

JEFF FALLIS

*Marvin Gaye Sings "The Star-Spangled Banner"*  
(N.B.A. All-Star Game, Los Angeles, February 13, 1983)

Aviator shades  
shading dark eyes,  
suit conservative,  
he strides up to center  
court and touches the mike  
with the half-funky  
drum beat already  
booming forth from  
the P.A. Before  
he's hit a note,  
there's already risk  
in the air, this sense  
of exploratory grace  
that only deepens when  
he sings the first few bars  
way down low,  
soft, slow, and soulful.  
Somehow the song,  
hard to sing in the first  
place, seems a new  
thing, a new body  
with new blood,  
full of air and open  
space, wounded and healed.  
You don't know  
where he's going with it,  
and what's exciting is that  
it sounds like he doesn't  
know either. The ramparts,  
the broad stripes, the bright  
stars, the twilight's  
last gleaming, the bombs  
bursting in air, all

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alive and open to oxygen  
again. The crowd gets  
more into it  
as he goes along; they whoop  
and holler when he nails  
the high notes, and by  
the end he's won over  
the entire Forum, Doctor  
J included. It's  
a gorgeous moment, and Marvin,  
coke-sick and exhausted,  
basks in the warm applause,  
gives 'em a grin, won't  
take off his shades.