

Keshovati
solo flute

PROGRAMME NOTES

1. *The King*
2. *The Six Queens*
3. *The Separation*
4. *The Reunion*

The story of the Champa flower first came to the composer's attention when she set Rabindranath Tagore's poem 'The Champa Flower' for a set of songs called *Mother and Child*. In Tagore's delightful poem he is a child who imagines what it would be like to change himself into a champa flower and hide from his mother. This aroused the composer's curiosity about the importance of the champa flower itself, and when she enquired into its origins, she was given two different verbal accounts of the Bengali folk tale concerning the sons and daughter of a King and Queen who underwent a magical transformation into champa and parul flowers. She then wrote her own narrative to accompany the four musical interludes for solo flute.

It is possible to perform *Keshovati* without speaking the narrative, though in such a case it is suggested that the text be reproduced in the programme notes. The short musical phrase for the flower speech can be replaced by a short passage in multiphonics of the performer's choice if the flautist is fluent in that technique. A multiphonic effect is required in the fourth movement 'The Reunion' where indicated to create an unstable chordal effect rather than only sounding the higher octave.

Keshovati was commissioned by the Australian flautist, Mark Underwood, who requested a theatrically based work. He gave the world premiere in Reading, UK on 29 November 2002.

Narrative:

Many years ago on the plains of Rajshahi there lived a King!

[The King: solo flute]

The King had seven Queens but the youngest Queen was the fairest and kindest of them all and was given the name Keshovati because of her lovely long hair.

The King had everything he could wish for, a palace with four hundred rooms, many elephants, silk and jewels, but alas he had no children. One day Keshovati brought him the news that she would bear a child in the spring. The other six Queens, far from joining in the celebrations, seethed with jealousy and fuelled each other's bitterness.

[The Six Queens: flute solo]

Spring arrived but unfortunately the new infant and its mother had been left in the none too tender care of the other Queens. They told the mother the newborn had the appearance of a hideous creature. Rather than risk the wrath of the King they had thought it best to have it removed and buried. The King's love for his Keshovati did not die and she bore him six more sons and a daughter, but all the children suffered the same fate as the first. Keshovati had now lost the bloom of youth, and grief had ravished her beauty. Despair finally overcame the King too. His beloved Keshovati's face now only reminded him of his own anguish and he banished her from his Kingdom.

[The Separation: flute solo]

The years passed and the King's wealth continued to grow as did the size of his palace and the magnificent gardens, but no children ever came to play in them. Mali, the King's gardener, came to visit the fragrant flowers every day to collect fresh flowers for Puja and was surprised to find seven beautiful champa flowers and one delicate parul flower growing in a wild, uncultivated part of the palace grounds. As he reached out to pick the flowers they lifted themselves high up beyond his grasp and spoke...

[Flower music: solo flute multiphonics]

Parul flower said: "Seven little brothers wake up, wake up. The King's gardener has come to pick the flowers. Shall we give him the flowers?" Her brothers replied: "No, we will not give him any flowers. Only the King can pick flowers for puja." When Mali told the story to the King, the King did not believe him and ordered the first Queen to go and gather puja.

Finally, when all six queens had failed to gather the flowers, the King himself tried but the flowers now said: "No, not even the King may pluck us for puja. Only the seventh Queen Keshovati is pure enough." The King then commanded that his Kingdom be searched for Keshovati and she was eventually found and brought to the palace in the simple clothes of a farm labourer. As she reached up her hands to the flowers, the seven champa flowers and the Parul flower tumbled into her lap and miraculously changed into seven sons and one daughter. They laughed and danced around her and cried: "Mother".

[The Reunion: flute solo]

Not every story has a happy ending. The King and his beloved Keshovati were reunited but the other six Queens were buried alive.