



PREFACE

Homage to Zsuzsanna Erdélyi

After the **SACRED VOICE** (2006) and the **INNER VOICE** (2007) CDs, the present piece called **FEMALE VOICE** (2017) is the third in my Healing Voices series of CDs. They are based on the curative and healing power of Hungarian folk songs.

In Hungarian folk poetry texts and melodies recited and sung primarily by women are believed to enhance physical and spiritual wellbeing.

FEMALE VOICE contains Hungarian folk songs, which speak of specifically female roles, fates, and existential situations. The listeners can hear little girls' games, brides' farewell parties- wedding songs, lullabies and songs about both happy and unhappy love. One can also hear songs about the married woman's fate as well as a dirge, ballads, and archaic folk prayers to facilitate childbirth. After all, it is the woman who accompanies the individual through life's important situations with her songs and voice. Both the opening and closing numbers of this record praise the especially blessed ability of the woman, which is her creative unique prerogative to bestow; the privilege of giving birth. All this praises and proclaims the life force, energy and vitality. This yields the frame and the eternal sense of the female existence and it is in this light that this life force makes bearable any difficulty in a woman's life.

The disc starts with the archetypal images of a cosmic genesis. The children's songs collected from a broad Hungarian language speaking territory indicate that preparations for the female roles are beginning to be developed by the

games, songs and sayings of young girls. In the songs of grown girls values such as faithfulness, virginity, and the expression of gratitude appear as voluntarily practiced values, often considered today to be old fashioned.

Our human life cycles are celebrated with ritual and customary songs of rites of passage. These facilitate the celebration and assimilation of the transition from one phase of life to the next, as in surviving a crisis-situation. For example, mother and daughter are both equally able to relinquish a particular phase of their lives by singing of their feelings, thereby releasing them in preparation for the next phase.

FEMALE VOICE is a mirror of the female soul and to wit, it can be happy, serene or beclouded, it can be innocent or teasing, weak or strong. The present record was not aiming at completeness, as it is impossible to undertake an encyclopedic survey of the many possible situations and conflicts life presents, as in the case of Anna Fehér. This becomes a metaphor of how a woman cheated, humiliated and robbed of all her emotional and ethical values has but one final instrument to help her: this being her own female voice. She is able to believe completely and firmly in the efficacy of the archaic creative power of the pronounced word.

Even today I can hear the voice of those Zobor–region and csángó women of Hungarian speaking minorities living in Slovakia and Moldavia who enchanted me personally during the course of my field work. This includes Mrs. Margit Brath, Mrs. János Andrásó, Mrs. Illés Dávid, Mrs. Dávid Gyurka and Mrs. János Benke– I thank them all for the folk songs that I sang, recorded and forwarded here (tracks: 9, 11-17, 21, 23, 26.). I owe special thanks to Dr. Zsuzsanna Erdélyi



for the prayers of Zala (1) and Moldavia (27) and for the lamenting song (24), which I have learned using her field recordings. I owe further thanks to all of those recognised and anonymous women of many tunes and also to the collectors of folk songs for making available to the public the fruits of their labor without which this record could not have come into being.

Besides the traditional texts, I have here included pieces from my own family and female mythologies, as there are experiences and situations to which I was only able to respond with my own texts and songs. I also share here my personal lullabies, which I have been singing to my own children. Individual creations and improvisation are not alien to folk poetry either. This is why I added my own songs (5, 18, 28) to the traditional Hungarian female voice.

The dearest gift on this disk to myself is my own mother's voice. My female voice is a continuation of hers. It was brought forth by her voice and it has grown up in its shadow as I encountered my first folk songs transmitted to me by her voice whilst still in her womb. Thus my female voice would lack credibility without hers.

She always sang, no matter what the situation. Now I sing along with her. These songs conjure up her childhood and youth that she spent in the County of Békés and in the farmland areas of the Nagykovács in the Great Hungarian Plain (Pusztá). Let this stand as a confession about the transmission of our popular cultural traditions, the continuity of the female voice and the common breathing of the generations. One has to take on and shoulder one's roots, which includes the motherland, which builds one's foundations and determines one's character.



Nowadays it has become important to bring to consciousness the traditional roles of womanhood – from childhood to old age. I hope that the words and melodies on this record will help girls and women of all ages sing along with us or find echos in the texts and melodies of this disk as a response to the vibrations of their own souls.

Additional thanks are due to composer László Hortobágyi who shows how archaic Hungarian folk songs fit in the fabric of world music, thereby validating their universality. Thus Hungarian folk music reaches through time and space. Here is hoping that the present FEMALE VOICE as much as my earlier collection called VILÁGFÁ (1995) and ROSEBUDS IN A STONEYARD (1996) will represent the timeless validity and universal acceptability of Hungarian folk music while also serving the continuous mediating role of Hungarian culture between East and West.

Budapest, July 2017.

Irén Lovász

translated by Ádám Makkai

