

## In Praise of Albert's Garden On Its 50th Anniversary

Like a timid monarch butterfly  
emerging from my sheltering-in-place  
cocoon—viewing the aftermath  
of a virulent pandemic war—  
I witness a city reinventing itself  
scrambling for a tangible identity  
as streets slowly repopulate  
with a languid reawakening  
by citizens grasping for answers  
of what's next in this new normalcy  
where familiarity has disappeared.  
Many storefronts empty, skyscraper  
offices barren of former workers—  
medical personnel exhausted  
zapped from the horrors of the day—  
with faces covered with worn masks  
to protect from virus variants  
plaguing a divided nation  
just when we had prospects  
for final resolution  
out of this universal nightmare.  
It is no wonder—New Yorkers  
seek a place for rejuvenation  
struggling to make sense  
of these disastrous current events  
which baffle and often confound.  
However, I'm sadly reminded  
I dwell in a city with amnesia  
where history often repeats itself—  
cognizant of this truism  
strolling through the welcoming gate  
of Albert's Garden—a brilliant miracle  
of the East Village, envisioned  
fifty years ago in 1971  
by founders Albert Eisenlau  
Louise Kruger and Ben Wohlburg—  
along with a dedicated contingent  
of fierce neighborhood activists  
who could foresee—*beauty*  
was a necessary ingredient  
to pacify from the challenges  
of their lives in a broken society  
fractured in the calamitous 1970s  
as America was recovering

from the ravages of the Vietnam War—  
the Big Apple threatened by bankruptcy  
and the Lower East Side tattered  
with neglected tenement buildings  
ripe with drugs and decay; a plethora  
of social problems begging solutions.  
Yet—these focused Village visionaries  
realized a simple abandoned lot  
full of garbage and rotting junk  
had transformative possibilities  
of birthing a community garden  
to spruce up the urban decline all around.  
Little by little, Albert and his comrades  
tirelessly removed wagon loads of debris  
while scraping through layers of concrete  
to the pure soil of earth itself—  
painstakingly preparing the space  
to eventually plant lush perennials  
as precious water was sourced  
from a hose attached to a fire hydrant.  
With much labor and sweat over years  
an architectural landscape emerged  
with a cemetery wall bordering  
full of local souls reposing behind  
keeping company with their neighbors  
of green bushes and serene shrubs  
planted around tall leafy trees.  
As time passed, paths were carved  
becoming a maze of mulch and sod  
and a rainbow of blooming flowers  
lovingly orchestrated for every season  
giving this inner-city wilderness  
a symphony of radiant Technicolor.  
A sculpted birdbath installed—to attract  
a variety of appreciative birds  
providing a natural soundtrack of song.  
Benches placed for weary feet to rest  
under delicate undulating branches.  
Eventually, this well-crafted oasis  
evolved into a spectacular shade garden  
to keep bodies comfortably cool  
from the blazing sun peeking  
through limbs whistling in wind.  
A creation of collective love  
by devout volunteers who fought  
conquering bureaucratic landmines

strategically placed by real estate developers  
anxious to exchange caladiums and tulips  
with pricey high rise condominiums.  
But, integrity and perseverance prevailed  
with Manhattan Land Trust formed  
for protection of a collection of gardens  
insuring a continuum of tranquility  
for this sacred Eden just off the Bowery.  
So it's appropriate to sound trumpets  
and beat tambourines and drums  
to celebrate the glorious longevity  
of this halcyon haven of pastoral peace—  
affirming that social action long ago  
by zealous and determined denizens  
made a difference for future generations  
despite the ever changing vicissitudes  
of the chaotic world swirling around.  
I salute you Albert's Garden.  
Let us sing songs of joy and triumph  
for your half-century existence.  
Here's to another fifty years!

Davidson Garrett

Davidson Garrett is an actor and poet. His poetry has been published in *The New York Times*, *The Episcopal New Yorker*, *Xavier Review*, *The Stillwater Review*, *2 Bridges Review*, *First Literary Review East*, *Sensations Magazine*, *The Ekphrastic Review*, and *Podium*, the literary journal of the 92<sup>nd</sup> Street Y. He is the author of two poetry collections: *King Lear of the Taxi*, published by Advent Purple Press, and *Arias of a Rhapsodic Spirit*, published by Kelsay Books.