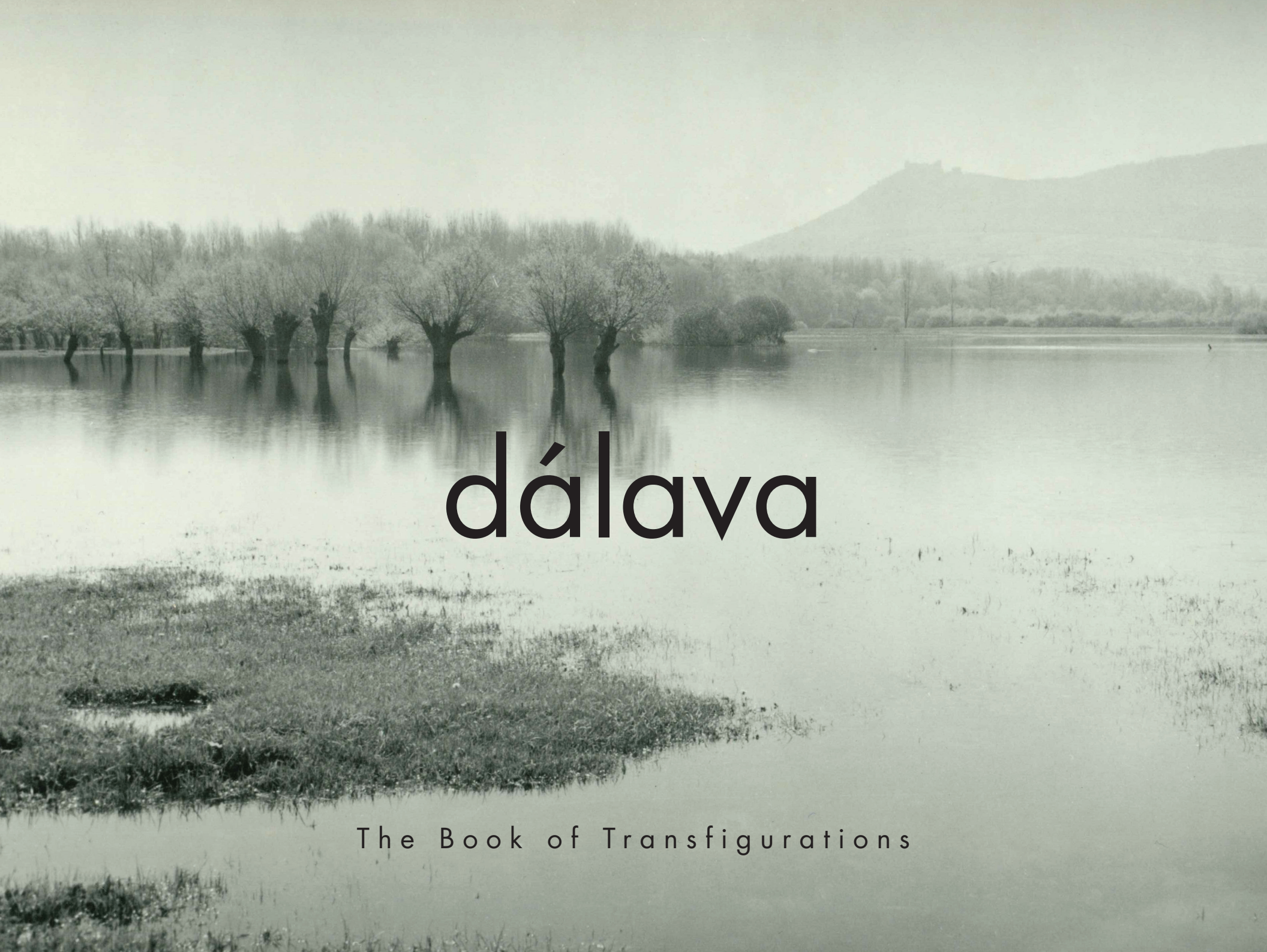


A black and white photograph of a flooded landscape. In the foreground, there is a patch of grassy land partially submerged in water. The middle ground features a line of trees, some of which are partially submerged, with their reflections visible in the calm water. In the background, a large, rounded hill or mountain rises, topped with a small, dark structure that appears to be a castle or a church. The sky is overcast and hazy.

