

To Ellis Marsalis, Jr. (1934-2020)

From the moment I couldn't breathe
to the moment y'all could not
y'all stood gazing
at my face
for notes of suffering
or clot

D'y'all really think
my metronome
would keep up pace
beepbeepbeepbop
Reassuring
Ode to Health
but look
Joy's got to have some pop

I was a pianist, I'd have explained
Taught jazz before you could talk
Connick
Wynton
Branford – heard 'em?
How about my old friend Cannonball?

Y'all didn't know a man of music
Uses hands to speak his pain, huh

(You'd have seen my fingers, honey,
Learning progressions
to impart)

Now some white coats close my story
Bet a white brother will write my life
But will my sons and grandkids' music
get white knees to end the strife

I don't know

(But I am coming
My Dolores
darling wife)