

Sweetgum & Lightning / Rodney Terich Leonard

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Arriving at the intersection of jazz and the written word, these poems demand to be experienced and felt

"With the vernacular of Zora Neale Hurston and the music of Leontyne Price, Rodney Terich Leonard honors the past while addressing the present moment in *Sweetgum & Lightning*. Take your time taking these poems in; they're meant to be sung aloud. As you listen, what you'll hear is what happens when the spirit is captured on the page. When the news of the day is too much to bear and we can't find the words, be grateful for this poet, who arrives when, 'We need somebody to sing us, at least, a song.'"

—A. Van Jordan

"Rodney Leonard's *Sweetgum & Lightning* is a cascade of image and song, charged by a voice that can pivot from reverence to gleeful vulgarity inside a single line. In these elegies, flashbacks, odes, indictments, riffs, and adorations we find a self engaged in constant revision yet remaining steady: 'I just wanna be jumpseat & aero in my own // historical zoom.' As much as this book looks to the past, there's no coasting on nostalgia here. 'The past / creeps wild / in my eyes,' and memory 'lurks & it forgives,' but Leonard is no lurker; even when he seems to be observing from somewhere off to the side, he's at the center of the action. He stacks his lines with the accoutrements of queer desire, a gesture of both affirmation and subversion—in other words, a show of strength..."

—Mark Bibbins

Rodney Terich Leonard was born in Nixburg, Alabama. An Air Force veteran who served during the Gulf War, his society profiles and poems have appeared in *Southern Humanities Review*, *Red River Review*, *The Huffington Post*, *BOMB Magazine*, *The Cortland Review*, *Indolent Books-What Rough Beast*, *Four Way Review*, *The New York Times*, *The Amsterdam News*, *The Village Voice*, *For Colored Boys...* (anthology edited by Keith Boykin) and other publications. He holds degrees from The New School, NYU Tisch School of the Arts and Teachers College Columbia University. A Callaloo poetry fellow, he received an MFA in Poetry from Columbia University and currently lives in Manhattan.