

MUSINGS

Music, the Goddess of Passion

AINON N



I confess: music for me is intimate. I don't know about genres and canons. Nor do I know the reasons that compel a composer to organize all the elements of a song in its wholeness. All I know is that it presents themes for me; it becomes contextual to my mood. I close my eyes, allowing my senses to float unfettered. Today, as the sky turned gray and the day folded, my emotions paralleled the journey of life moving on to that quiet destination. A song and my life walked together. In quiet I listened to Tagore's song-lyric, *jokhon porbe na mor paayer chinho ei batey/ tokhon emni koreyi bajbey baanshi ei naatey/ kaatbey din kaatbe* ("when my feet will no longer leave its mark on this bend/the flute will still play/days will still arrive"). It presented me the message of conclusiveness; yes, I am mortal. I felt the momentary sensation of becoming the essential third note caught in the minor scale of a sadder sound. I embraced the truth.

and the voice. They flowed together, the layers weaving melody and harmony. Yes, at that point it narrated my story. I crossed the emotional distance. Such is the power of music to grasp reality, offering renewed meanings. Indeed, music is the muse, the mind-user; it is the connection to thinking. As they say, "music is the sound of thought."

To my receptive mind, sometimes it is just one line that becomes ambrosial: *tobu mone rekho/ jodi dure jaii chole/ jodi poriya mone cholocholo jol naii dekha dayey noyon-o kone tobu mone rekho* ("And yet, remember me even if I wander far away/ as you think of me, if tears do not spring in corner of

your eyes, yet, still remember me"). For me, it produces that plateau of surprise where I linger for a while in wonderment, reflecting on existential truths. The truth that moments do not belong and that they exist on their own volition to be summoned at one's will in the now of the future! Just because there was happiness once does not mean it is unhappiness now. Such is the introspection that makes music the *muein*, the mystery, that never fails to initiate a thought.

And when I listen to *abar asheche ashar akash-o-cheye/ ashe brishtir-o-shubash batash beye* ("ashar is here once again enfolding the sky/ bearing rain and a refreshing breeze"), it makes my mind feel the temperament of the wind and mist that playfully move through leaves; I hear the raindrops that create the symphonic notes. It leads me to see the golden sheen that divide shade and light as it comes through the branches, and compels me to smell the sweet fragrance of wet trees and earth that dissolve slowly in the air. This rhythmic flow of nature's display is a perfect performance of the adagio -- graceful and energetically alive. This song is that intangible magic which crosses over to be one with the elements of the natural world. It leaves me refreshed.

Music truly invades the most innermost spaces of my life. At the office it becomes a cluster of low notes that keep me company; on long drives music accompanies me as a good-natured friend; as I sit outside on the porch it

allows my mind to wander freely; when I pen words, it becomes a stack of impressions making me wonder: do they sound better together, or do they move away from the storyline? And yes, when I need an occasional breather, music is there in the background without fail. When a whimsical medley of notes glide from one to another in an endless series, I give in to the care of this devoted companion. A companion that leads me to myriad of questions.

Sometimes I wonder if I were to choose a metaphor for my life what it would be. Could I be the daybreak Ahir Bhairav raga, or perhaps the late-night raga Rageshri? No, none of that! I believe it would be the traditional *bnashi*, the slender hollow bamboo piece with burnt holes. You see, for my bohemian mind the musical emotion in *dure kothae, dure dure/ amar mon baraye ghure ghure/ je banshite batash kande sheyi banshitir shureshere* ("where far away/ where does my mind roam/with the flute's tune that causes the breeze to weep?") is the perfect teaser of images pleasingly personal. It sets me loose on a journey to my native land, to the river banks, the musky air and the evening twilights. The flute possesses the *ainon*, the vital force, that creates its own content comprehensible within the cultural expressions across time. It has a dynamic language of its own, ever changing, ever probing.

Indeed, music is provocation!

Ainon N. writes from Chicago, IL.

TRAVEL

Bewitching Heidelberg

AFSANA TAZREEN

Much like the famous German song "*Ich hab mein Herz in Heidelberg verloren*" by Fred Raymond, which later became the theme song of this celebrated city, I also lost my heart in Heidelberg. I was not the first and I am sure that I will not be the last. Many others, including celebrities such as Goethe, Hugo and Twain, to name a few, fell in love with Heidelberg. Given its romantic castle ruins, beautiful architecture in the old city, and serene walkways along the Neckar which flows along a valley, it is hard to stay immune to its charms.

I consider myself fortunate to have been able to call this fairy tale city my home for two years. My eight-year old son and I used to live in a tiny house nestled amid the lush green hills, only five minutes away from the Neckar River.

Heidi is beautiful through every season. Spring used to be my personal favorite. With the advent of Spring, the magnolias and cherry blossoms in seductive shades of pink competed for my attention. The mountains of Heidelberg draped themselves in gorgeous shades of emerald, as they towered over the Neckar which lay at its feet, as still as glass. Picnics on the bank of the river became a common sight, as did row boats, kites and barbecues. The fields surrounding our campus had a generous sprinkling of wildflowers of every color imaginable.

As I scampered between class and home, everyone around me seemed to be enjoying an ice-cream cone. It took enormous self-restraint to sit in front of the computer, with the sun shining brilliantly over the red sandstone buildings right outside my window. When I was not writing essays for my coursework at the university, or offering a walking tour to holidaymakers, I would set out to explore Heidelberg with my son, and we would grab our own ice cream cones.

