

THE SOLDIER, THE WIFE AND THE  
BUM (1990)

I was a bum in San Francisco but once managed  
to go to this symphony concert among the well-  
dressed people  
and the music was good but something about the  
audience was not  
and something about the orchestra  
and the conductor was  
not,  
although the building was fine and the  
acoustics but  
I preferred to hear the music alone  
on my radio  
and afterwards I did go back to my room and I  
listened on the radio but  
then there was a beating on my wall:  
"SHUT THAT GOD DAMNED THING OFF!"

there was a soldier in the next room  
living with his wife  
and he would soon be going over there to pro-  
tect me against Hitler so  
I snapped the radio off and then heard his  
wife say, "you shouldn't have done that."  
and the soldier said, "FUCK THAT GUY!"  
which I thought was a very nice thing for him  
to tell his wife to do.  
of course,  
she never did.

anyhow, I never went to another live concert  
and I always listened to the radio very  
quietly, my ear pressed to the  
speaker.

war had its price and millions of young men  
everywhere would die  
and as I listened to the classical music I  
often heard them making love, desperately and  
mournfully, through Shostakovich, Brahms,  
Mozart, crescendo, climax, then the shared  
walls of our  
darkness.

— Charles Bukowski

San Pedro CA