

## Goodreads review of “As If” by Michael St. Paul

The cover photo of Tina Schumann’s prize-winning chapbook, “As If,” is beautiful, direct, and impossible to ignore. The blare of blue sky, the bold white letters like clouds, the pointed roof near the bottom. The title itself speaks to possibilities (as if this, as if that) and also gives a nod to a youthful sarcasm (sure, whatever, as if). But in no way are these poems immature or aimless. They are confident, solid, and give way to a momentum, a velocity as if each line of verse therein had jumped right off the roof of that eye-catching cover.

In “As If” we have a poet completely in her element. The voice/tone is consistent, strong, and each poem communicates with the others. Wait, let me rephrase...voice/tone doesn’t seem quite right in describing what we have here...attitude is more like it. This book dishes it out without being confrontational, subversion and surprise on every page. The pace/cadence is superbly controlled by intelligent line breaks (which may surprise the reader as these lines can be ridiculously long, the poems bulky, yet it’s all masterfully done), enjambments, and the musicality of Schumann’s diction. She is part Whitman, part prophet of the Americana. Not many poets I know can be both heartbreaking and funny, but Schumann manages to walk the line between grief and guffaw.

Some favorite lines of mine include: “those no-good hours between two and four / when every failure rushes in—every folly confirmed,” “And 4:00 am / is full of 4:00 am,” “As it is, you make believe—that is, as if,” “I am as flat and dumb as the kitchen floor.” I admit these aren’t even the strongest lines in the chapbook, but they just tickled me. But instead of me quoting Schumann, just go out and buy the book. It’s worth it.

Generally speaking, Schumann’s poetry is not exactly “the type” of poetry I read. But the authenticity of the speaker, the charm and unpretentious intelligence and insight, the sheer gusto...well, I couldn’t help myself, I was caught up in it. This chapbook feels so complete, unified, and sure of itself it almost reads like a full-length (which I have no doubt will be forthcoming). It is dense, but Schumann sure as heck isn’t.

If there are any flaws in the work, I would say they come at the very beginning and the very end of the poems. I’m not overly excited about her titles, and I’m not overly excited about some of her endings. Some poems end on a decrescendo when I feel maybe they could have ended on a high note. Or the endings feel somewhat staccato. However, this is a relatively minor thing considering the overall strength of the manuscript. I’m sure enough reviewers will disagree with me to make my point null and void; I’m sure Schumann would disagree with me as well. And if she were ever to email me, something tells me she’d convince me I was wrong.