

Boss Soul
12 Poems by
Sarah Webster
Fabio
set to
Drum Talk,
Rhythms
& Images



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MUSIC LP

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FOLKWAYS RECORDS FL 9710

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

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BOSS SOUL

Readings by poet Sarah Webster Fabio

Music accompaniment: Cyril Leslie Fabio, congo;

Wayne Wallace, guitar; Michael Holland and Ronald

Fabio, bass. Vocals by Vicki Jordan and Carolyn Fabio.

Narration by Thomas Fabio

Cover photo by Cheryl Fabio

San Francisco State College's "Poetry-in-the-Schools," a National Foundation of the Arts program. The group also performed at the San Francisco Black Expo 1972.

Sarah Webster Fabio began college in the 1940's at Spelman College in Atlanta, Georgia. She was part of a community which included Martin Luther King Jr. and had scholars such as W.E.B. Dubois on campus.

A year after receiving a M.A. Degree in Creative Writing at S.F. State College, she joined Langston Hughes and others in a reading at the First World Festival of Negro Arts, at Dakar, Senegal.

Her poetry is in Hughes & Bontemps Poetry of the Negro, Adam David Miller's Dices & Black Bones, Gwendolyn Brook's A Broadside Treasury. Poetry and writings can also be found in Black World magazine, and her critical essays appear widely, including the New York Times.

She has been in the field of education in northern California since the beginning of the 1960's. In addition to writing poetry and teaching in Black Studies at U.C., Berkeley, and Merritt Community Jr. College, she is a lecturer and a specialist in Black literature and language. She is in the final stages of a book, Black Talk: Soul, Shield, Sword, to be published by Doubleday.

Side I

Poem

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--|
| 1. Work it out | 1. "Melody undecided" |
| 2. Boss soul | 2. Congo accompaniment, Leslie Fabio |
| 3. Soul through a licking stick | 3. "yo granma", vocalists Vicki Jordan and Carolyn Fabio |
| 4. Glimpses | 4. "Nigger Sweat" |
| 5. Fungi and Calalu | 5. A calypso |

Side II

- | | |
|---------------------------|--|
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| 2. A lesson Twice Learned | 2. Drum roll funk |
| 3. Panther caged | 3. "-----" |
| 4. Black Back | 4. "Sheeba's Puppies" |
| 5. Rainbow signs | 5. "-----" |
| 6. A Mover | 6. "Place In the Sun"
Vocal by Vicki Jordan |

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

"Being Black," Oscar Brown, a friend and fellow poet, once said, "is a vigorous exercise of the soul." Sister Sarah Webster Fabio, born in the dawning depression world of a segregated southern ghetto in Nashville, Tennessee, completed her schooling there at Pearl High School and at Fisk University (where she received her B.A. degree).

The oldest daughter of three girls in a family of six children, she was called "Sister." She grew up in a world dominated by three brothers where she alternated between being a lady and a tomboy. In quiet moments, she became a poet at an early age--around seven.

At nineteen, she became the mother of the first of the Fabio brood--Cyril Leslie Fabio. He was soon joined by the others--Thomas, Cheryl, Renee and Ronald. Cyril Fabio, congo player, and Ronald Fabio, bassist, formed the group "Don't fight the feeling." Thomas, actor, is MC and Renee, in live performances, works it out with the latest dance steps. "Boss Soul" is a way of life, which comes with an understating of Black culture, a strong identification with and respect for one's heritage which is a force strong enough to close artificial generation gaps.

The poetry and music (most of it original) in this album was presented live and enthusiastically at Elmhurst Junior High School, an East Oakland neighborhood school, and at Woodrow Wilson High School in the Hunter's Point area of San Francisco. This was made possible through

BOSS SOUL

Notes by S.W. Fabio

Drum talk, moving rhythms, slant/slick rhymes, liberated minds, soaring spirit, having vision filled with concrete images, earthy associations, street idiom, combine to give us the metaphor of what it is to be black here in this time and space as we tell it like it is. Like our music -- our response to time and place in rhythm which is the ritual of our spirits; like our dance -- the ritual of the body; poetry is the ritual of the mind. Soul. Boss Soul.

At the base of Black poetry is the long and highly developed oral tradition of ancient African Culture -- our folklore and folkways which have survived as a part of our cultural heritage. It is a lifeline which extends from the early slave/work songs and religious spirituals and folktales to James Brown's "Staggolee" and Jimi Hendrix's "Dolly Dagger".