dálava

The Book of Transfigurations

dálava

The Book of Transfigurations

Booklet texts by Julia Ulehla
Song translations by Julia Ulehla and Martin Úlehla

1	Ej, na tej skale vysokej	Seven pairs of eagles*	2:35
2	Dyby ňa moja maměnka stará	Grass	3:05
3	Dyž sem já šel pres hory	The rocks began to crumble	4:15
4	Co ste si mamičko za dům stavjat dali	Iron bars, iron lock	4:47
5	Vyletěla holubička	The bloody wall	5:43
6	Sem chaso spěchajte	You used to look like a lion	4:47
7	Před našim je zahrádečka	Red violet	2:04
8	Studená rosenka	Souling	2:55
9	Na strážnickém rynku	War	4:00
10	Vydala máti	Mother gave away her daughter	3:16
11	Okolo Hradišča voděnka teče	He's bringing something for me	5:19
12	Fašanku	Carnival	2:29
13	Pásl Jano koně	Sell us your shirt*	2:26

*includes archival recording sung by Jiří Úlehla with Antoš Frolka, cimbál

Total time: 48:11

Julia Ulehla	vocals
Aram Bajakian	acoustic & electric guitars, percussion
Peggy Lee	cello
Tyson Naylor	piano, accordion, Farfisa organ, Hammond A-100, Wurlitzer, Rhodes
Colin Cowan	double bass & electric bass
Dylan van der Schyff	drums & percussion

All melodies and texts traditional Moravian, arranged by Aram Bajakian and Julia Ulehla, bajak music (ASCAP)

All songs except "Ej, na tej skale vysokej" and "Pásl Jano koně" collected and transcribed by Vladimír Úlehla in his book *Živá píseň* (Living Song, 2008, originally published in 1949)

All facsimiles of transcriptions are taken from Vladimír Úlehla's *Živá píseň* (2008, 1949), and the hand written transcription of "Před našim je zahrádečka" was copied from František Bartoš and Leoš Janáček's 1893 edition of *Kylice z národních písní moravských* (Bouquet of Moravian Folksongs)

Booklet text by Julia Ulehla

Translations by Julia Ulehla and Martin Úlehla

Recorded on February 26, 2016 and mixed by John Raham at Afterlife Studios, Vancouver, BC

Mastered by Michael Fossenkemper at TurtleTone Studio, NYC

Produced by Aram Bajakian and Julia Ulehla

Executive Producer: Tony Reif

Design by Tony Diodore

Photographs of the South Moravian countryside by Miloš Spurný, courtesy of Věra Spurná

Photograph of people working in the fields from Vladimír Úlehla's film *Mizející svět* (Disappearing World, 1932)

Dálava is a Czech word that doesn't have an exact English equivalent. It refers to the disappearing line on the horizon where land and sky hazily merge into one another. It seemed a fitting metaphor for this inquiry into the past and across the sea.

Photograph by Miloš Spurný, courtesy of Vera Spurná



The Book of Transfigurations

"I have to compliment you on your daughter's excellent English. How does she know how to speak so well?" Thanking him, I replied that it was her mother tongue. "But how does she know the songs so well? She is singing along with everything!" I explain that we are American but that my father is Moravian and we sing a lot of Slovácko folk songs at home.

This exchange happened in the park at the Strážnice International Folk Festival during the summer of 2016 when we were in South Moravia for my dissertation fieldwork. Strážnice is a small town in the region of Slovácko, located at the western hem of the Carpathian Mountains at the Moravian/Slovakian border. The festival was founded in 1946, in part by the efforts of my great-grandfather, Vladimír Úlehla. He probably never imagined that seventy years later his New York City-born great-great-granddaughter would set foot in the festival and sing along to some of the same songs he transcribed.

