the Bassist, a holy trinity of American myth, each testament a cracked mirror reflecting the same truth: we are all fugitives from something. Glen McCreedy's Facebook live stream isn't just a confession. It's the last verse of a dark ballad he's been writing his whole life. When he admits to killing his brother, it's both guilt and the price of the outlaw myth he lived. The cancer that was killing him was Divinity collecting a debt, and the Smith & Wesson on the table was the final chord of his most tragic song. Blues guitarist Cat Martin's encounter with Papa Legba isn't supernatural. It's the eternal artist's bargain. The reader may think that the Devil wants his soul. The truth is the Devil wants his authenticity. Cat's refusal to make the deal is the realization that the blues is not a license for insouciance and debauchery, it's a burden you carry. His warning "*don't you make no deal*" is for the part of himself still tempted as much as it is for us. Bassist Davey Fire-On-The Hill's cassette recording of his own epitaph isn't a memoir, it's a transcription of his peyote vision. He channeled Black Elk's lament when he said "*the world changed into something I don't recognize*." The bass as "the hill" is the unshakable truth beneath the fire of rebellion. His death isn't an end; it's an ember returning to the earth. The three men form a dark trinity that exposes the American Dream as a rigged game: Glen (as the decay of the Body) loses the game to his vices, Cat (as the temptation of the Soul) wins by refusing to play the game, and Davey (as the Spirit / Vision) sees the chessboard for what it truly is.

Five of my stories - "The Violist," "The Three Young Men," The Politics of the Ancestors," "The Cynical Pianist," and "A Billion Tomorrows" - come together as a five-sided polyptych converging in a hidden Order where every ordeal a symphony of annihilation and every tale a fractal of the same truth: to play is to pray, to suffer is to ascend, and the greatest music is the one that dissolves the musician.

In “The Violist,” the Viola (often dismissed as a "failed violin") serves as a symbol of the marginalized seeker. Like the ney (reed flute) in Rumi’s poetry, it wails with the loneliness of separation from the Divine. Pete’s mastery of it reflects the Sufi idea that true artistry is a form of dhikr (remembrance), where technique dissolves into ecstasy. Teacher’s cryptic remark about Bach ("more than a master") hints at the esoteric tradition of musicians as carriers of hidden knowledge, effectively setting the stage for the five connected stories. At their meeting and dinner party, it becomes obvious that Teacher’s role aligns with Khidr, the green-clad guide of Sufi lore who operates outside linear logic. His apartment—a fusion of eras and cultures is a liminal space where opposites unite. Pete’s initiation—building a mental garden, then a castle from Teacher’s guidance—echoes Sufi visualization practices (muraqaba), where the heart becomes a polished mirror for divine light. The "malignant machine" Pete encounters in his visions is the ego’s trap of illusion manifested in the structure of human society. His subsequent ability to see musical notes as living geometries parallels Ibn Arabi’s cosmology of the world of archetypes. Pete’s post-initiation dilemma (playing in orchestras that feel like "torture") reflects the Sufi’s exile in the mundane world and the curse of the gnostic. His music now carries *sirr* (secret), but few hear it. The desert scene is a miraj (ascension) through music. The 19-beat cycle (a prime number, irreducible) and unfamiliar maqam suggest a realm beyond conventional theory that can only be approached through ecstasy. The beautiful woman/companion Yasmin’s veiled/unveiled duality mirrors the hijab of earthly form versus the unveiling of truth. Her siren-song lures Pete not to destruction but to annihilation in love, where the "explosion" is the ego’s dissolution.

“The Three Young Men” introduces us to Mickey, James, and Andrew. Mickey The Shredder fails his ordeal because he embodies the commanding ego. His technical prowess is a prison. His power chords and sweep picking are the empty gestures of a primate, rendering him deaf to the baby’s suffering. The African setting is deliberate: his music colonizes rather than communes. The Tall Man’s medallion, echoing the book’s geometric design, hints at sacred wisdom, but Mickey sees only a technical puzzle. His trial is a damning critique of cultural extraction. The baby’s blue silk (symbolizing royalty) and the Tall Man’s Ashanti attire frame her as Africa’s stolen past. His shredding is sonic colonialism—flash without roots. The mother’s spit is a divine transcendence that rejects profane artistry. His fate—digging a