An example of Folkmores that has passed through our generations, in a somewhat altered form, is an attitude toward our elders and ancestors which was once called "ancestor worship" and was a part of our religious beliefs. This breaks down to our games of "playing the dozens" which becomes the theme for Langston Hughes' book "Ask Yo Mama".

Echoes of songs of childhood rhymes for work, play and teaching: "Sticks and stones will break my bones but words will never hurt me." With "Yo Grandma" as background, "Soul Through A Lickin' Stick" is about this experience.

We hear a lot about our African heritage and we are now studying the old world culture. This region of the Middle Passage has played an important part in our history. Yes, Slaves were broken in and bartered for on those islands, but many became contraband, showed themselves unfit for an institution like slavery, and then were left to endure the heartier life on the islands. The missing link between what we were when we left Africa and what we were to become in America has many of the answers to the riddles within

these islands far away from Africa but close at hand to our own southern shores.

This music is in 2/4 or 4/4 time, with marked rhythm and syncopation. The natives of this area use homemade instruments of the percussion type one of the better known being the steel drum which are made from old oil cans. The songs are usually dealing with everyday life, or with politics or current events. The Duke of Iron once said that the "first jam session" was probably Calypso. One of his pieces is called "Jam Session" and in it the instruments talk to each other like the talking drums of Africa. They question and answer and resolve arguments. Calypso is the traditional folk music of the Caribbean Islands -- the West Indies -- particularly Trinidad and Jamaica. This is the area of the Middle Passage where our forefathers came through and our distant cousins still live. Some songs like "Don't Touch Her Tomatoe" will take a favorite food item and give it sexual overtones; some describe a good or bad quality about someone or something - can be gossip of badmouthing a person. Some can, like a newspaper, give the current events of the day. Calypso was originally the only method of communication for slaves who could not talk to one another while they worked in the cane fields. These songs then became their way of showing their pleasure or resentment in life. "Fungi and Calalu" is in this tradition.

Words were often used to deny and distort Black reality by the people who sought to oppress and repress and suppress Blacks. Words were used to give license to hurt, to kill. Protest from the Black side has always been a necessity - today as yesterday. It has been necessary as a survival tool.

Drum talk - not always happy talk; sometimes a warrior's call, the military roll spelling out taps for the fallen soldier. Consider "A Lesson Twice Learned" for John John Kennedy, where the violence of our age escaped the Black ghettos where it is usually contained and descended upon the White House occupants during our time.

Black talk has always taken words and images and "broken" or "distorted" them to present their world view, to code a new language which would be foreign to those who could control and repress them. Double talk with two levels of meaning.

Church gospels, praise songs. Sorrow songs, work/slave songs, cries of intense pain or well earned pleasure form the underlining of the soul of Black poetry. "Children get ready for the Train is Coming" or "Follow The Drinking Gourd" as symbolic language, as codes which helped heroines like Harriet Tubman liberate her people by the famous "Underground Railroad."

That's what Black poetry is about. That's what makes it lyrical, instructional, full of passion -- love and concern, anger and hatred, understanding and bitterness. Properly understood, as the human voice capturing in word a graph of a peoples' sojourn on earth at a particular time and place, it is as far ranging and universal as is our black music - better known as jazz.

BOSS SOUL

"Don't Fight the Feeling" has been appearing on the scene in the San Francisco Bay Area including a single performance at the renowned

jazz club Both/And. They have also played at the University of the Pacific, DeAnza Junior College, Nairobi College, they have taken BOSS SOUL into the junior high and high schools of the San Francisco -- and Oakland schools through San Francisco State College's program - "Poetry In the School." With the exception of their arrangement of "Place In the Sun" all other tunes are originals. Two young high school brothers Wayne Wallace, guitar, and Ronald Fabio, bass, co-direct the group and work out the original compositions. On stage Renee Fabio adds a dimension of dance. Thomas Fabio narrates and acts as MC for the group.

Work It Out

Gig Away
Shindig, U.S.A.

Steeled behind big sound,
twanged from livid guitars,
they moan, shout, jerk,
twist and duck --

like, popcorn,
out of sight,
eyes fastened to the tough heat.

Like robots --
bodies spastic
as from deep within
a new force surges;

heads, in concentric circles
of satellite automation,
orbit.

