

Michael Diebert

For Paul Desmond

You sought to sound like a dry martini,
but I hear a deep sepia single-malt scotch,
a sphere of ice,
a short, heavy-bottomed glass,
honeyed smoke curling from a slow-burning cigarette.
You take a long, silent sip,
sit at the bar between sets, riff
not on how Morello smacks his snare,
not on how Brubeck's fingers jitterbug
between tempos, nor how they lift
your solos toward a tart grace.
Instead, wisecracks, cocktail stuff,
throwing your head back with a laugh,
breezy and inscrutable:
Freud, Cadillacs, fear of the Russians.
What are you trying to sound like when you play?
Rain kissing windowbox basil,
pigeons pecking asphalt,
espresso shot, wedge of lemon pie?
You loosen your tie.
Shifty time signatures far from your mind.
You look hard into that heavy-bottomed glass,
that universe of ice.
You swirl that scotch until you're certain it holds
the coldest note ever written.