In addition to his work with the folklore festival, Dr. Vladimír Úlehla (1888-1947) was a biologist by profession, and his work also crossed over into ethnomusicology and film. He drew upon his expertise in the biological sciences to perform an in-depth and novel study of folk songs from his native Czechoslovakia. His posthumous magnum opus *Živá Píseň* (*Living Song*, 1949) chronicled the folk music traditions of Strážnice. Úlehla considered the songs from Strážnice as *living organisms*, linked them to their ecological environs, and isolated musical characteristics that correspond to the various stages of their evolution.

Inspired by Vladimír's ideas of living song, the Dálava project is an experiment to see how his transcriptions of the folk songs from Strážnice grow in the physical and cultural environment of New York City (the first record, 2014), and Vancouver (this record, 2017). Both recordings chronicle a journey towards the musical tradition of my foremothers and forefathers, weaving together sound, story, history, memory, ancestral conjuring, folk cosmology, and the natural world. I offer it to the old ones on whose shoulders I stand.

We chose the title *The Book of Transfigurations* because this collection of songs is really just that. We have transfigured the songs from their original transcriptions on the printed page, and we have transfigured them from their more traditional incarnations in the Czech Republic. What is more, almost every song tells the story of some kind of transfiguration—girl into speckled bird, girl into married woman, boy into soldier, girl into mother, mother into widow, boy into ghost, vibrantly strong soldier into wounded corpse, and man into murderer.



Dr. Vladimír Úlehla, photographer unknown, from the archive of Blanka Úlehllová

Ej, na tej skale vysokej

*Ej, na tej skale vysokej
na tej skale širokej
ej, sedem párov orlou
Ej, nečakaj ma má milá
má frajerka rozmilá
ej, nečakaj ma domou*

Seven pairs of eagles

*Ah, on that tall rock
On that wide rock
Ah, seven pairs of eagles
Ah, don't wait for me my love
My most beloved girlfriend
Ah, don't wait for me to come home*

This is one of two songs on the record that isn't actually transcribed in *Živá Píseň*. I know it from a recording of my grandfather Jura (Jiří), Vladimír's son, which was made in the 1950s. He is gone now from this world, and I can't even begin to say how it shakes me up to hear it. His voice is a little raspy, hooded, heroic, and perfectly in tune. I hear his heart bursting open when he sings, with nothing hidden and nothing feigned. It is just gorgeous.

The words have their own weight. They are stunning and startling, portending the ominous fate of battle, or of a journey from which one does not return. The version we recorded is quite short—it materialized just days before we went into the studio, and we decided to keep it shocking and brief, which is on the same scale as the version sung by my děda Jura. Since then, when we perform it, it has grown into another beast entirely, like a horse careening around and galloping in full force.



1946 live radio broadcast of Vladimír Úlehla and the Strážnice Student Cimbalom Band led by Slávek Volavý, photograph by Jan Machálek, courtesy of the Etnologický ústav Akademie věd České republiky

Dyby ňa moja maměnka stará

*Dyby ňa moja maměnka stará na trávu dala
veru bych já jí nošu nažala*

*Ale mňa moja mamička stará na trávu nedá
rači ju sama po polu hledá*

*Není jí v polu ani v úhoru
Petrovští chlapci to sú oráči všecko poorú*

Grass

*If only my old mother would send me to get grass
Truly I would gather a big basket for her*

*But my old mother doesn't send me for grass
She prefers to search in the field herself*

*There's none in the field or in the outfield
Petrov boys, they're quite the plowmen, they
plowed everything*

35 (T48)

Strážnice. Sb.Ú.-Zp. Fr. Šrámek-Čapatý v létě 1912

Trvá 22"



1ad 35 (T48)

Petrov u Strážnice. Sb.Ú.-Zp. strýček ve Zvolenovské hospodě
v létě 1910 - sbíráno spolu s H. Bímern.

