Some Bright Elegance

For the screwfaced in good shoes that paper
the walls of dance halls, I have little patience.
I say dance, not to be seen but to be free, your feet
are made for better things. Feel the bitterness
in you lift as it did for a six year old Bojangles
tapping a living out of Richmond beer gardens
to the delight of a crowd that wasn't lynching
today but laughing at the quickness of the kid.

Throw yourself into the thick, emerging pure
reduced to flesh and bone, nerve and sinew.
Your folded arms understand music. Channel
a packed Savoy Ballroom and slide across
the dusty floor as your zoot-suited twenties
self, the feather in your hat from an Ostrich,
the swagger in your step from the ochre dust
of a West African village. Dance for the times

you've been stalked by store detectives
for a lady on a bus, for the look of disgust
on the face if a boy too young to understand
why he hates but only that he must. Dance
for Sammy, dead and penniless, and for the
thousands still scraping a buck as street corner
hoofers who, though they dance for their food,
move as if it is only them and the drums, talking.

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Part of Poetry 2012 – The Written World
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