Shaking tail feathers,
they cannot strut --
peacock proud --
must contort on wailing
crowd-mad stages.

They work it out,
this thing they cannot name.
Not knowing if there is
a proper stance
They publicly fidget
in their dance
to ease the terror
of the unknowing.

Tighten it up,
hully gully awhile,
funky chicken,
then Shotgun, chile,

Break on down
Do the boogalu
Make like a penguin,
slopping too.

Breakdown, chillun,
break on down
Do the boogalu,
Make like a penguin,
Slopping too.
Tighten it up,
hully gully, awhile,
funky chicken,
then, Shotgun, chile.

Boss Soul

Is
for-real
love, hate,
"Doing"
the thing,"
moving,
clapping,
boogalooing,
telling
it like
it is,
letting it
it all hang out,
learning
through
living
what
life's
all about;

gut bucket
gospel
spiritual,
jazz
touch
cords of
Feeling
any live
person
has to
tune into
or turn
on to
that
special
deep down
inside-you
thing.

When
an ax
riffs
sad,
drums

beat
bold
flute
pipes
mellow
trumpet
walls
cold -
Oh! yeah
it makes
you
feel
For-real.

In Chi'
there's
a wall
with a
background

of blue
with faces of
black
folk
painted on
who gave
soul
a special
hue -
Malcolm,
Coltrane,
Monk,
Marcus, Stokely,
Sarah,
Nina,
DuBois,
Gwen,
Muhammad Ali,
Aretha, and then
that LeRoI cat.

and his words
built into
OBAC's
wall of
respect
to shout
from the
brick front,
"Black people,
Calling all
black people
wherever you are
Urgent
come on in."

Dig it,
Blood,
You are
what's
happening.
You learned
in your
black ma's
kitchen
the nits
and grits
of-it-corn
crackling,
beans,
greens
hoe cakes,
black eyes
and rice;
cobblers
yams,
sweet
potato
pies,
chittlins
ribs, links,
neck bones
back and snouts
give a
hint -
of what
its flavor
is about.

Being
hip, wise,
weary but
at peace
even when
down
to a
thin dime
but, still

finger
popping
and grooving
in time,
your way
catching
others
grooving
theirs.
Giving
the next
man
his due -
respect,
digging
on everyone
everyone
going
into their
own thing.
Everybody
sing "Amen"
talking about
a whole
lot sa
ever-loving
Soul;
it'sssump'n
else, it's
boss, boss soul.

SOUL
THROUGH
A
LICKING
STICK

My
black Ma
sure knows
her thing;
her scar-face
spoon
is her
big, stick,
and with
this
wooden
sceptre
she rules
her world
with a lick.

In her
backyard
there's no
money tree,
to prune
her switches
from,
but she can
lay as good
a whipping
on your
behind
as if she'd
used
some
Georgia
pine.

Then,
she can
brush off
the bruises
and really
get Down
deep
into her
pot and
cook -
I mean
burn
a lot.

She
whips up
the best
soul food
you've ever had
and her cakes,
pies, and
cobblers,
Man,
they're
really
bad!

Her Ma
and her
Ma's Ma
taught her
all she knows;
they got
their
nits and grits
from
down home
and it
shows.

Anyway
she wields
that stick -
loving like
or bold,
you're
going to
get from that
licking
stick
a whole
lot'sa
SOUL!

Background Song For "Soul Through a Licking Stick"

Chorus:

Yo' Granma tol my Granma
"Yo stir up trouble lak a brew."
My granma tol yo granma,
"lak it or lump it, I always come through."

My black Ma sure knows her thing
Her scar face spoon is her big stick
And with this wooden sceptre,
She rules her world with a lick.

In her backyard, there're no money trees,
to prune her switches from,
but she can lay a whippin' on yo behin'
as if she used some Georgia pine.

Chorus:

Yo Granma tol my granma
"Yo stir up trouble lak a brew."
My Granma tol yo Granma,
"lak it or lump it, I always come through,
lak it or lump it, I always come through,
lak it or lump it, I always come through."

Glimpses
of an Image

Glimpses
of an image
of ourselves, now,
from glints
of our past;
to wear like
a mask of our
black nature
for all to know
us by:

a garmet,
pose,
smile;
a grimace,
stance,
style
tatoos on
oaken souls,
carvings on
mahogany
hearts.