Trvá cca 10"

The text in the upper right-hand corner of the transcriptions indicates several things: the place in which the song was collected, in this case Strážnice; by whom it was collected (Sb. is an abbreviation of sbíral), in this case Úlehla; and by whom and when it was sung (Zp. is an abbreviation of zpíval), in this case František Šrámek-Čapatý in the summer of 1912. Trvá in the upper left-hand corner indicates the duration of one pass through the melody in seconds.

This is one of the sweetest songs I know, full of innocence, possibility, and longing. Vladimír Úlehla believed you could hear the expansive alluvial fields of the Strážnice landscape in the melody itself, and I agree. I feel it stretching out to the horizon in its long lingering phrase ends, and quivering, hovering melodic arcs. This song is a beautiful example of a *táhla píseň*, literally protracted or drawn-out little song, so characteristic of Moravian folk song. Incidentally, Petrov, the village of excellent plowmen, is adjacent to Strážnice.

Dyž sem já šel pres hory

Dyž sem já šel pres hory, pres zelené údolí
počaly sa skaly lámat
milá na mňa volala, ručenku mně podala
ej že sa bude vdávat

Vydávaj sa cérenko, moje zlaté srdénko
já sa nesmím ženit
došla na mňa cedula, cedulenka, cedula
mosím na vojnu ít

The rocks began to crumble

When I went across the mountains, across a green valley,
The rocks began to crumble,
My love called me, gave me her hand,
Well, that she will be married

Get married my girl, my golden heart,
I am not allowed to take a wife
I received a note, a little note, note
I must go to war.

5/3 (Tosa) *Aj, Jurenko, Jurenko* Strážnice. Sb. Ú. - Zp. Jan Neuman-Zajíc 6.9.1942

Trvá 18"

The musical score is written on three staves in 5/3 time. The melody is in a key with one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are written below the notes. Fingerings are indicated by numbers 1-5 above the notes. The lyrics are: Dyž sem já šel pres ho-ry, pres ze-le-né ú-do-lí, po-ča-ly sa ska-ly lá-mat, mi-lá na mňa vo-la-la, ru-čen-ku mně po-da-la, ej, že sa bu-de vdá-vat.

8 (72)

Strážnice. Sb. Ú. - Zp. Jan Neuman-Zajíc 3.5.1942

Here, a journey is evoked—from mountain heights to valley lows—and at a certain point, reality begins to shatter as the rocks crumble all around. Our hero's lover calls to him and tells him she will be married—but to who? Is it an admission of infidelity, or is she trying to convince him to marry her, or is it the awful premonition of what is to come? He has received a "note, a little note, note" (the richly alliterative *cedula, cedulenka, cedula*) and must go to war.

We tried to find a sonic language for the disintegration that happens in this song text, and the kind of reckless, destructive abandon that accompanies great loss. The musical conjuring of celebratory funeral parades, of life entwined with death, of high with low, marriage, battle, golden hearts, mountains, valleys, crumbling reality.

Co ste si mamičko za dům stavjat dali

*Co ste si mamičko za dům stavjat dali
oken ani dveří enom samé stěny*

*Dveřa zatykáte železnú zatykú
aby k nám nemohel šohajek s muzikú*

*Dveřa zatykáte železným zámečkem
aby k nám nemohel šohajek s péřečkem*

Iron bars, iron lock

*What kind of a house did you build for yourself, mama
Neither windows nor doors, only walls*

*You cover the doors with iron bars
So that my boyfriend with musicians couldn't come visit*

*You lock the doors with an iron lock
So that my boyfriend with his feather couldn't come visit*

19 (T 23)

Trvá 21"

Strážnice. Sb. Ú. - Zp. Hugo Nosek 3. 5. 1942

Naučil se od jejich staré chůvy cca r. 1895

The musical score is written for three staves in G major (one sharp) and 2/4 time. The melody is simple and folk-like. The lyrics are written below the staves, with some words underlined. The first staff has the lyrics 'Co ste si, ma-mič-ko, za dům stav-jat da-li,'. The second staff has 'co ste si, ma-mič-ko, za dům stav-jat da-li?'. The third staff has 'O - ken a - ni dve - ři, e - nom sa - mé stě - ny.'.

