

David Cope

Remembrance of Miguel via Grand Rapids



Miguel Algarín's poetry and his work with Miguel Piñero and others in founding the Nuyorican Poets Cafe speaks volumes for his commitment to the revealing and healing aspects of the sacred word of the poem and for the deep gift and the great heritage of Borinqueño poetry. I came to his work late, beginning with Spain's Federico García Lorca and the great Chilean poet-diplomat Pablo Neruda, and when I became custodian at my city's key Latinx school, friends there knew of my own poems and showered me with cultural gifts. From Fátima Nieves, I fell in love with the work of Clara Lair's "Tres

Nocturnos de Nueva York," with Julia de Burgos' "Rio Grande de Loíza," and above all with the work of Luis Pales Matos, whose Tuntún de Pasa y Griferia remains a classic volume on my bookshelves to this day. As I designed and prepared to teach our college's first multicultural literature class in 1991, I chose Pedro Pietri's Puerto Rican Obituary, a selection of four of Miguel Algarín's poems from On Call and work by Lorca and Neruda, Que Despierte El Leñador (with my translation of the poem) as a brief introduction to the greatness of Spanish poetry for those just beginning to grasp the revolutions in the art over the last century. I recited this learning curve that I experienced even as I introduced these works to my creative writers and multicultural literature students. I have, over the past decades, learned to appreciate the greater scope of Miguel's work from afar in my home town of Grand Rapids, and to recognize his importance in the awakening and mastery of identity for his countrymen in their struggle to make their way in this nation. From one who never knew him in person, I salute his achievement and historical importance.

David Cope. Born 1948, Detroit. Married 51 years, 3 grown children. Taught Shakespeare, Creative Writing, Multicultural Literature, Women's Studies at Grand Rapids Community College 22 years; school custodian 18 years before that. Pushcart Prize winner, 1977. American Academy/Institute of Arts and Letters literature award, 1988. Nine books published. Editor & publisher, Big Scream magazine, 1974-2021. David's latest book is The Correspondence of David Cope & Allen Ginsberg 1976-1996.