

ELIZABETH LINDSEY ROGERS

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鼓浪屿 (gǔ làng yǔ)

*in Fujian Province, also known  
as "The Island of Pianos"*

To learn the God  
of an island, I listen first

for his hammers:  
here, the thimble-drop

of bougainvillea, and mollusks  
clicking in silver bowls.

Boats, a row of Dutch  
shoes clap, hull

against hull—along  
the reef, what is heard

as timpani: 鼓浪屿, gǔ làng yǔ—  
鼓 *drum*, 浪 *wave*, 屿 *islet*.

Once, *eyelet*: Sunday's lace  
and *swish*

when white ladies  
landed, arms buried

under hymnbooks.  
They came with pianos

to dolly-up the island  
hills, and to form

chorales from orphans,  
mining belief

like ore. Faith, quick to cull

in a sturdy room  
of sound—everyone can love

4/4, the easy symmetry  
in hymns.

My shadow grows a train  
as I wander, wrap around

porches—and snake through  
alleys, where Tuscan villas

mold and yellow.  
Moon-shaped gates

are the old rings  
to someone's garden—and over trees

Koxinga stands on a peak  
in granite armor.

喵喵: *miāo miāo*  
a peacock shrieks, splays

his tutu of evil eyes.  
Is this some sign

for death? *Foreigner*,  
I can't read his note

in full. Does he know  
about the first boy

trained on mutes and levers,  
then sent by foot to tune

against the island's brackish  
air? Once, some learned

arpeggios; others,  
fog and opium. A few climbed

cliffs and leapt, gave up  
their bodies for water.

If there *is* a key  
for this blue

island, it might be  
B major—both gilt

and dark somehow,  
what drifts now

from the open window:  
someone loves Chopin's

third nocturne, even  
in the height of day.

As I leave, I pass a school

where children clink  
the first of their scales.

*Zhǔ!* From their teacher,  
the only syllable

I can register. I think  
it is the *zhǔ* that means

*concentrate; join together.*  
Or was it the other one:

*god; master?* Nuance:  
all but the ferry's siren

dampens, meets the deaf  
in my ear.