Through her frustration, I imagine her in a cage of sorts, surrounded by nothing but iron bars, iron locks, closed doors, and walls, while the living, breathing, sounding world outside passes her by. The feather is another image from the natural world, but in this case it has an additional significance. A feather in a man's hat can indicate several things: a long feather in a young man's hat can mean that he is single, and when he marries the feather is literally clipped shorter; there are also songs wherein a girl gives a feather to the boy that she likes; and a boy's hat can even contain multiple feathers, one from each of his girlfriends.

Vyletěla holubička

Vyletěla holubička od sósedů z okénečka
 Sedla sobě na bránečku, co pak děláš můj synečku
 U synečka za dveřama stojí lože s peřinama
 Na tom loži synek leží poróbanó hlavu drží
 Co's to milá co's dělala žes synečka róbat dala
 Bránila sem nemohla sem vezma šátek plakala sem
 Sósedova stěna bílá teče po ní krev nevinná
 Panenka ju zalíčuje krev nevinná prostupuje
 Nepřestupuj krev nevinná bývalas mně kdysi milá
 Nezalíčuž nezaléčíš pokád se s ním nerozlóčíš
 Už je stěna zalíčená má milá s ním rozlóčená

The bloody wall

A dove flew from the neighbor's window
 She sat on the gate, what are you doing my son
 At the son's, behind the door, there's a bed with big covers
 On that bed, the son is lying, he holds his busted head
 What my love, what did you do, that you let the son get
 beat up
 I was defending, I could not, I took a kerchief and I cried
 On white wall of the neighbors there flows innocent blood
 The girl paints over it but innocent blood seeps through
 Don't seep through innocent blood, you used to be my
 love once
 Don't paint over it, you won't get relief from it, unless you
 part properly
 Already the wall is painted over, my love parted with him.

166 (T 225)

Strážnice. Sb. Ů. Zpíval Fr. Šrámek - Čapátý v létě 1912

Trvá 25"



435

This is one of the strangest texts I have encountered in Moravian folk song. It recounts the story of a young man's murder, and much like Vydala máti, the point of view jumps between several narrators, and it is not always clear who is doing the talking. An omniscient narrator tells the tale in lines 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, and 8). A dove that seems to be a voice from another world, maybe an ancestor, addresses the human characters in lines 2, 5, and 10. The girl speaks in lines 6 and 9. And perhaps it is the girl's new boyfriend who speaks in line 11. The text describes how the deceased boy continues to revisit his girlfriend in the form of blood that spontaneously seeps from a white wall. There are hints of a love triangle, of two young men in love with the same girl, and a fight for her affections. In Moravian folk song, doves are often a deceased person who has come to communicate with the human world once again, but in this case it does not appear to be the deceased boy.

Sem chaso spěchajte

Sem chaso spěchajte pomoci hledajte
Našemu hajtmánku on má v boku ranku
a už zamodralú ujujú

De sú tvé pistole co's míval pri stole
de dalaman zlatý husársky pripjatý
už si ty zajatý ujujú

De tvá hlava krásná pekná kaderavá
de sličnosť prejasná, aj, je zohavená
hlava zkrvavená ujujú

Dycky's byl tak silný každému odporný
nikeho sa's nebál keho si len potkal
jako lev si zručal ujujú

De sú tvé hvězdičky od tvojej mamičky
de opašček zlatý vygombíčkovany
už si ty zajatý ujujú...

ale už je darmo vojsko robí larmo
...ujujú

You used to look like a lion

Here, boys, rush over, seek help
For our commander, he's got a wound in his side
It's already turning blue, ay, ay, ay

Where are your guns that you used to
have by the table

Where is your golden dalaman,
buttoned up like a Hussar
You are already captured, ay, ay, ay

Where is your beautiful, pretty, curly head
Where is your shining beauty, ay, it's defaced
The head is bloodied, ay, ay, ay

You have always been so strong,
you could fight off anyone
You weren't afraid of anyone, whoever you met
You used to look like a lion, ay, ay, ay

Where are the little stars from your mother
Where is your golden ornamented belt
You are already captured, ay, ay, ay...