Thinly
veiled,
see the
she-child,
clasping hands,
nimble leap
into ritual dance,
ushering in the
green Spring --
so young,
fresh,
firmly planted
those patterning
feet on the drumming
earth.

enrobed,
see Hannibal,
Othello,
and shades
like ivy along
the walls of
Timbuktu;
regally sunning

in embellished
courtyards of
Cairo and
Addis Ababa
And behind them,
the splendor
of the Pyramids,

Enjewelled,
splendidly,
and perfumed
see Aida,
Cleopatra
and Sheba.

See
in moonlit
glimmer those
middle passages,
bruised with
pain on slave
ships, in dungeons;
smouldering in
torrid tombs of
Western
industrial
nightmares,
buried in the cotton
coffins
of the
South.

Glimpses of
a memorable
past; fragments
of the dimmed
soul of a people
of destiny
to fix as an
image to
mirror us
in our
Negritude --
our collective
Afro based
consciousness.

Nobly,
irrevocably,
we emerge
to become
who we are
and we are
black,
beautiful,
precious,
proud.

Don't Bother Up My Fungi An Calalu

Chorus:

Fungi and Calalu
Fungi and Calalu
Whatever else you do
Don't bother up my fungi and calalu.

1st verse:

Don't bother up my fungi and calalu,
I can handle whatever else you do.
Troubling time, I can drag me self through
As long as I got fungi and calalu.

Chorus: (repeat)

2nd verse:

You can be pretty or ugly as sin.
Start brawling, 'n guess who'll win?
Don't care about you carousing all night,
But, bothering up my food'll start a fight.

Chorus: (repeat)

3rd verse:

Don't want any lumpy fungi, woman,
Don't want stalks in my calalu, hear me man,
Stuff me pot with conch 'n crab, what you say,
Hot peppers and okra enuf' to season okay.

Chorus: (repeat)

4th verse:

Kin folk coming back home on plane 'n' boat,
Get a feast when we kill and Bar-B-Cue goat.
Breadfruit, mangoes, we bring canaps galore,
We wine then 'n' dine them when they hit the
shore.

Chorus: (repeat)

5th verse:

I take me Doctor Fish, it's good for what
ails me
Sugar apples, 'n tamarinds, I pick from
the tree,
Soursop 'n' papaya, I take straight lak
my rum,
Cocanuts, 'n passion fruit when I need some.

Chorus: (repeat twice)

After Birmingham, They March
For Martin Luther King

They mark time,
now, with blunt booms;
bomb-blastening, already
they have drowned out
Sunday-suited silences.

Lamely, they forsake
summer struts, preening
in well-pruned parks:

some take up arms and
spill out into the
overflowed streets of
despair and discontent,
into the gutters, brimming
with our great waste,
rain slickened and
still swelling.

Boldly postured, others
testily move forth in
concert mood; grimaced in
pained contortions
of song, with locked hands,
keeping abreast, steadily
they march

A Lesson

Twice Learned
Never To Be

Forgotten For John John Kennedy

John, John,
See, see the ceremony's on,
Hear, hear, the drum roll swell,
Salute another passing soldier,
Learn, learn your lesson well.

Once there was a warrior,
Whose heart and flowed red
Who stood to cheer his people,
And gunshot felled him dead.

This man had a brother,
Who rose as did the first,
And as he neared victory,
Gunshot his life dream burst.

Other brave ones of our time-
Malcolm, Martin, Medgar-
Stood, as men, to be counted
Gunshot felled them forever.

John, John
See, see the ceremony's on.
Hear, hear, the drum roll swell.
Teach, teach the young to suffer:
You've learned your lesson well.

Panther Caged

For Huey Newton, chairman for self
defense Black Panther Party

Caged -
within the
prisons of our
lust, greed, madness
one one side
of the bars,
and on the other
within the sanctuary
of cells of solitary
confinement --
we,
at last,
must come
face-to-face.

You of the clear,
dark piercing eyes
peering in on us,
and, in the calm
aspect of your
pointed visage,
judging us for
what we are --
guilt ridden,
confused, fearsome,
cowardly and
criminally silent,
sitting fat
amidst the wars
of violence and
abject poverty.

Huey --
idol of
America's clear-eyed
youth --
you who have
dared to take up
arms against the
evils of our times,
what can you see
that we cannot
that would prompt
you to make --
barely visible --

A sign with
upthrust fingers
of V for victory?
and this with a
transcendent
flicker of a smile?

