

Melia Watras: Vetur öngum lánar lið for voice and cello (2016)

World Premiere:

Sæunn Thorsteinsdóttir, voice and cello; June 5, 2016, Seattle, WA

Duration: 3:00

Program Notes:

Vetur öngum lánar lið (Winter aids no one) was written for the amazing cellist Sæunn Thorsteinsdóttir. Part of my *Folk Style Project*, this piece springs from my friendship with Sæunn, and her generosity in sharing her feelings about Iceland, her homeland.

When I started collecting and formulating ideas for the piece, I asked Sæunn if she had any poets or wordsmiths in her family or circle of friends; I was interested in having her not only play the cello, but to sing in her native language while she played. I was quite excited when she told me her great-grandfather, Bjarni Jónsson, was a poet, and asked her if she could pick out a poem or two of his. She sent me two poems written by her great-grandfather: *Vetur öngum lánar lið* and *Ævidansinn* (The Dance of a Lifetime), along with English translations by her cousin, Berglaug Ásmundardóttir. Jónsson's words became the text for my song. The poems, in Icelandic and English are below.

—Melia Watras

Poems by Bjarni Jónsson

Written in New York in 1931

Translated by Berglaug Ásmundardóttir

Vetur öngum lánar lið

Vetur öngum lánar lið
leggur þröngu sporin,
Andinn löngum lifnar við
lóusöng á vorin.

Ævidansinn

Allt í gegnum aldaðir,
ekki breytast heimsins kynni,
ýmist hryggir eða glaðir
dansa menn um dauðans traðir,
Drottinn stjórnar hljómsveitinni.

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Winter aids no one

Winter aids no one
Lays narrow tracks,
The spirit is accustomed to coming to life,
To the plover's song in spring.

The Dance of a Lifetime

Through the ranks of the ages,
The world's experiences are unchanging.
Either doleful or jovial,
Humanity dances on the paths of death.
The Almighty conducts the band.

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