

# Millennium Jukebox

ALAN SOLDOSKY

Think we live in dangerous times?  
Consider the 1640s . . . Tell me  
when in the millennium it wasn't mostly a catastrophe.  
Falling towers, yes, and tribes of dark birds  
slowly circling. Repent Now stenciled on breastplates,  
graffitied on orphanages and stone bridges.

Fear, number one on the charts,  
playing in every roadhouse. You can't  
turn down the volume because you don't like  
the music. Every Roundhead on the dance floor  
pushing and shoving. So go on, take  
your sacraments; last rites are guaranteed.

Or you could choose another epoch, say  
1790 or 1970. Although your neck might get caught under  
the blade or splintered by twisted metal. The smell of burnt biosphere  
on the breeze. You traded in your chance to live  
in Nice or San Francisco for a flat in Grozny  
or Belfast or Zagreb, somewhere

night lays siege to the boulevards  
and a yellow fog hunches against the windowpanes.  
Snow scudding over Moscow apartment blocks,  
rain battering Chicago Southside tenements.  
Sand scouring the streets of East Jerusalem.  
Manila filled with debris. Jakarta scorched by lightning.

The rain that floods Tennessee  
sends a man into his burgundy Oldsmobile,  
pushes him straight through to California,  
a hundred miles an hour across the Bay Bridge,  
pursued by the Highway Patrol, tires flattened by a SWAT team,  
driving finally on his rims . Highway 101 closed.

So he douses himself with gasoline and,  
after a four-and-a-half-hour standoff, is shot

with pressurized foam. He said he had  
important things to do. Suppose you  
had wandered out one evening,  
gnats hovering above the embassies of grass,

the dusk the color of car sickness,  
the air smelling faintly wounded,  
and decided you too had had it. What music  
would you bestow upon the customers of the corner café  
you entered, wearing your black skullcap  
and your sash of bullets?

Or would you carry a corsage of fuses  
onto the bus, counting backwards to yourself, ears plugged  
into your Walkman, and watch the dust  
drifting through the fiery sunlight  
as you grasp the sides of your seat, a prayer book  
stuffed like a ticket in your back pocket?

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