ForeWord Reviews
Clarion Review

POETRY

From My Mouth to Your Ear: Original Works of Poetry
Michelle Fleming-Bendo
978-1-4259-6692-8
Three Stars (out of Five)

You are not to be walked on, spit on, ridiculed or discounted. —from "Hopeful"

A certain kind of valued friend senses the need for encouragement and leaves an unexpected note where they know you'll stumble on it. Michelle Fleming-Bendo's poems are offered up with exactly that intention. Her work as a drug rehabilitation counselor reinforced a belief in the importance of validation; by accepting it for herself, she offers a serving all around. These pieces ring of wanting and satisfaction, of stardom fantasies and praise for the grounded life. Emotion is embraced rather than subverted, including the release of a good ol' cry.
I am an emotional junkie / I feel to be alive, to remind myself that I am made up of more than / just bones and blood

The pieces which differentiate themselves from a fairly even pack are lighter, as in "Speak!" a piece on the unnatural practice of speed dating: *We're encouraged to talk but warned to limit ourselves to the / Reader's Digest version — being as condensed as humanly possible* and conversely of leaden seriousness, as in the wrenching first person voice of "Innocence Lost": *Ouch / That hurts / No one is / Supposed to / Touch me / There*

The depressive aura so often dominant in first poetry collections doesn't materialize; instead we're afforded unguarded passes at a woman succeeding in her determination to find the value in people and in herself. If any personal fault is revealed, it's a background dose of vanity. A preference for everyday speech means that one need not be an expert in literary cryptography to crack into the meanings. The needle on the cliché meter ticks upward every so often, but the incidence is less than newsworthy in severity. Some readers will find recurring subjects tinted with sentimentalism, others will like the primary emphasis on things close to home.

If the function of a living poetry is communication, *From My Mouth to Your Ear* fulfills that function without cluttering the lines with unneeded indirection or symbolism. We are so accustomed to hearing complaints and poor-me lamentations that the expression of thankfulness is the next thing to revolutionary, whether for friendship, steady love, meaningful work or parental lessons on strength of character. In "Sacrifice," Fleming-Bendo asks, *What would make you sit up and take notice?*

The fact that she really cares about the answer tells us that she’s in a good place, and only bound for better.