

COMPOSER'S NOTES:

Voice of Hope

“*Voice of Hope*” for soprano and string orchestra was commissioned by the Vesnivka Choir through the Laidlaw Foundation; the work is based on the 1932-1933 Famine-Genocide.

The work opens with a dark and ominous theme presented by the strings in the high register. The music creates an atmosphere of despair and sorrow when a child sees a little bird at her window begging for food. She asks the bird to tell the world that we are dying from starvation. The music suddenly speeds up and becomes rhythmic and intense, depicting Stalin’s police gathering up all the food from the villagers and leaving families to die from hunger. The opening theme reappears in the last verse, but with a stronger sense of helplessness, as many have died. As the music intensifies, it reaches a dramatic climax with both soprano and full orchestra on the words “But we as a people will not give up, we have not died, we are still alive.”

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The Famine-Genocide occurred as a result of direct Soviet policy to crush the nationally conscious Ukrainian people – especially peasants and landowners – who most fervently resisted collectivization and supported the independence of Ukraine. This terror claimed the lives of between 7 to 10 million people.

The Soviet regime introduced unrealistically large quotas on grain and other agricultural products, stripping the peasants of their food supply. In August 1932, the regime authorized the confiscation of grain from peasant households and a month later enacted a law that authorized the death penalty or the "leniency" of 10 years exile for the theft of "social property" – grain and foodstuffs. The borders of Ukraine were officially sealed to prevent any migration or relief efforts. This made it difficult for the Western press to report on this catastrophe. At the same time, the Soviet regime dumped 1.7 million tons of grain on Western markets.

“*Voice of Hope*” is dedicated to her mother’s family, Great Grandmother Katerina Kozar, Grandmother Tatiana Breha, Grandfather Gregory, and their children, Peter, Philip and Anastasia who died in the Holodomor. Her mother Paraskevia Breha Kuzmenko, orphaned at the young age of nine, survived the Holodomor.

Larysa Kuzmenko / 2003

Mother, listen,
Is someone knocking at the window?
Poor exhausted little bird!
How have you survived
In this misery and strife?
Who will feed you?
We haven't a crumb of bread or a grain.
We're cold and hungry; Woe is us!
Fly, fly away across the sea! Tell everyone
How we're suffering,
How we're hungering,
How many of us now have died.
Why are we dying of hunger?

Villagers are gathering grain in the fields,
And Stalin has issued strict orders:
"Gather the whole crop in Ukraine!"
O woe is us!
Gendarmes are going from house to house,
Scraping everything out,
Every crumb of bread on the table, every cabbage.
Children are weeping, mothers are sobbing,
Praying for a crust of bread.
But no, the cruel Stalinist regime
Has set itself the goal of bringing people to their knees,
Of making them into beggars and slaves.

Hunger is stalking the land,
Hunger is stalking in my Ukraine.
Everyone is dying: the old, the women, the children.
The village has fallen silent.
The chatter of children can't be heard,
The paths from house to house have grown over with weeds,
Everything is silent.
O barbarous savage,
Your regime is cruel!
But we haven't died! We're still alive!

– Бідна, згорьована пташко!

Як ти залишилася

жити ось тут,

в цій біді і незгоді?

Хто тобі їсточки дасть?

– В нас вже немає

і крихточки хліба

і ні зернинки зерна.

Так холодно, голодно

Горе у нас!

– Ти полети, полети

ген за море!

Повідоми усіх людей:

як ми горюємо,

як ми бідуємо,

скільки померло вже нас.

За що ми від голоду мремо?

* * *

Збирають хліб селяни із полів,

А Сталін видає наказ суворий;

– "Забрати з України весь врожай!"

О горе, горе!

Жандарми ходять по хатах

і вигрібають все:

від крихти хліба на столі, до капустини.

Ридають діти, плачуть гірко матері,

І молять в Бога ту шкоринку хліба.

Та ні, жорстокий сталінський режим

взяв за мету народ поставить на коліна,

створити вбогих і рабів.

І ходить голод,

Голод ходить по моїй Вкраїні.

Вимирають всі: старі, жінки і діти.

Село неначе онімло;

Не чути щебету дітей.

Стежки від хат позаростали бурянами.

Завмерло все кругом.

О, лютий нелюде,

Жорстокий твій режим!

Та ми не вмерли, ми живі!