As we walked along the cobblestoned alleys of Altstadt for the thousandth time, we would observe the sea of faces around us and try to separate the locals from the tourists, which became an interesting exercise. Every year thousands of tourists flocked to this picturesque city to get a whiff of its rich history.

The Altstadt, which means "Old City" in German, actually lives true to its name. Heidelberg escaped bombing in the World War II because it was not an industrial hub, and therefore, of no particular strategic interest to the Allies. Little wonder that unlike many German cities it has buildings dating back to the late Middle Ages and early Renaissance.

In fact, only the Altebruecke or "Old Bridge" was partially damaged by the Nazis themselves to prevent the Allies

from entering the city. The bridge, later restored as a walkway for pedestrians, is almost never empty. From families with children chattering noisily, flustered and dazed tourists walking aimlessly, the lone cellist playing a melody in one corner to gooe-eyed couples "locking in their love"—there were always people on the bridge. Unless it was the dead of winter, of course! There is something magical about that bridge that makes one fall helplessly in love, a love so hypnotizing that one would never want to leave. No wonder it is considered as one of the most romantic spots in Heidelberg.

spectacular view of the city which lay at the foot of the hill.

The castle itself is an amalgamation of several buildings which were constructed over several centuries, which is apparent from the stark differences in their style of architecture.

Apart from the rich history of the castle buildings, the Elizabeth Gate, built overnight as a gesture of love, and the Grosses Fass, the world's largest wine barrel with a capacity of about 58,000 gallons, are "must-see items" for the tourists. There is even a wooden dance floor on top of the barrel, led by a

"Snake's path", will bring you to the Thingstätte, a Nazi-era amphitheatre.

To talk about Heidelberg and not mention its university is sacrilegious. Indeed, Germany's oldest university witnessed the rise of minds such as Hegel, Schumann, Bunsen and Heidegger. In fact, fifty-six Nobel Prize winners have been in some way or other connected to Heidelberg University. Established in 1386 with only four faculties, the Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Heidelberg now comprises 12 faculties. 30,000 students come to it from all over the world. I should add that its students pay



Towering over the Altstadt, the castle ruins of the late Medieval and early Renaissance period looks majestic. It looks even more striking at night when seen across the Neckar River, brilliantly illuminated. The castle can be reached either by walking up a steep, winding trail, or by taking the funicular railway, which dates back to 1890, from Kornmarkt station. Although, being a student, I possessed a semester bus ticket that could get me a discounted price on the funicular ticket, I always preferred to take the trail and soaked in the

staircase! The terrace is a perfect picnic spot. In spite of having visited the castle countless times, I cannot help but wonder at the far-reaching views over the Neckar River and the red rooftops of Altstadt.

Another popular site of Heidelberg is the Philosophenweg or the Philosopher's Way. Walking through steep fields, orchards and even vineyards on the slopes across the Neckar from the Altstadt on the winding path, you'll come across panoramic views of the castle and the city. Moving further up along Schlangenweg or

no tuition fees. All undergraduate programs are conducted in German although a few graduate programs are entirely taught in English.

I thank the day that Heidelberg University chose me as its student, because when I returned to my homeland last year, I carried with me a treasure trove of fond memories, and the satisfaction of having lived in one of the most bewitching places in the world.

Afsana Tazreen is a Program Coordinator at FES in Bangladesh.

POETRY

Grief Tourist

RUBANA HUQ

Stepping into unknown spaces,
Courting crumpled sheets,
Sporting effortless travelers' look,
Settling between a sleep and snooze,
Listening to every creak, footstep,
Every drunken conversation across the street,
Loyally responding to midnight mails and messages,
Playing with puddles to walk past time,
Tiptoeing to a road still unprepared for me to step into.

Back home, sleeping in a makeshift bed in an ex-gym setting,
Damp walls bragging his weight records,
White sheets, pillows, Ipad blasting away with unknown tracks,
Remind me that what makes me today is what makes me not--
Regular is the biggest exception,
Work is home, while home a play tent!

So, I visit places that host my losses:
New England and England both,
Calling them home to justify closures,
When in reality, all I am is just a grief tourist,
Seeking out cafes, roads, parks to seal my memories
Becoming a distant story teller with attempted detachment,
Ignoring torn todays and tragic tomorrows,
Rushing to the last page, adding a dash of fiction,
Changing the tone to a publishable ending,
Through words waiving discomfort,
Through poems becoming correction pens...
Risking unfair erasures.

Rubana Huq writes creatively and is also the Director of the Mohammadi Group.

Unknowable

SHEHRIN HOSSAIN

how do you explain that love is a monstrous shape-shifting beast and you can never tell what form it will assume next?--

will it dazzle you,
like a too-bright ray of light
filtering through a too-wide gap
in the curtains of a small cold room,
its form so breathtaking that
despite all the poems you could write
about it
you don't even really want to touch it?

or is it going to be the ghost
that startles you again only when you're
alone,
when you realize no way in hell
will you ever make it on your own?

or is it yet again, on some other hazy
night,
nothing but a sad girl's smoky cinnamon
voice
undulating in the background of your
undulating mind,
somewhere inside where you
still wait for the beautiful things to make
sense? --
the dancing the colors the flowers the
lights the laughter
and
the blindingly radiant people
who seem to somehow know what it is;
who you don't think will ever understand
why sometimes
you just need to quietly observe,
because really,
I heard you swearing, you said,

"I swear all this talking is just me trying to understand it;
I still find myself wishing I could."

Shehrin Hossain is in her 3rd year, studying English literature at North South University. Sometimes she writes, although mostly she thinks about writing.