

TWO BULGARIAN SONGS

For mezzo soprano & viola

Bulgarian text by Elisaveta Bagryana

PROGRAMME NOTES

1. *Kladenetsut (The Well)*

2. *Moe sartse (My heart)*

The composer was immediately attracted to the beauty of Bagryana's poetry spoken in Bulgarian when she attended a launch of the English translations by Forest Books at the Bulgarian Embassy in London. Although the English translations were useful for understanding Bagryana's texts, they could not capture the rich tones and musicality of the original Bulgarian. Aglika Markova, the cultural attache at the Embassy, was instrumental in encouraging and helping Hiscocks to set the Bulgarian.

Kladenetsut was the first song to be realised with viola accompaniment in the summer of 1996. It received a premiere on 21 October that year by Naomi Itami accompanied by Roy Howat on the viola; this was part of *Seasons of Change*, an event devised by Hiscocks involving music, poetry and dance for the Guildford Book Festival. *Moe Sartse* was composed early in 1997. The two songs were first performed together by the Bulgarian mezzo Natalia Afeyan accompanied by Dorothea Vogel in December 1999.

The songs are intended to be sung in the original Bulgarian, whose rhythm and inflections are an essential part of the music. To this end, the vocal score gives the original text with a transliteration underneath to aid non-Bulgarian speakers using the system employed in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music & Musicians*. The accompanying English translations are included to aid comprehension, and are reproduced here by kind courtesy of Forest Books.

KLADENETSUT (The Well)

The heart of my little green oasis is my well, hidden in the yard among three birches and twin pines.

In December the well is warm, in July, cold, wrapped in white dawn and soft evening shadow.

On the bottom, within the frame of stone, its water a round mirror.

When I lift the heavy lid at noon, the sun comes from the zenith, across its sky flies a bird, and into it stormy south winds spill blossom.

When I open it up at night, I see – a wandering cloud, the moon throws its platinum discus, a star leaves like an innocent tear, and the fathomless oval gleams in full light.

Oh, my dear well, deep and clean and alive. It is absorbed with lament and laughter, favourite voices and happy children's cries.

When I am lost I lean over it searching for my image in the depths – and I always find myself again – in winter frost, in sweltering heat...

But can you imagine how difficult it was to grind through those layers of stone and hardened clay?

Before one vein of water could find its way, a huge mound of earth lay piled upon the ground.

Passers-by stopped and wondered, friends asked, strangers asked:

What on earth do you need a well for, now you have a tap in the yard?

I answered, as if I were to blame: To remind me of the well of Sliven and of my first flights of fancy, and the push of that first wave...

– Poetry – they smile ironically.

But the drought sucked the lakes dry in summer, the fountains and the tap water – and the people started to peep into the well to draw its clear water.

Then came a severe winter. Everywhere froze and there were burst water pipes, but the well was not seized by the frost. It breathed out warm vapour from its depth – at the bottom the water was alive just like the well at Sliven, from which I sipped my first faith.

Elisaveta Bagryana

translation by Belin Tonchev from

Selected poems of Elisaveta Bagryana, Forest Books, 1993

MOE SARTSE (My Heart)

*Through you flows the restless electricity of my blood
which draws the broken diagram of my life and inspiration.
You throb flawlessly on the stony hills of my way,
you give your out-of-breath rhythm to my verses.
You take the bitterness and the pollutants, drunk by me,
and like a miracle worker, who changes water into wine,
you change them into globules of poetry.
You fight defiantly with rising and falling tides of love,
and finally you lead me again to the rescuing shores of creativity.
You stand startled in stillness, before beauty and goodness.
You are excited by waves of alarm or joy in the world
and you sound like a conch shell,
with voices gathered from the human ocean...
I thank you, living heart. I'll not ask for another
- in order just to prolong my life...
Beat, beat away you last predestined stroke,
and then let us fall asleep to come to rest together
- my own dear heart.*

Elisaveta Bagryana

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