But it's all for nothing, military makes tears
...ay, ay, ay

175/1 (T 235-1)
Trvá 25"

Strážnice. Sb.Ú. Zpívali Pavel Slováček st. a Martin Piža v srpnu 1912



This song is a receptacle that holds layers of history sedimented inside. There are several words that don't appear in modern Czech, and I've been working on deciphering their meanings with my father, uncle, and grandmother. My grandma dragged out an old etymological dictionary of archaic forms of the Czech language, but it wasn't much help. The first word in question, dalaman, appears in the phrase "de dalaman zlatý husársky pripjatý" which literally means "where (is the) dalaman golden, Hussar-like attached." Hussars were a type of light cavalry soldier during the Austrian Empire. At first I wondered if dalaman might be an orthographically adapted loan word of d'Allemagne, a type of sword from the 14th century. There is a baked roll in the Czech Republic called dalamanek (little dalaman) and it rather resembles a sword. But then, swords are rarely made from gold, it is too soft and too expensive. I researched the uniforms of Hussars and discovered that they wore coats called dolman, adorned with a chest full of golden buttons. Perhaps dalaman refers to this coat. The verb připnout implies some kind of suspension or tacking on or even buttoning up, appropriate for a sword, but also for the Hussars' uniform in which many golden buttons were fastened, and layers, coats, and weapons were attached.

larmo, the second mysterious word, is found in the phrase "ale už je darmo vojsko robí larmo," which means "but it's all for nothing, military makes larmo." I wondered if larmo might be a loan word from the French larmes (tears), which would make sense in context. If this is true, perhaps the loan word from French is the residue of the history itself. Pavel Slováček and Martin Piža sang this song for Vladimír in August of 1912, and perhaps it was learned during their own compulsory military service, but perhaps not. During the Napoleonic Wars, Napoleon and his army passed right through this area on their way to Russia. In 1805, the famous battle of Austerlitz (or in Czech, Slavkov) involving three empires (French, Russian, Austro-Hungarian) occurred just 50 kilometers from Strážnice. Amazingly, Martin Piža's father was born in 1799, and he fathered Martin when he was 87 years old, in the year 1886. The old man lived to be 108, and according to Vladimír he taught his son Martin many old songs and stories. It is conceivable that this song made its way from the Napoleonic era in just two generations.

There are a number of symbolic complexes to mention as well: hvězdičky or little stars are a protection charm, and the opašček zlatý vygombíčkovany or golden ornamented belt was also believed to be a sign of protection from harm. The song asserts that neither weapons, nor beauty, strength, magic, or luck can protect one from the brutalities of war. I was drawn to this song by its text, its beautiful Lydian melody, and also the onomatopoeic lamentation phrase ujuju (j in Czech is pronounced like y in English) that concludes each verse. When Vladimír transcribed the two men singing this song, they forgot the words to the last verse. He notated this in his transcription of the text. We chose to include their memory lapse in our recording, and you can hear a partially wordless lament in the last verse.

Před naším je zahrádečka

Před naším je zahrádečka zamyká sa
a v ní roste fíjalenka červená sa
Já ju mosím utrhnút dybych tam měl zahynút
Nemožu ťa duša moja zapomenút

Red violet

In front of our house, there is a little garden, it gets locked
And there grows a violet, turning red
I have to pluck it even if I were to perish there
I cannot forget you, my love

163/T 221-2/

Strážnice. Sb. Ú. Zpívala Maryška Procházková 6. 8. 1942

Trvá 50"

Před na - ším je za - hrá-deč - ka, za - my - ká — sa
a v ní ro - ste fi - ja - len - ka, čer - ve - ná — sa.
Já ju mo - sím — u - tr - hnút, dybych tam měl za - hy - nút,
ne - mo - žu ťa, du - ša mo - ja, za - po - me - - nút.

