

Strayhorn's "Chelsea Bridge" (Webster/Mulligan)

by Con Chapman

I park my car on the bridge but
before leaving for the train, I sit
and listen to the opening bars of
Strayhorn's "Chelsea Bridge."



Something fluttering, as if
on the wing—a delicate thing—
it ascends from below,
from the baritone,
a virile voice among the reeds,
and above it, a tenor note floats.

Three men produced this thing,
yet it is delicate as a doily,
and for all that—masculine, resigned.
One imagines the bridge off in the distance
through fog, the sun coming up or going
down over a drowsy town.

And then the verse; a stroll across the span
by a preoccupied man who, when he is done,
looks up from his introspection to see
the sun, the first or last light of the day.

The chorus is a melancholy enlightenment;
this is all I have, he thinks, the only
transcendence I'll get out of this day.
I should seize it while I can.

I turn off the car, and take my bags down
to the platform. To the east, the sun lights up
the iron rails with rays of orange that
splice across the blackish tracks.

