BARBARA RAS

What to Take

From the drummer, take the cymbals, the crash, and hi-hat and walk like you’re shining. From the composer take “water under snow is weary,” sung by young voices in the timbre of wind blowing through the antlers of reindeer.

From the organ-maker take the names of the stops, night horn, vox celeste, and chimney flute, instrumental sustains that theoretically go on forever. Eternity eludes the NRA and ants, who cannot hear, but I swear that following Rachmaninoff’s Second Piano Concerto note for note while rain sledgehammered the road the first time I drove to Swannanoa, got me there safely.

From a gypsy, take any castanets offered, and play them first thing to get you out of bed, despite the news of nine dead in Charleston who invited Dylann Roof into their prayer service at the Emanuel A.M.E. Church where he repeatedly shot the gun, whose one note is death. Take a chance. Take guns away and ask people to hum more, to whistle, if, unlike me, they know how, to talk often, like baby turtles, who start vocalizing inside their eggs.

Every river’s original name was water weeping, water laughing. Take the call of a cricket or a ricochet of crickets, each with its own thumbprint. Take the cry of a bushbaby at night that narrows to next to nothing the distance between it and us, both our wailings scored by loneliness, both shocking the night air, calling for kin, calling for help to perpetuate the species. Take a lesson from the bushbaby with its esoterically large eyes that see what we don’t see, its paws and mouth that eat whatever they kill.