

TONIGHT'S JAM SESSION AT KING DAVID'S HOUSE OF SONG



“Ode to Ella Baker” by Lisa McLymont
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Tonight, up in heaven, along the banks of the River of Life, there's a local watering hole called King David's House of Song. It's a full house, with folks laughing and smiling as they watch the television screens reporting the results of the US elections. Then an old blind black man slowly makes his way through the tables and the people to an upright piano off against the wall, near a small raised stage in the corner.

A few people take notice, and start to poke each other and point to the man heading for the piano. “Shhh . . . Look – *he's* gonna sing tonight.” The old man brushed his fingers across the keyboard, grinned the widest whitest smile at the crowd he could not see, and did just that, slowly dragging out the first line as his fingers ran riffs on the keys before him.

“Oh, beautiful, for heroes proved . . .”

As soon as the first syllable emerged from the old man's mouth, a large black woman smiled and stood. The room parted for her, as she moved past the piano, up onto the stage, and joined her powerful voice to his: ". . . *in liberating strife . . .* "

Two white guys, one a balding blond and the other with graying brown hair, caught each other's eyes, nodded, and grabbed a pair of guitars. Then they joined the woman on the stage, and began to sing the harmony parts: "*who more than self, their country loved . . .*"

Another black man then joined them on the stage, with his trim athletic body and a voice that echoed of the Caribbean, and his hands began beating on a pair of conga drums as he joined the singing: ". . . *and mercy more than life . . .*"

Then a newcomer stepped up, turned to the crowd, raised his hands to conduct, and brought the whole place in right on time as the chorus came around: "*America, America . . .*"

When the song ended, the applause was deafening. When it began to die down, the old man at the piano waved folks to sit.

"Ladies and gentlemen, that was Bernice Johnson Reagon on lead vocals," and the crowd applauded. As it quieted, the old man went on: "Jimmy Buffett and Kris Kristopherson on guitars," and the applause returned again. "Harry Belafonte on drums." More applause, louder, plus a few whistles. "And you can call me Ray" said the old man, grinning again as the cheers and whistles roared once more. "But let's hear it for a newcomer to this joint," said Ray, "Let's give a big King David's House of Song welcome to our conductor this evening, Mr. Quincy Jones!"

The reaction was electric, with waves of cheers and whistles and foot stomping that went on and on and on.

Finally, eventually, slowly, the sound died down, and a small African-American man in the

back stood up with his glass raised. "A toast!" he shouted, and everyone was silent, as they turned and looked to see who it was. Then everyone – including King David himself behind the bar – raised their glasses in anxious anticipation.

Gesturing with his glass toward the television screens, the small man smiled a broad smile that took in the whole bar, and walked over to Harry Belafonte. Then he raised his glass even higher, and said three little words – "To good trouble!" – and **dinged** his glass with Harry's.

"TO GOOD TROUBLE!" the assembly replied, as they all **dinged** their glasses together with each other.

And then the music *really* got going.

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Back in 2007, late on a Friday afternoon at the height of the trial of Scooter Libby and the legendary liveblogging led by Marcy and the crew of Firedoglake, I told a story at FDL:

One of my kid's favorite lines at dinnertime is, "We have to ding!"

It started on a Friday when he was not yet two, and we had finally sat down to dinner at the end of a long week for all of us. Mrs. Peterr raised her glass, I raised mine, and in a quiet, exhausted, but happy voice she smiled at me and said "To the weekend." "To the weekend," I echoed, touching my glass lightly against hers. Then, from the high chair, a little voice chimed in loudly and proudly, punctuating each word with a swing of his sippy cup: "To. The. Weekend! Now ding with me!"

And so it is at our house, especially on Fridays: We have to ding.

The beverages vary widely, from glass to glass and from day to day – juice, wine, water, sparkling cider, beer, milk,

scotch, etc. – and so do the toasts. Some days, we toast each other; other days we toast something great that has happened. Some days, the toasts bring happy thoughts, and on other days, they carry a note of sadness and loss. Some toasts are short, simply naming the person or thing for which we are grateful. Others are longer, and take on Dr. Seuss-like rhymes and rhythms.

The one thing they have in common, though, is a sense of shared gratitude. Mark Twain put it like this: “To get the full value of joy, you must have someone to divide it with.” Science fiction writer Spider Robinson takes Twain one step further: “Shared joy is increased; shared pain is lessened.”

It’s Friday, it’s the end of a rollercoaster of a week, it’s five o’clock somewhere, and we’ve got to ding.

A lot has happened since the Kid first swung that sippy cup. He is now a college graduate and is gainfully employed, Scooter was convicted, then had his sentence commuted, and eventually was pardoned. Dubya gave way to Obama, and then came four years – four long years – of Donald Trump. Four years ago, Biden began the long tough slog of repairing our relationships abroad, as well as our COVID-battered communities here at home.

Now, after four years of Trump plotting to return and wreak vengeance with Republican leaders embracing cowardice and cravenness, tonight is the end of a rollercoaster of a campaign, the polls are closed, and by God we *have* to *ding*.

Raising a glass

To good trouble, and the good troublemakers who make it!

DING

John Lewis is still dead, but the good troublemaking goes on. And we are going to need every bit of it and then some over the next four years.

So what's in your sippy cup, and what's your toast tonight?