

THE WHITE ROOSTER

A cantata in the spirit of a short opera
by Sheila Silver & Stephen Kitsakos

Scored for 4 women's voices, 1 man (Percussionist - also speaking part),
5 Tibetan singing bowls and hand drums

Characters

Yangchen, Tsering, Tsomo, Pema
Diki (played by Tsering)
The White Rooster (played by Yangchen)
The Doctor (played by the percussionist)

Tibetan Buddhist Nuns
a young nomadic maiden
a prince living under a spell
a physician

In the present day, on the outskirts of a small village on the Tibetan Plateau near the edge of the Indian border in the Himalayas, three women are kneeling on the ground of a rudimentary hut. Through gesture and indication it is apparent they are caring for another, unseen woman, who is ill. They are Tibetan Buddhist nuns who have begun a long and arduous journey to exile in India. They carry in their satchels the necessities for sustenance and prayer: food, water, the Tibetan singing bowls they incorporate into their daily life for spiritual nourishment, and a "khatag" - a ceremonial white scarf, either cotton or silk, used to establish contact between persons or between a person and a deity.

THREE NUNS

(chanting Dharani for Medicine Buddha)

*TEYATA: OM BEKANZE BEKANZE MAHA BEKANZE
RANZA SAMUNGATE SOHA*

*Ray of light like a hundred thousand suns.
Ray of light like a hundred thousand suns.
Purify my mind, Purify my thoughts,
Sisters meditate on the Medicine Buddha.*

YANGCHEN

She suffers still from the loss of blood.

TSERING

There's a bullet lodged somewhere.

YANGCHEN & TSERING

A soldier's bullet.

TSOMO

(continuing, Tsering joins her)

Purify my mind,
Purify my thoughts

YANGCHEN

How can we dream of Dharamsala?

TSERING

How can we dream of a blessing from His Holiness?

TSOMO

Our dreams make us mindful of death.

YANGCHEN

She will die soon if we don't get help.

TSOMO

Death is inevitable. Only the time is uncertain.
Be mindful of death and the meditation will be more powerful.

FOUR NUNS

Everything is changing from moment to moment.
Nothing can remain unchanged.
There is nothing to hold onto.
Do not attach.

They return to meditating

YANGCHEN

(spoken)

Look! She's stirring.

TSOMO

(spoken)

Give her some water.

PEMA enters, breathless.

TSERING

Pema's back!

PEMA

(taking things out of her bag as she speaks)

*I found some herbs and butter to make a salve.
It should help to stop the bleeding.
And I spoke with an old woman.
She sends us some food and her blessings for a safe journey.*

TSOMO

Did anyone else see you?

TSERING

Is there help to be found?

PEMA

There is a doctor but he is one of them. You know that he is forbidden to help us.

FOUR NUNS

*Everything is changing from moment to moment.
Nothing can remain unchanged.
There is nothing to hold onto.
Do not attach.*

*They continue chanting Dharani for the
Medicine Buddha.*

*TEYATA: OM BEKANZE BEKANZE MAHA BEKANZE
RANZA SAMUNGATE SOHA*

*PEMA sings an extended prayer in preparation
for giving healing herbs while the others
accompany her*

YANGCHEN

We are a long way off from Lake Nam Tso . . .

PEMA

(finishing her healing tasks)

We suffer so on this journey.

TSERING

Did we make the right decision to come?

TSOMO

*We are accustomed to hardship.
But we will endure to walk the path of the Buddha.*

FOUR NUNS

*We are accustomed to hardship.
But we will endure until all people are free.*

TSOMO

*Yes, we are accustomed to hardship.
That is why we are able to make this journey.*

*But we must never lose our compassion
for those who would harm us,
For those who would see our culture fail...
For that is not our way.
Let not anger control you.
Fill your hearts with love,
For that is our way.*

THREE NUNS

For that is our way.

PEMA

*As we spin the mani wheel,
Let's tell a story to help our sister heal.*

TSOMO

Yes, let's tell a story...

YANGCHEN

(excitedly)

*I know, The Tale of the White Rooster!
I'll be the White Rooster*

TSERING

And I will play Diki.

TSOMO

Then Pema and I will narrate.

The four women place themselves in a circle around their sick sister and begin to tell the story. TSOMO takes a large and special "khatag" out of her bag and gives it to YANGCHEN who wraps it around herself becoming the WHITE ROOSTER. TSERING puts on a Tibetan head scarf and becomes DIKI.

