

American Festivals

The Poetry

4 Poems by Robert Trent Jones

1. Oration on July 4th
2. Black Suit Blues (for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day)
3. Memorial Day
4. Thanksgiving

1. Oration on July 4th

Statesmen act,
Scholars teach,
Musicians play,
Poets sing,
And the Orator proclaims.

In Independence Hall,
The hall of halls,
The cloth of liberty was spun
From pilgrims' pride.
When the bell pealed
Our Declaration was signed and sealed.

Our American history began
When wise Ben Franklin warned his countrymen
That those who give up their liberty for safety
Surely will lose both.

And thus the battle came.
A battle fought and finally won
Led by our brave Washington.

Together again,
These visionary men
Burned their passion
Into our Constitution.

When asked by Mrs. Powel
(We the people...)
"Do we have a republic or a monarchy, Sir?"
Old Ben replied, "A republic, Madam,
If you can keep it."

Keep it we did,
When civil handshakes
Gave way to battle
Hand to hand, heart to heart.

In the dripping gloom
At Vicksburg, at Gettysburg
The Union's long grey shadow
Had withdrawn by dawn.
Saturday, July 4, 1863.

Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation
Unshackled our Constitution
And with his mortal life,
Redeemed liberty's promise from that awful strife.

Today, parade and play July Fourth away.
Picnic until flickering embers
Dance up among the fireflies
Floating into star-spangled skies
While fireworks brighten our eyes.

My friends, never forget
On this day of merriment,
To question our leaders
The way folks questioned Ben Franklin.

Breathe deeply of our free air
And let every American sing in chorus:
"Keep it – a republic,
America, sweet land of liberty."

Abandon false security
Embrace each other
She lives – the Statue with the golden gleam
Lit on Liberty's island of our American Dream.

I ask you, as I,
To pledge anew
Your life, your fortune
Your sacred honor
To our everlasting liberty.

2. Memorial Day

Upon his lonely bower
I set a flower
plucked as he
to die in glory
before its time.
He, a still memory of mine
remains living in my heart
before war cut us apart.

When they handed me a folded flag
the pipes began to play.
I turned away, turned my face away,
as my tears fell to sacred ground.

Looked up and there an eagle found
an angel eagle, flying high.
Our soldier's soul flew that day --
together they soared, then flew away.

Turn the earth on bended knee
to receive those who never bent
so you are not the living dead.
Let us rest in fields of poppies red.

The dew descends to bless the heads
of ghostly rows of moonlit stones.
They striped our virgin banner red
when for Liberty, they bled.

Our Flag snaps in Freedom's wind.
Salute our priceless chosen
known and unknown equally
who honored Liberty's endless call.
God Bless them one and all.

3. Black Suit Blues (for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day)

Wanna go home and burn my black suit
Wanna go home and burn my black suit
Wanna grieve naked
'cause you can't get to Heaven
With your clothes on.

Don't wanna know my destiny
Don't wanna know my destiny
Sorrow shadows me
'fraid mean ole' Fate
Is catchin' up to me.

Don't sink into a sea of despair
Don't sink into a sea of despair
Pray with me and I'll be there
And we will overcome.
"Free at last, Free at last
Thank God Almighty, Free at Last."

'cause he lived out our Dream
'cause he lived out our Dream
They shot him down - Martin Luther King
'an still his spirit sings
They could not kill our king.

4. Thanksgiving

Welcome pilgrims,
I am Clan Mother
Of the sacred land
You will now tread.

On this humble stage
Far from the western sage
Imagine, if you will,
Vast lands, untamed still.

Now we'll talk story
Clothed in musical tones.
Listen with open hearts and ears
To Nature's Soul which we revere.

*

"I'm a Tom Turkey
And I'm feeling quite quirky;
Tomorrow is Thanksgiving Day.
Today is the day to make the hen fatter
Before I pass away.

"I'm a wild turkey,
So I'll puff, I'll strut my stuff
And flaunt my feathers
As all creatures must
In Indian Summer's lust,
Before the hunt
Turns us to Autumn's dust."

"I'm the hen
Sitting is my game,
I am not the game,
My Tom is the one
On whom you should take aim.
Sitting is my way to the divine,
Sitting I wait for the new life of mine."

And so, the day has come,
We give thanks for surviving,
To enjoy the glistening web of life.
This is our earthly paradise

Until the northern white
Blankets nature asleep
Under the blue black night,
The Milky Way shining bright.

*

From Maine to Montana
Man and moose walk down
To the great waters to drink
The rosy shimmering of dawn.

In the snowy deep sleeps the bear
In the warm, hugging night.
Winter is upon us already there
In the crisp, crystalclear air.

And the wolves come down and
Drive the elk into that snowy deep
And the bison roam on the prairie
With the promise of life to keep.

And in the vast prairie lands
Grasses filled with frosty dew,
The grain turned, the soil renewed
The Missouri running true

Look south to where the mountains grow,
Give thanks to yellow Yellowstone
For all creatures to flock, to roam
Above and below yellow Yellowstone.

Look east from the tall, tall Redwood coast
To Colorado Rockies, shining red
Mountains that the cloudbursts bled
Into The Canyon's grand river bed.

And the mighty Mississippi
Floods through the old bayou
Into the great Gulf of bright blue
Where marlin fight man to survive.

The Gulf streams north, cobalt blue
Warming seashores, outer banks too
Where vast schools of fish thrive
Darting and diving to stay alive.

The story will be told, again and again --
The Creator quickens every living thing
Nature's heart is never tamed.
The circle of life will always remain.

*

Mother Earth calls us back
We raise a toast of applejack.
We smoke the peace pipe
We watch the rain and sunlight clash
Into autumn's rainbow rhapsody.

Beat, beat the aspen drum
Dance, dance the harvest dance
Breathe, breathe the sacred chants

Pilgrims all on vision quests.
We sailed from the East
Pioneered to the West
Buscando (Seeking) El Dorado

To learn what natives knew
Where the Indian corn grew,
Beaten into bitter bread.
On their wilderness we fed.

*

Gather together family and friends
Around our fire circles once again.
It's the day to laugh 'til we cry
For "fruitful fields and healthful skies" *
For all of life sublime.
It's Thanks and Giving time.

After our wilderness walk
After the hunt
After the harvest
We gather for our feast
Delicious cuisine of the wild beast.

Our Mother sang us so deep
We loved each other to sleep.
Grateful for our feast of life
We sleep as children do,
Dreaming of where buffalo roam.
We are that dream, we are Home.

“O! The joy!” **

* Abraham Lincoln November 19, 1863, Proclamation establishing the Thanksgiving holiday

** William Clark November 7, 1805, Journal entry when he first viewed the Pacific Ocean