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BRITTA BYSTRÖM  
Notes from the City of the Sun

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INTERNATIONAL ROSTRUM OF COMPOSERS  
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# BRITTA BYSTRÖM:

## NOTES FROM THE CITY OF THE SUN (2017)

Text: Bei Dao, translated into English by  
Bonnie S. McDougall  
Duration: 26'09  
Instrumentation: for soprano solo and orchestra  
Malin Byström, soprano

Malmö Symphony Orchestra  
Eun Sun Kim, conductor  
Recorded 23 November 2018  
Malmö Live Concert Hall

BRITTA BYSTRÖM (b. 1977) began her musical career as a trumpet player. In her teens, she began to compose music and studied composition at the Royal University of Music in Stockholm 1995–2001, where her main teachers were Pär Lindgren and Bent Sørensen. Byström has composed for most sizes of orchestras and contexts including chamber music, vocal music and opera, but the emphasis has been on orchestral music. Her music demonstrates a special attention to sound and a sensitivity for the music's resonance that could be described as impressionistic.

"NOTES FROM THE CITY OF THE SUN for soprano solo and orchestra is a work based on the Chinese writer Bei Dao's suite of poems with the same title (in its English translation). The suite consists of 14 short poems that I have turned into 14 songs, to be performed without break. Every poem has a title which summarizes its content: *Life, Love, Freedom, Child, Girl, Youth, Art, People, Labour, Fate, Faith, Peace, Motherland and Living*. The titles have also been set to music and have in my work the function of a door opening towards a new song and a new world of sound. These 'title doors' are always performed by the singer alone, on one single note – every new note a semitone higher than the note before. In that way, it is the soloist who opens the doors and leads the listener through the music. Already before I began the composing,

I imagined Malin Byström's voice to be the one that leads the listener, opens the doors, and I am very happy that my dream could come true! (Malin Byström and I are not related, we just happen to have the same surname.)

Bei Dao (b. 1949) is one of the so called 'misty' Chinese poets, which are characterized by their interest for the intimate and private, rather than the collective and political. Bei Dao often borrows techniques from the film world: the camera moving in different tempos, sudden cuts between images... Maybe it is this connection to pictures in motion which makes it so natural for me to transform his poetry into music, since music – like the film – exists within time. The poems are very precise, as cutouts by knife, but at the same time open to different interpretations. Also this – the combination of exactness and ambiguity – makes Bei Dao's poems natural to set to music. The very last poem, *Living*, consists of only two words: 'A net'. I think of that as a motto for the entire composition, which is a kind of fine meshed net, with threads branching out in different directions, continuing in ever new paths, but still remaining connected.

The song cycle is about 25 minutes long and is dedicated to Malin Byström."

– Britta Byström



### Notes from the City of the Sun

#### *Life*

The sun has risen too

#### *Love*

Tranquillity. The wild geese have flown over the virgin wasteland  
the old tree has toppled with a crash  
acid salty rain drifts through the air

#### *Freedom*

Torn scraps of paper  
Fluttering

#### *Child*

A picture enclosing the whole ocean  
folds into a white crane

#### *Girl*

A shimmering rainbow  
gathers brightly coloured feathers

#### *Youth*

Red waves  
drown a solitary oar

#### *Art*

A million scintillating suns  
appear in the shattered mirror

#### *People*

The moon is torn into gleaming grains  
of wheat  
and sown in the honest sky and earth

#### *Labour*

Hands, encircling the earth

#### *Fate*

The child strikes the railing at random  
at random the railing strikes the night

#### *Faith*

A flock of sheep spills out of the green ditch  
the shepherd boy plays his monotonous  
pipe

#### *Peace*

In the land where the king is dead  
the old rifle sprouting branches and buds  
has become a cripple's cane

#### *Motherland*

Cast on a shield of bronze  
she leans against a blackened museum wall

#### *Living*

A net