

Lisa Bielawa

WWW.LISABIELAWA.NET

Note

Premiere: October 10, 2004, Dawn Upshaw Perspectives Series, Carnegie Hall; Weill Recital Hall, New York
 Duration: 16'
 Instrumentation: Solo voice, Pic/AltoFl, Cl (Eb), Vln, Vlc, Pno

From Hurry, My Verses

Hurry, my verses, hurry; never
 have I so needed you before.
 Round the corner there's a house
 where the days have broken rank.
 Comfort there's none and all work's stopped
 and there they weep, ponder and wait.

Drowsing they gulp the half-insomniac's
 bitter bromides down like water.
 There is the house, where the bread's bitter,
 there is the house, so hurry there.

Let snowstorms whoop in from the streets, -
 you're like a rainbow in the crystal,
 a dream, a bit of news: I send you,
 send you and that means I'm in love.

–Boris Pasternak, translated from the Russian by J. M. Cohen. Used with permission from the Estate of J. M. Cohen.

Pasternak knew, just as the Greeks knew before him, that sometimes there can be a song emergency. In the ancient Greek world, songs change things: paeans keep order between people and gods; the Sirens' song changes the courses of ships. Our poet beckons exigently to his muse, demanding beauty to counteract the chaos, sadness, stagnancy, insomnia, chaos and starvation in the house. His song is a paean too – to his own verses, for their power to bring succor. And they do. When I read this verse, it touches the place of distress and disarray in me while it fills me with a willful idealism, a heroic kindliness. At the moment that we acknowledge how emotionally depleted we are, we come to our own rescue with an alarming new energy – there is compassion and initiative in us after all, we still love. We are giddy with joy but baffled; this phenomenon belies all our understanding of emotional economy.

Pasternak invited me to make a space where this unaccountable resuscitation could be sung. I hoped to re-create, in musical time, the experience I had reading the poem. The collaborative openness of the performers in the premiere performance guided me; their individual gifts prompted me to hear six urgent songs at once instead of just one.

– Lisa Bielawa

Publishing & Management: Daniel Brodney | 917.676.1858 | brodney@prodigy.net

Press Contact: Christina Jensen PR LLC | 646.536.7864 | christina@christinajensenpr.com