PEMA and TSOMO

(Narrating)

Like a jewel in a crown
Stood a house by a lake.
That the sunlight would kiss
Every morning to wake.
In the family were three,
They were sisters in name
They were raised in that house
But they weren't the same.

They had barrels of tea
And sweet barley in sacks.
And a pasture of grass.
For the family's yaks.
They made butter and cheese
Which they hung on a string.
And the herd was the source
Of the family's well being.

And they loved them as much
As they loved one another.

PEMA and TSOMO

(Narrating)

One evening when Diki was returning with the herd she became distracted
by a beautiful voice singing.

YANGCHEN

(The Rooster singing a mantra)

OM A HUNG BENZA GURU PEMA SIDDHI HUNG

(Rooster's mantra continues under narrators).

PEMA and TSOMO

(Narrating)

She followed the voice.
It lured her like a labyrinth.
But she could not find the source.
So she returned to the pasture to find
her yaks had disappeared.

She looked everywhere
But they were not to be found.

*And saddened by the loss
she started for home.*

PEMA and TSOMO
(Narrating)

DIKI

*NAMO BUDDHAYA
NAMO DHARMAYA
NAMO SANGHAYA*

*But the path suddenly seemed unfamiliar.
And as twilight turned to night she saw a cave
with a red door.*

*Something she had surely never seen before.
And suddenly the door wide open was sprung
And she saw a White Rooster
Who spoke in her tongue!*

THE WHITE ROOSTER
Tashi Delek!

DIKI

Tashi Delek! Can you help me find my lost yaks?

THE WHITE ROOSTER

Perhaps. But what will you do for me?

DIKI

*I do not know much that would be useful to a bird.
You are a bird... aren't you?*

THE WHITE ROOSTER

*Yes. I am a rooster... and I am lonely.
Will you return?*

DIKI

How will I know where to find the door?

THE WHITE ROOSTER

*Diki, my blossom.
Just follow your tracks.
Then I shall tell you where to find
your lost yaks.*

(He turns away from her and begins chanting...)

OM TARE TUTARE TURE SOHA

DIKI
NAMO BUDDHAYA
NAMO DHARMAYA
NAMO SANGHAYA

PEMA & TSOMO (speaking)
And so she returned home...
but remembering her promise,
Followed her footsteps back again.
Past the side of the lake, in the shade of the
big mountain, until once again she was at the
big red door.

THE WHITE ROOSTER

You have returned as promised.

DIKI
Yes, I can see that you are no ordinary bird.
I would like to bring my yaks home, please.

THE WHITE ROOSTER

But I have something else in mind.
I am lonely.
Diki, will you be my wife?

DIKI
How can I when I must care for my sisters?

THE WHITE ROOSTER

I will send the herd to nourish them
If you will stay here with me.
They will have yak milk,
But you will have cream.
Diki, do not be deceived!
Diki, things are not always what they seem.

PEMA & TSOMO
And with anguish Diki thought:

DIKI
By the merit I accumulate from practicing generosity and the other perfections,
may I attain Enlightenment in order to benefit all living beings.

PEMA & TSOMO
(spoken)
And so she came to live with The White Rooster.

FOUR NUNS
Everything is changing from moment to moment.
Nothing can remain unchanged.
There is nothing to hold onto.
Do not attach.

THE ROOSTER and DIKI
OM TARE TUTARE TURE SOHA
(Chanting throughout)

DIKI (singing to herself)
NAMO BUDDHAYA
NAMO DHARMAYA

PEMA & TSOMO
And so the price was paid.
And so the sacrifice was made.
A year went by, but she wasn't distraught.
He seemed so agreeable and they never fought
And despite a cave filled with feathers and clutter
She nourished on yak meat & sweet rice with butter

But one night the moonlight enticed her
So she went for a walk in the cool, mountain air.

And there.... At the edge of the field she heard his song.

THE WHITE ROOSTER
OM A HUNG BENZA GURU PEMA SIDDHI HUNG

And as she approached she saw

DIKI
This is no rooster who warbles a call -
This is no rooster I see here at all.

PEMA & TSOMO
A handsome young man, arms stretched to the sky
Was singing to the moon in the snowy paradise.
(for a moment DIKI and the ROOSTER lock eyes)

THE WHITE ROOSTER
Diki!! Do not be deceived.

And then she ran, frantically
across the field to the cave,
to the red door and there,
on the floor,
she saw it

PEMA
The white skin.
The skin of the rooster.
And she seized it and
threw it into the fire.

TSOMO
The white skin.
The skin of the rooster.
And she seized it and

ROOSTER
(in between phrases of OM A HUNG...)
Diki, do not be deceived.