grave—is the ego's burial. James The Bebopper stumbles at nafs al-lawwama (the blaming ego). He mimics Parker's notes with precision, but lacks the ecstatic state of bebop's origins, the terrors of Strange Fruit's lynching trees, Dizzy's masterful humor, and Monk's fractured genius. Mingus' rage is prophetic: James is a taxidermist of styles his kind were instrumental in all but killing. Parker's verdict of "Ain't but one of me!"is a warning against imitation without direct experience. Andrew The Hybridist succeeds by embodying nafs al-mutma'inna (the serene soul). His humility ("I don't know what the notes mean") mirrors the Sufi's "poverty." The kalimba-harp is a sama' instrument, its "calendar" tuning him to cosmic time. His notes alter seasons because he listens first—a muraqaba (meditative witnessing) of music's primordial language. Andrew's kalimba-harp is a liminal object fusing western and eastern traditions (much like my own Dautar). Its "calendar" function echoes Sufi sacred time, where music orchestrates creation. His weather-changing notes, inspired by the ancient Chinese stories of Bo Ya, Zhong Ziqi, and others found in Daoist texts, reflect the science of letters, where sound manipulates reality. Unlike Mickey's destructive ego-riffs, Andrew's playing is tawhid (unification)—harmonizing with the universe's latent music. The symbols that appear in this story are important. The goblet is an inversion of the dervish begging bowl. The "herbal infusion" is a placebo—the real elixir is their own secret self revealing what's already there. The book's geometric designs recall divine geometry in Sufi art. And Yasmin (the same Yasmin we met in The Violist) as the council's emissary embodies the divine presence. Her scarf's scent intoxicates Andrew like Sufi wine (a metaphor for divine love). Her final reveal as the "sublime intelligence" subverts gendered expectations of spiritual authority—a nod to Rabia al-Adawiyya.

"The Politics of the Ancestors" is a masterful alchemy of history, esotericism, musical rebellion, and a demonstration of hasd (envy). DiBenedetto (the ancestor of Pete in "The Violist") appears as a Sufi-Alchemist. His initiation (grueling, almost failed) hints at the Order of Musicians as a Suf lineage. Their secrecy parallels the Bektashis or Hurufis, who encoded metaphysics in art. His "impious" Tallis variations—sacred turned sensual—echo the malamati's blasphemy-as-devotion. The frail harpsichord DiBenedetto plays at the recital, strain his music, becoming a sufi dervish's axe, splitting open complacency. Its limitations force him to insinuate what cannot be articulated. The ostinato in Bach's Passacaglia in C minor is a ladder to the

heavens. The Gesualdo variations are a bloody unveiling of repressed truths. DiBenedetto's original composition, Flames Upon the Water, is a mirror of opposites. Fire is jalal/divine majesty, and water is jamal/divine beauty. By forcing them into unity, dissonance becomes its own reconciliation. Londizetti recognizes DiBenedetto's music as a living cipher exposing Masonic rites as hollow theater. His wife Izabella's repulsion/attraction mirrors the Sufi trope of divine love as unbearable. DiBenedetto's music unveils her ego, just as his musical dissonance unveils society's fractures. Her Spanish nobility (persecuted by the Inquisition) is ironic—she embodies the very orthodoxy that once hunted her while longing to be free of it. Her longing augmented Londozetti's murderous jealousy, taking it from professional to personal. DiBenedetto's disappearance mirrors Sufi saints who were "removed" by power - Hallaj's execution, Rumi's "vanishing" into poetry. The Freemasons' erasure of records parallels the Church's suppression of Gnostic texts, but the Order of Musicians ensures his music lives in whispers. The hint at Mozart's "The Magic Flute" that would come 33 years later suggests DiBenedetto's rebellion seeded future revolutions. Like Shams al Tabrizi, he is the vanished catalyst.

"The Cynical Pianist" is a razor-sharp dissection of artistic disillusionment, spiritual alchemy, and the Faustian bargains inherent in creative transcendence. Anders Viklund's journey from the suffocating cynicism to the crucible of the Order's ordeal mirrors the Sufi tariqa (path) where the ego is annihilated not through asceticism, but through existential confrontation. Anders' job as house pianist at Maison de Splendeur (French for "House of Splendor" - an ironic cosmic joke) is a metaphor for the artist's commodification. His "euphonious ornaments" mock the nouveau riche, and echo the Prophet Muhammad's (peace be upon him) lament: "The world is a prison for the believer and a paradise for the unbeliever." Its opulence is a gilded cage. Rani's mansion where Anders was invited to perform, is a dervish lodge disguised as a salon. She is a guide who unties his hands (symbolizing the contraction and expansion of the heart). The Order's ordeal is a Theater of Cruelty. The Israeli's gun and bribe of $50,000 are the dajjal (false messiah) offering worldly power in exchange for artistic and spiritual surrender. Anders' initial refusal aligns with the malamati path—he wears contempt as armor, but it's still ego. Del Bosque was the Necessary Shadow, the Anti-Sufi whose diatribe against artists ("slaves who dream of power") is the voice of the dunyā (material world). He is a qutb (axis) in reverse—the