Panther --
proud, black,
brave, beautiful --
cornered,
you have lived
true to the nature
of your origin.
And, in our
piggishness,
is what you see
a sign that we
also are living
true to our own?

Black Back

Back
Home again
Black back
all the way
back
Black. Dig.
Back into
my own thing.
Check it out.
Black from
the tips
of my black
kinks
to the
hard earth-caked
soles of my feet.
Dig.
To the
bruised
dark blood
of my being;
to the
core of my black
soul,
dig.
And the black eye
of my
i-

magination,
to the black
i-
mage of
my God,
to the
black
i-
dea
of beauty
and wisdom
flowing
naturally
from
this
black
thing.
dig.
Check it out.

I'm
Black
again
back
Black,
Black
back.

Check it out.
Be Black
back
Be back
Black
Check it out.
Be back
Black
now
Black
back
now.
check it out.
Dig.

Rainbow Signs

They will appear
in the moist air
after the earth
has been primed
with rain,
these gossamer
rainbow signs.....
water, water everywhere
but where is the cup to drink?
Water, water everywhere
sky turning from blue, mauve, to pink.

Yeah--
they're almost
anywhere you look
spreading prisms
Of light
around the moon
at night,
arching the sun
in the afternoon,
eclipsing dark clouds
at daybreak.
Look for them and
they are there
about you everywhere.
We who are on the ark,
our beings singed by fire,
ask for the cooling waters,
ask for the calming rain;

take away the fire-lust,
take away the fire,
send down the cooling waters,
send down the cooling rain,
give us, again, the rainbow sign,
give us, again, the rain.

sarah webster fabio

A Mover

(A Montage in Memory of Langston Hughes
Who For Almost A Half-Century Was Acknowledged
Dean of American Negro Poets and The
Spiritual Father Of The Race, May, 1967)

Moving
in an earthy
way like
clover in the
wind, carrying
with it the flavor
of oak, sawdust, thyme,
Burlap, tobacco, beer,
turnips, sassafras,
honeysuckle and
wildly luscious
lemons and lime:

mushrooming,
like shanty towns
with outhouses
warmly facing South,
and junky joints
pulsing in a
profusion of
downhome beats
beamed from the
United Ghettos of
America--home of
the black native
sons.

Moving
like old shoes
wearing faces of
simple souls scuffling
through their daily
existences in the complex
worlds of the dark
Harlems; like
a river cutting

new beds, wasting
vast banked walls,
twisting and turning
toward a new course--

deepening with the years;
sometimes widening,
sometimes narrowing,
sometimes drying up
exposing a naked,
sunbaked, rough
raw clay.

Moving
in a folksy way
like the parson's
sermon filled with
fire and brimstone
and peace in a valley
lulled by Solomon's songs
to a dream deferred
which rots, explodes,
and dries up like
"a raisin in the sun";
like the son
who learns where its at
through weatherlipped
words of a mother
as she reveals the
metaphor of her life,
succinctly, with a
headshake and admission,
"Life for me ain't
been no crystal stair."

Moving
like a Ray Charles'
blues number where
while droning a syncopated
tune it cries the light
of tears bright enough
to make a blind man
see;
like a merry-go-round
swirling forever on
in carousel gaiety
for all but one lonely
girl who watches from
the sidelines, wishing
with all her heart to
join the ride, but
demanding to know
at the onset,
"where is the seat
for a child who's
black?"

sarah webster fabio

Photo courtesy of the
Oakland Post newspaper,
Grover Cleveland



Lecturer, Division of Afro-American Studies, Department
of Ethnic Studies, University of California, Berkeley.
Created the Language Arts program including subjects:
From a Black Perspective (Fall, 1968); Afro-American
Literature classes as follows: Black Rhetoric (Fall, 1969);
Afro-American Literature--Fiction (Winter, 1970); Black
Poetry (Spring, 1970). Also created the University of Cal-
ifornia's Black Writers' Workshop (Fall, 1970) and served
as Black writer-in-residence for the school year (1969-70).
Instructor (part time) California College of Arts
and Crafts since 1969 where she initiated a Black Studies
curriculum to serve the needs of the visual artist in the
fields of Black Literature and Black Heritage.
Instructor (part time) Berkeley Unified School Dis-
trict, In-service training for staff in History and Cul-
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