<i>Crackling and consuming!!</i>	<i>threw it into the fire.</i>	<i>Diki, things</i>
<i>Until there was nothing left.</i>	<i>Crackling and consuming!!</i>	<i>are not always</i>
	<i>Until there was nothing left.</i>	<i>What they seem.</i>
<i>But ashes.</i>	<i>But ashes.</i>	
<i>But ashes.</i>	<i>But ashes.</i>	
<i>But ashes.</i>	<i>But ashes.</i>	

DIKI

(overlapping with above)

*If I burn this skin he will be released.
No longer shall he be a beast!*

*(During the above, Diki picks up the white
"khatag" that has been lying on the floor and in
a series of stylized gestures pretends it is being
fed to the flames.)*

NARRATORS

*But the moon started to cry
for she had got it wrong.*

THE WHITE ROOSTER

(enters)

Diki, what have you done?

*It is true. I am a man. A prince of my people.
But I refused to be a slave to the demons.
I fought. I rebelled.
But the demons are powerful.
They trapped me. They imprisoned me.
And I am released just once a day
To sing about freedom.
To sing about liberation.
My skin is my prison
to remind me to be obedient.
But now that it is destroyed,
Never shall I be released.
Never. Not even once a day.
And now I shall now be taken by the demons ...
They will come.*

DIKI

*Husband hear me!
Husband listen to me!
Husband hear what I say!*

*No, we shall not let them come!
Don't give the demons power!
No, we shall not let them in!
Don't give away your power.*

Be mindful of this and the journey we take, will lead you to freedom.

DIKI followed by NARRATORS

*Purify your thoughts.
Purify your mind.
Husband meditate on the power of compassion.*

DIKI & WHITE ROOSTER

*Ray of light like a hundred thousand suns.
Ray of light like a hundred thousand suns.
Purify your thoughts.
Purify your mind.
Husband meditate on the power of compassion.*

OM TARE TUTARE TURE SOHA ...

The ROOSTER and DIKI begins to chant. Gradually the narrators join them.

PEMA & TSOMO
OM TARE TUTARE TURE SOHA

THE WHITE ROOSTER
OM TARE TUTARE TURE SOHA

DIKI
NAMO BUDDHAYA...

The women circle around the "fire" having resurrected the white scarf which Diki holds above her. As the chanting and dancing builds to a climax, the doctor knocks and then enters.

The illusion of the story-telling ends abruptly and the khatag falls to the floor.

The Doctor's lines are all spoken.

THE DOCTOR

The power of your singing has drawn me here ...

(looks around the room and sees the prostrate sister)

PEMA

(cautiously)

He is the doctor. I saw him in the village.
The one I told you about...

TSERING

And forbidden to help us.

YANGCHEN

He could report us.

THE DOCTOR

Let me see your sister. She needs my help.

TSOMO

Sisters calm yourselves! He is offering help!

THREE NUNS

OM MANI PEME HUNG

(TSOMO guides the DOCTOR to the unseen nun on the floor. YANGCHEN begins to softly chant "OM MANI PEME HUNG", and eventually others join her, lastly TSOMO whose voice rises above the others. Meanwhile the doctor pantomimes carrying for the wounded nun, the removal of the bullet, and the bandaging of the wounds. Finally he rises to leave.)

TSOMO

Will she heal?

THE DOCTOR

Yes.

TSOMO

Good Doctor, please tell me why have you saved this life?

THE DOCTOR

Sisters, I, too, have suffered.
I save this life gladly.
Every act of kindness counts.

(He starts to leave)

TSOMO

Doctor, wait.
We must give you something for your help.
To thank you.

THE DOCTOR (shaking his head no)

But I require nothing ...

TSOMO

Please ...

ALL FOUR WOMEN

(While Tsomo presents the Doctor with the khatag, the other three continue their chanting. Eventually, Tsomo joins them as it continues to build. One by one the nuns place their bowls on a table altar and once the doctor accepts the scarf he arranges their bowls and then begins to play them with mallets, in counterpoint to their chant. He continues in his accompaniment until the end of the opera.)

FOUR NUNS

OM MANI PEME HUNG

TSERING FOLLOWED BY OTHERS

By the merit I accumulate from practicing generosity and the other perfections, may I attain Enlightenment in order to benefit all living beings.

**** END ****

NOTE: The *Om a Hung...* and *Om Mani Peme Hung* mantras are each based on a traditional Tibetan melody. The *Namo Buddhaya...* is based on an original melody by *Tennyi Sabchu Rinpoche*.