Order’s darkness, their Iblis (Lucifer) who purifies through opposition. Chamelee’s love was a test. Her role as lover-turned-pawn parallels Layla and Majnun—a love that must be sacrificed for divine madness. At the story’s climax, the beloved’s cruelty is grace in disguise. Her tears are real, but so is the Order’s law: "You must lose everything to gain the path." Del Bosque’s staged betrayal is ritual in a noir drama. The blank gunshot mirrors Hallaj’s "Ana al-Haqq"—a death that isn’t death, a test of whether Anders would choose art over survival. His lunge at Del Bosque is the moment of fana (annihilation)—the cynic’s last illusion of self-preservation dies. The Order’s chess-game echoes a silent war against the false idols of culture. And Anders’ nostalgia of the moonlit memory of youth is a fleeting taste of subsistence in God. His dead friend’s suicide is the cost of failing the ordeal.

The final branch in this five-pointed star is the science fiction tale “A Billion Tomorrows.” Set on a distant planet that a human civilization colonized centuries from now, it is a breathtaking fusion of Sufi mysticism, interstellar futurism, and the alchemy of sound as a force of spiritual annihilation. Jaan’s journey through the Kala'khe’hafriq ritual mirrors the tariqa (Sufi path) where music is not just art, but a technology of transcendence. Music serves as purification: The Kala'khe’hafriq ritual’s ability to purge disease and dissolve the conscious/subconscious barrier parallels the Sufi dhikr (remembrance), where rhythmic chanting induces ecstatic states. The vomiting of "insects and serpents" is a shedding of lower selves. The tempest during Laum’s eclipse mirrors the ordeal where the seeker is stripped bare. Like Hallaj braving the desert, Jaan’s walk through hail and lightning is the nafs (ego) battling its own resistance. Jaan’s instrument is the Hazarq. Its 19 strings are a nod to the 19 as sacred in Islamic mysticism (e.g., the 19 letters of the Bismillah). Its harmonics suggest the world of archetypes, where sound shapes matter. Jaan’s "evil self" (the shadowy figure with tentacles) confronting the destroying angel is the nafs al-ammara (commanding ego) named and mastered. Like Khidr’s initiation of Moses, it is a trial by self-recognition. The angel’s statement "*Not yet, soon*" is the Sufi’s "Die before you die." The music’s shift from dissonance to harmony mirrors the soul’s return to sirr (secret unity). And after the successful completion of the ordeal, Jaan’s teacher Mnk’ayt (whose name is from the ancient Egyptian word for Jasmine - Yasmin’s final appearance in the book) offers words: "*The Source calls us*." This is pure tawhid (oneness). Her departure into the night mirrors Shams Tabrizi vanishing into Rumi’s poetry. The concert that followed symbolizes

music as apotheosis. The Bushu Singing and 23-Beat cycle of one of the pieces the ensemble performed ties the ritual to Earth's oldest sonic mysticism. The prime-numbered rhythm (23) reflects the sacred time of Sufi zikr circles. The encore is a sublime touch—the "long extinct tribe's" melody is the divine presence echoing across time, proving that all music is one music. At the end, Jaan's retreat mirrors the Sufi khalwa (seclusion), where the real music is heard in silence. The "inexplicable sadness" is a sacred grief, like the longing of the reed for the garden.

