

IN THE VILLAGE OF LA MODESTO  
—for Erik “Buck” Townsend

Every day has its night and every kingdom  
has its knight too, even Modesto.  
Before *hyphy* there was *opera*, blowing aria winds  
through oak and almond trees—  
leaves falling like curtains as sun sets on stage.

A town without music is a well run dry—  
an oceanless beach, a child without laughter.  
Listen to *Lucia’s* soaring sopranos—  
*bel canto, bel canto.*

He who brings music to the people brings life to the dead.  
Thank you *Buck Townsend* for blowing the dust off our souls,  
lighting us like kindling so we burn with song,  
the tenor flames of your voice stoking the fire in our hearts.

Seventy, they say, is the new forty,  
and opera is the new gangsta rap—  
*Sweeney Todd* was a serial killer, and *Don Quixote*  
lived a thug’s life—tear drop tattoos and windmills  
etched across his skin.

For 25 years, you’ve been tunneling us out  
of our cultureless prison— a place with only a few banjos  
and shotguns for bass. Now there are overtures and opuses,  
bespectacled crowds, a place for families to applaud.

You’ve brought song to voiceless youth  
and dance to weary legs. We ride your coattails, *Maestro*,  
because you can move us to tears. *Bravo. Bravo.*

You are the *Deus ex machina* that saved our town.  
*Erik “Buck” Townsend*, you are the song that saved this city.

by Sam Pierstorff,  
City of Modesto, Poet Laureate, 2004-2008  
Presented on the Occasion of Erik “Buck” Townsend’s 70<sup>th</sup> Birthday  
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