

Three Men Dancing on a River Shore

(Ch'ing Dynasty Serving Platter, Blue-and-White Porcelain)

for Tim Buckley and Tracy McCallum

by John Balaban

In the background, you can see the city they left behind
when they crossed the river to dance on this shore,
three gentlemen in mandarin robes and scruffy beards
now jigging on the sand under pines and willows
accompanied by hired musicians on trumpet, flute
and drum, and one plying a squeeze-box of some kind
for these scholars waving their hands above their heads,
kicking up sand in a dharma field of friendship, their
getting to the other side, as Buddhist say.

Three men dancing. Not drunk, just immensely amused
knowing that soon enough there would be only the wind
shushing its sad music through these pines on empty shore.