

Lesbia

Lesbia, song cycle for soprano, alto, piano and double bass (5 strings).
Duration: 15 minutes.

This song cycle is based on texts by Roman Poet Gaius Valerius Catullus and from the Book of Lamentations of the Bible. Those of Catullus are sung in their English translation and those from the Bible, in Latin. Although apparently disconnected from each other, both texts have a common subject: love. Catullus' love is that of a man toward a woman, and because of it being more "mundane", I decided to have them sung in English. Lesbia's love, however, is oriented solely toward God and so I decided to use their Latin translation to envelope her in an aura of holiness and mysticism.

Song I is full of Catullus' optimism and joy for his newly found love in Lesbia. Song II expresses Lesbia's gratitude toward God for having listened to her pleas. But in Songs III and IV the whole atmosphere changes dramatically. There, both Catullus and Lesbia correspondingly, express deep disappointment for having been betrayed by those whom they love so dearly. Song V concludes the cycle and it is the first time when both characters sing simultaneously. This is a song of lamentation and resignation for they have realised now that no matter how hard they try, and no matter how many times they feel betrayed, the only true feeling they are capable of is love. Love toward Lesbia in the case of Catullus; and in that of Lesbia, toward God.

This piece was written for and premiered by Soprano Sari-Anneli Ruokonen (Lesbia), Alto Tiina Penttinen (Catullus), Javier Arrebola at the piano and Juha Kleemola, double-bass in 2005 at the Sibelius Academy, Finland.

I

Carmen 5 (Catullus) Anonymous translation

Let us live, my Lesbia, and let us love,
and let us judge all the rumors of the old men
to be worth just one penny!
Give me a thousand kisses, then another hundred,
then another thousand, then a second hundred,
then yet another thousand more, then another hundred.
Then, when we have made many thousands,
we will mix them all up so that we don't know,
and so that no one can be jealous of us when he finds out
how many kisses we have shared.

II

Lamentations 3 (Bible)

55 invocavi nomen tuum Domine
de lacis novissimis
56 vocem meam audisti
ne avertas aurem tuam
a singultu meo et clamoribus
58 iudicasti Domine
causam animae meae
redemptor vitae meae
59 vidisti Domine iniquitatem
adversum me

English Translation (King James)

55 I called upon thy name, O LORD,
out of the low dungeon.
56 Thou hast heard my voice:
hide not thine ear
at my breathing, at my cry.
58 O Lord, thou hast pleaded
the causes of my soul;
thou hast redeemed my life.
59 O LORD, thou hast seen my wrong

III

Carmen 72 Anonymous translation

At one time you used to say that you alone knew Catullus,
Lesbia, neither did you wish to know Jupiter instead of me.
Now I know you: wherefore even if I burn the worse,
you are cheaper and of less meaning to me.
You say how can this be? Because a hurt of such a kind
forces a lover to love more, but to wish her less well.

IV

Lamentations 3 (Bible)

43 operuisti in furore
et percussisti nos occidisti
nec pepercisti
44 opposuisti nubem tibi
ne transeat oratio
45 eradicationem
et abiectiōnem posuisti me
in medio populorum
46 aperuerunt super nos os suum
omnes inimici
47 formido et laqueus facta est nobis
vaticinatio et contritio
48 divisiones aquarum deduxit oculus meus
in contritione filiae populi mei

English Translation (King James)

43 Thou hast covered with anger,
and persecuted us: thou hast slain,
thou hast not pitied.
44 Thou hast covered thyself with a cloud,
that our prayer should not pass through.
45 Thou hast made us as the offscouring
and refuse
in the midst of the people.
46 All our enemies have opened their mouths
against us.
47 Fear and a snare is come upon us,
desolation and destruction.
48 Mine eye runneth down with rivers of
water for the destruction of the daughter of
my people.

V

Carmen 87 Anonymous translation

No woman can truthfully say she was so much loved,
as my Lesbia was loved by me.
No such big trust was ever kept in any commitment before
as, on my side, my love for you was kept.

Lamentations 1

20 vide Domine quoniam tribulor venter meus
conturbatus est subversum est cor meum in
memet ipsa quoniam amaritudine plena
sum foris interfecit gladius et domi mors
similis est
21 audierunt quia ingemesco ego et non est
qui consoletur me omnes inimici mei
audierunt malum meum
laetati sunt quoniam tu fecisti adduxisti
diem consolationis et fient similes mei
22 ingrediatur omne malum eorum coram te
et devindemia eos sicut vindemiasti me
propter omnes iniquitates meas multi enim
gemitus mei et cor meum maerens

English Translation (King James)

20 Behold, O LORD; for I am in distress: my
bowels are troubled; mine heart is turned
within me; for I have grievously rebelled:
abroad the sword bereaveth, at home there
is as death.
21 They have heard that I sigh: there is none
to comfort me: all mine enemies have
heard of my trouble; they are glad that
thou hast done it: thou wilt bring the day
that thou hast called, and they shall be like
unto me.
22 Let all their wickedness come before thee;
and do unto them, as thou hast done unto
me for all my transgressions: for my sighs
are many, and my heart is faint.