

JOHN FOX REVIEWS

The Art of Listening: *An Anthology of Listening-Themed Poetry and Visual Arts* Edited by Linda Eve Diamond

People living in the world need this magnificent book, *The Art of Listening: An Anthology of Listening-Themed Poetry and Visual Arts*. I wish a reader did not have to know English. Besides that fact, this book, the poetry and art within it, hold the key to living in a world infused with love and beauty, attention and truth, hope and possibility, magic and daily life, humor and compassion, fragility and the entire ocean of experience.

Writing this appreciation is a challenge because what Linda Eve Diamond accomplishes is true greatness.

How can I express a sense of greatness? Praiseful adjectives don't do justice to something that is so alive and made to burst free from our ways of thinking about life—even when those ways are good and life-giving.

When scrolling through this exquisitely designed online anthology, I become aware that Linda Eve's keen attention is given with freshness to each page of this anthology—so that the page vibrates with life-force and brings honor to each individual expression.

I want to announce here and now that this downloadable book is available for FREE:

bit.ly/LEDArtOfListening

The vision of this book will expand and energize your relationship to listening—to music, art, photography, nature. Listening to artistry, social justice, spiritual realities and the splendidly unique individual differences. Listening to one another—and especially the inner listening that teaches a person about their limitations and possibilities.

The Art of Listening, with depth and clarity, touches upon the complex layers present in the experience of listening. These layers come through because several contributors of art and

poems are asked by Linda Eve to say what is underneath their capacity to listen. This “underneath” illuminates and grows the whole fertile ground of listening.

This ground of listening shows up in a well-known poem I've written that is in this anthology. Here is its last stanza, and I invite you to feel this listening ground underneath your feet:

When someone deeply listens to you
your bare feet are on the earth
and a beloved land that seemed distant
is now at home within you.

Listening is more than a positive regard of one person to another—it is that—but listening is also a multi-dimensional and deeply-rooted practice that taps into ancestral voices and history, intuition, and silence.

SILENCE

Listen. Do you hear it? Hands signing space.
Ears turned into tuning forks. That barest
of hums.

Can I write so you hear it?

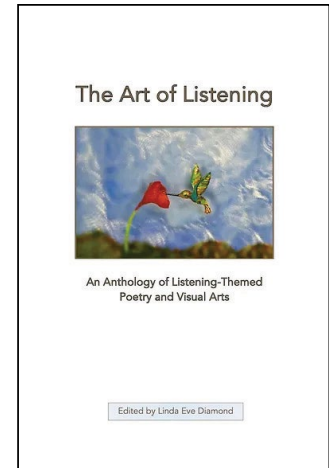
That slight high-pitched crackle. Autographs
of air recorded on cheeks. Harmonies of
stories wandering the wind.

Listen. Shhhh. Listen.

Listen with me to silence.

I crave it. Then I will be quiet and listen to you.

Linda Albert from The Art of Listening



A tangible expression of this layered nature of listening is found in the many Artist Statements included. I wrote about listening layers in my Poetic Medicine Artist Statement:

“We are confident that deep listening—along with being a generous and polite act, more than even being a therapeutically wise approach—is a **generative element of engaging a creative relationship.**”

The generative evocation that results from listening is a gift of this book. I hope you will travel this journey. You will discover, by deeply listening and paying attention, by interacting with and turning poems over in your heart, how connections are made page-by-page and step-by-step.

Brenda Ueland wrote profoundly in her 1936 book, *If You Want to Write*:

“Listening is a magnetic and strange thing, a creative force. When we are listened to, it creates us, makes us unfold and expand. Ideas actually begin to grow within us and come to life. When we listen to people there is an alternating current, and this recharges us so that we never get tired of each other...and it is this little creative fountain inside us that begins to spring and cast up new thoughts and unexpected laughter and wisdom. Well, it is when people really listen to us, with quiet fascinated attention, that the little fountain begins to work again, to accelerate in the most surprising way.”

The “alternating current” and “creative fountain” are layers that breathe, they are made manifest in this living book. You will learn by experience how to be an excellent listener.

Layers are found in the work of The Good Listening Project led by Jenny Hegland. Trained “listener poets” bring their attention to stories of those they serve in healthcare and from that considered listening, write poems given to those who are listened to. There is the microscopic sculpture of Willard Wigan which will first shake and then vitalize your perception of what being present in this world means. A beautiful section shows an extraordinary

layer of how listening happens for the deaf with a poem *Magic* by Hiram Larew, translated into American Sign Language. You can see that sign language presented as a link.

There are so many delightful surprises in *The Art of Listening*. We learn through brilliant photographs that listening is full of color and motion, light and imagery. You’ll find humor via cartoons that pop up through these pages. You get to savor how a good laugh—a kind of WD-40 that lubricates the sometimes serious practice of listening.

Like WD-40, I have found that a child helps us to make listening a great discovery. Twenty-seven years ago, I asked a group of 5th graders to tell me what they knew about listening. Here is one of the responses:

You can listen anywhere.
Your mind might not want to go.
If you can listen, you can find
answers to questions you didn’t know.

Nick Penna, 11 years old
from his poem “Waiting in Line”

Nick Penna deeply understands the paradox that “You can listen anywhere,” and at the same moment we often find listening a difficult thing to practice. His line, “Your mind might not want to go,” is one of my favorite lines of all time and the ones that follow, “If you can listen, you can find / answers to questions you didn’t know,” are among the most remarkable bits of wisdom I have ever heard.

Perhaps what I love most about *The Art of Listening* is the inclusive, wide-ranging sensitivity that was given to create it. This feels like magic yet that magic is made by a person: Linda Eve Diamond.

She and I are pilgrims on a journey that brings us into the temples of listening. Besides having a handful of my poems in this book, Merna Ann Hecht, leader of Stories of Arrival, Immigrant and Refugee Youth, a poetry project and Bahareh Amidi are included.

I hope you will share what this great book offers: bit.ly/LEDArtOfListening. ■