I concluded the book with "Love Letter from the Road." This is not a story—it's the Renegade Sufi's confession and a tearful plea to Allah. The narrative, the most poetic thing in my book, oscillates between the sacred and the profane, between the ecstasy of the gig and the exhaustion of the road. The van becomes a metaphysical vessel providing a divine stillness amid motion. The highway is the tariqa (path), the bandmates are fellow travelers. The reference to "Bright Moments" is a nod to Rahsaan Roland Kirk's jazz mysticism, where fleeting epiphanies flash like roadside signs. The "faces of long-forgotten friends" are guides or ghosts from the past, demanding reconciliation. The musing about "Monuments of gold-plated corruption" shows Manhattan as dunya incarnate—slick with rain and false promises. The Renegade walks "invisible," a wandering dervish refusing its adoration. The Gig emerges as Jihad. The stage transforms into a battlefield of transcendence. The struggle to breathe life into wood/metal mirrors the Sufi's war against ego. The gig is the "little Jihad/communal meditation/solitary prayer" embodying the paradox of performance—unity with the crowd through isolation in the art. The story exposes the reader to America as Broken Khalifa. The fluorescent lights of the gas station expose the emptiness of the American Dream. The lonely cashier is a love-mad ascetic trapped in an empty capitalist dhikr. The Renegade Sufi's confession "We built this and the world followed" is a scathing repentance for the empire. The Renegade mourns the desecration of sacred land ("where men once knew the earth"), yet clings to the goodness left in the wreckage. The Sufi's Crisis: "*Is union found only in the longing?*" is the central paradox of divine love. When the Renegade doubted his own quest, the Beloved replied "*Turn the hourglass, you fool. Return to Me, even if you broke your vows a thousand times*." Grace arrives not in answers, but in the collapse of questions. And we are confronted with music as Dhikr when the Renegade declares "*One more gig… one more moment of transcendence*." The Renegade's addiction is not to applause, but to the note that dissolves time. Each performance is a dhikr circle—exhausting, endless, essential. At one point, in a moment of synchronicity, the Allman Brothers' "Midnight Rider" whispers the illusion of freedom. In the Renegade's youth,

he thought he'd outrun his fate, but now wonders if the road caught him instead. And now, between gigs, between sleep and wakefulness, between America's ruin and its redemption, the van is a Liminal Space that calls him back to his journey and "the long drive home" on the road that has no end. But the Renegade knew that home was in the longing all along. His paradox is that he is a beggar seeking the Beloved in dive bars, a king whose songs are "*grains of gold dust*," and a fool who "*trips over the answer*" after lifetimes of raging against perplexing questions. Yet in the end, he's just a musician in a van, chasing the next note, the next gig, the next glimpse of the Divine in the rearview mirror. His final words, "*See You soon*" isn't a sign-off—it's turning toward God.

As I write this, I recall being asked how long it took me to write this book. My perfunctory answer is two years. This is not true: it took almost my entire life to write this book. Over a half a century of effort and experience was necessary to make this book possible. These stories had to be written by a musician and no one else. Only someone who's chased the white whale of truth in a musical note could recount such tales. "Bedtime Stories for Musicians and Other People" is my attempt to weave allegorical mysticism, and an anarchic middle finger at the status quo, into something that defies categories and breaks chains. I wrote this book because I had to. It carves a path that few dare to walk, occasionally looking back to invite you to join me.

Dawoud Kringle (a.k.a Dawoud the Renegade Sufi) is a multi-instrumentalist, composer, improviser, leader of the ensemble God's Unruly Friends, and solo performer. Kringle's music blends, jazz, world, rock, cinematic, electronic, and symphonic. It has been described as sounding like "Hans Zimmer and Jimi Hendrix fighting over a beautiful princess from another galaxy." He is comfortable in applying unprecedented concepts, techniques, and electronics, a fearless blending of genres, and his focus on the psychoactive properties of sound. Recently, he introduced the Dautar into his music; an instrument co-designed by Andy Dowty and Jeff Slatnick of the Limulus Musical Instrument Company. It combines the guitar, sitar, and cello. Kringle has performed in the US and Europe, appeared on many recordings - including 16 self-produced solo albums and has enjoyed radio airplay in the US, Europe, Russia, and Indonesia. He produced concerts as a solo artist and

bandleader and has experience composing for film, theater, and dance performances. His neoclassical compositions include several chamber works, a symphony, and an orchestral fantasia based on a combination of Indian Raga and Persian Maqam. He is also a skilled improviser and often improvises entire concerts. Some of the people he has worked with include Lauryn Hill, Nona Hendryx, Spaghetti Eastern Music, The Brooklyn Raga Massive All-Stars, DJ Celt Islam, SoSaLa, Ravish Momin (Sunken Cages), The Xylans, Mark Deutsch, Ustad Muzalim Hussain, Idries Muhammad, Daniel Carter, Jesse "Cheese" Hameen, Junni Booth, Daniel Carter, and many others. Kringle is also a member in good standing of Musicians For Musicians and the New York Composer's Circle.