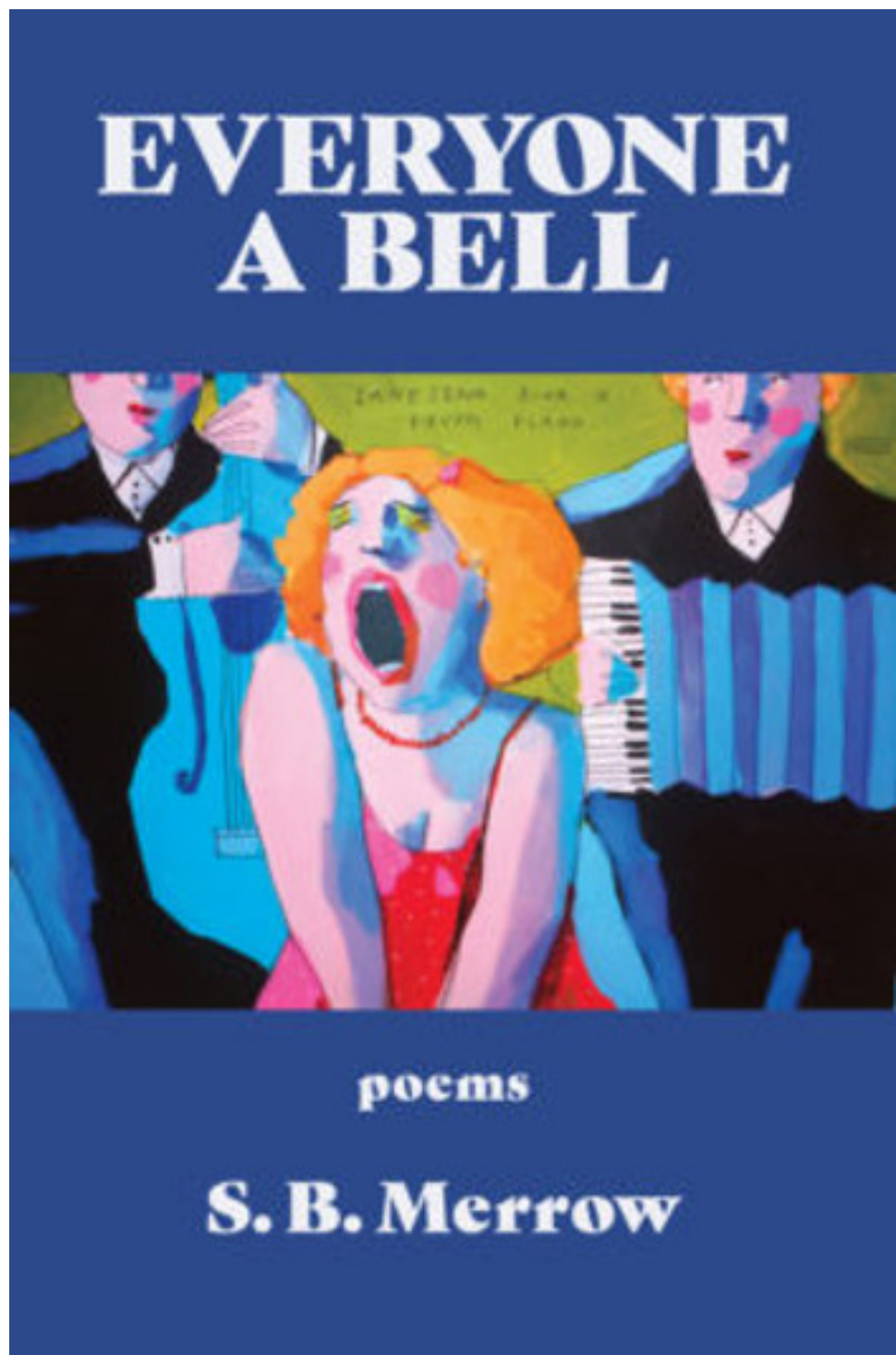


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James Bourey reviews S.B. Merrow’s Everyone a Bell



[Everyone a Bell](#)
By S.B. Merrow
Kelsay Books Inc.
2020

Sometimes, when reading a literary journal or poetry magazine, one comes across a poem that really sticks. It might reverberate with an emotional connection. It might be a masterpiece of craft. Something about the poem is special, so we copy it and file it away with other favorites to be enjoyed again. I was really pleased to open this collection and find *The 100th Birthday Party* which I had once pulled from The Free State Review. I don’t remember the date of the issue as I had just hand copied the piece on a legal pad, underlined *I decorated with twisted ribbons*, and *haters had all died off*, and *The old man remained at the party, settled/ in his barbed spine*, and jotted down FSR. And because of this poem I was immediately engaged in *Everyone A Bell* by S. B. Merrow.

This is a collection of fifty-three poems divided into four untitled sections. The poems deal with a wide range of subjects in a precise and incisive way. Emotion is always subtly shadowing the language, never smacking the reader full-on. Descriptive phrases ring so clearly, and the lines are careful and musical and often intriguing. It’s never “fresh” to say that a poet uses fresh language, but this poet uses everyday language in fresh and unusual ways. Read these opening lines from *Bricolage* aloud –

*Long ago, you adopted a raptor –
with a tinker’s charm, you
summoned its generous wings.*

The linking of *raptor* and *tinker* and *wings* is unusual. Adding *adopted* and *charm* and *generous* brings some brilliant contrast. Then, when we notice *Long ago* and *summoned* we realize that everything has combined to deftly sketch a fairy tale of a poem, perhaps about the memory of a junk collector, or a story heard in childhood. Whatever the drive, the reader is treated to an enchantment. Merrow does this repeatedly throughout the collection. Whether dealing with love or grief or nature or the supernatural, she uses her gift of knowing certain exact words and seeing an alignment of those words that always evokes a picture, some ringing sounds, and an emotional connection. The picture will be multi-dimensional and open to interpretation. The sounds will embellish it all and the emotional connection will have a muted universality. Merrow is a skilled poet.

In a gathering of poets there is always discussion on the importance (or necessity) of titles in poetry. I’m a title lover. For me, a good title can add an extra dimension to a poem. It can help define the poet’s direction or intent. It can, in a few words, provide a setting or hint at a backstory. Sometimes, at a public reading, the title can help to eliminate long (often boring) introductions to poems that need a gentle set-up. Merrow has a gift for titles: “A Puddle of Glitter on the Roof of My House” “Autumn Rot” “Everyone A Bell” “After the Inauguration No One Attended” and my favorite “Building A House Beside Three Trees.” Short, medium, or long this author’s titles are fine gates that help open the poem to a receptive reader.

But this collection is far more than a few clever titles. It is a passage through the days and nights, months, and years of a poetic life. It is a collection reminiscent of poets like Marilyn Taylor, Stephen Dunn, or Susan Rich. If you enjoy clear, interesting, and thoughtful poetry then you should buy this collection.

James Bourey is a poet and reviewer now living on the northern edge of the Adirondack Mountains in New York State. He lived in Delaware for thirty years before this recent move. His chapbook *Silence, Interrupted* was published in 2015 by the Broadkill River Press, and it was selected as best book of poetry by the Delaware Press Association, and also received third place in the same category from the National Association of Press Women. His work has appeared in *Gargoyle*, *Broadkill Review*, *Double Dealer* and other journals and anthologies. His new book is [The Distance Between Us](#).










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