

The Story of Richard Maxfield

He jumped out of a window.
Or did he shoot himself?
Was there a gun
or was it pills?
Did anyone see blood?
Was he holding water in his lungs?
Or was he right about the CIA conspiracy and killed by one of them
because he knew their plan?

Richard was an electronic composer.
He wrote a piece called 'Cough Music' made up of the coughs
of hundreds of people at concerts.
He was brilliant and well organized.
And then he fell apart.
He was homosexual and took drugs.
He was brilliant and well organized.
I loved 'Cough Music' and could not see how such a fine composer could
fall apart as Richard fell apart.

This is the story of Richard Maxfield.
He died in California.
It does not make me as sad that he died
as that he fell apart.
We all die.
We do not all fall apart.
'Cough music' was a beautiful piece of music.

I went to a
concert tonight
and heard many people coughing,
especially during the encore, which was a piano piece by
Debussy, delicate and sparse,
like a dress you can see through,
and everyone seemed to have to cough during the piece.

If you cough very hard,
do you think you fall apart?
I once had a bad cough
and now realise that for two weeks I coughed during every
poetry reading and concert I went to.
I wonder if anyone recorded my cough?
I wonder how many readers and performers
not only did not feel sympathetic towards
my bad lungs and the symptomatic cough
but also wanted to shoot me for coughing?
A fortuneteller once said I would die of TB. I wonder if that's
why I like 'Cough Music'?

Perhaps I should have my lawyer
write into my will
"I would like to have 'Cough Music' played at my funeral.

Someone would think that in bad taste.
No one likes to think that after you die you still have
bad taste,
Even if you had it in life.

What bothered me about Richard Maxfield was that
he had the bad taste to fall apart;
dying after you fall apart is actually a rectification
of bad taste.
Richard was so brilliant and well organized
I could not imagine how he fell apart.
And 'Cough Music' is just one of his very beautiful concrete tapes.
They say the men he loved destroyed him.
But he was brilliant and well organized and I find it hard
to believe some not-brilliant and poorly organized man could destroy him.

You see, the story of Richard Maxfield is one I do not understand.
But I have always loved 'Cough Music'
and when I heard the beautiful Debussy tonight
and thought of a man I love
who for many reasons I cannot see or be with
and I heard the audience coughing, flashing every once in a while
like light catching a strip of aluminium which blows on a fruit tree
I understood that I would never fall apart,
though I did not know why,
and for a moment I thought of the involuntary action of
coughing, and I understood perhaps
why he jumped out of a window
though I knew that just as I would never fall apart,
I would also never jump out of a window,
and I also refrained from coughing, though just at the end of the
Debussy,

I wanted to/ maybe just to join the whole crowd.

There are many ways to die,
but none of them is subtle.

Why *do* people cough so much
at concerts?

I cannot touch the piano.
I cannot touch you.
If the King of Spain gave a concert
no one would cough.
The story of Richard Maxfield is one I do not understand,
but I thought of it tonight,
listening to people cough their way through Debussy.

It was not music.

Only Richard Maxfield made music out of coughing, and he is dead.
Richard Maxfield is dead.

Diane Wakoski (1972?)