434

In 2015, my grandmother gave me many of my great-grandfather's books and archival materials, including a hand written songbook that was copied from a collection of folk songs assembled by Moravian folk song collector František Bartoš and the composer Leoš Janáček from the year 1893. The song Před naším je zahrádečka is inside. I don't know whose hand gracefully copied the song from out of Bartoš and Janáček's collection, but if you compare the hand written transcription with Úlehla's above it, you can observe the different ways in which the two men (Úlehla and Janáček that is—Bartoš didn't make transcriptions) chose to capture the song in musical notation. It's worth noting that the two versions have a temporal distance of nearly fifty years and a physical one of fifteen kilometers (the distance from Úlehla's site in Strážnice to Janáček's in Velká nad Veličkou, as the crow flies). Both men notated by ear, but Vladimír invented an instrument that allowed him to precisely measure rhythmic durations. On a long strip of film paper that he rigged to continuously move through an old camera, he would make a mark when a note was sounding. Each note in a melody had a mark of certain length, and he would count the holes on the side of the film paper (there were four per frame—think of a 35 mm film camera), and then by dividing them by their common divisor, he assigned them into a metric framework. We created our version in seven, following Vladimír's transcription, but we played with the meter to flip it at times (2+2+3 becomes 3+2+2). From what I can gather, the song is not sung much these days. I imagine our version is quite a bit rougher than the original ever was, and our justification and inspiration for this was the text. Although veiled in the tender poetic metaphor of a reddening flower safely locked behind a garden wall, this text speaks of an obsessive erotic longing worth dying for.

A copy of Leoš Janáček's transcription from Velká, 1893.

Před naším je zahrádečka, zamyká sa
a v ní roste fíjalenka, červená sa.
Já ju mosím utrhnút, dybych tam měl zahynút,
ne-mo-žu ťa, du-ša mo-ja, za-po-me-nút.

Studená rosenka

*Studená rosenka padá šuhajek koníčky hledá
nehledaj šuhajku koně já sem ti poslala pro ně*

*Studená rosenka prší už sa mně má milá duší
nehledaj šuhajku koně já sem ti poslala pro ně*

Souling

*Cold dew falls, the boy searches for his horses
Don't search, boy, for your horses, I already sent someone for them*

*Cold dew rains, already we are souling my love
Don't search, boy, for your horses, I already sent someone for them*

187A (T 250 A)

Strážnice. Sb.Ú. Zpíval Jan Machálek-Rakušan 22. září 1942

Trvá 13"

The musical score is written on two staves in 2/4 time. The first staff contains the melody with lyrics in Czech. The second staff contains a simplified version of the melody, likely for a harmonium or piano accompaniment. The lyrics are: Stude-ná ro-sen-ka pa-dá, šu-ha-jek ko-níč-ky hle-dá, ne-hle-daj šu-haj-ku ko-ně, já sem ti po-sla-la pro ně.

Stu-de-ná ro-sen-ka pa-dá, šu-ha-jek ko-níč-ky
hle-dá, ne-hle-daj šu-haj-ku ko-ně, já sem ti po-sla-la pro ně

Studená rosenka takes place in the quietest hours of the night, when all is secret, still, and silent, and love gives two souls the means to disappear into one another. Crystalline dew on the grass, darkness, quickening heartbeat, the restlessness of horses, the longing of imminent departure.

Na strážnickém rynku

Na strážnickém rynku berú na vojnu
chytili mňa páni mosím též na ňu
vlasy ně reží líčka ně blednú
už je zle nedobre má milá se mnú

War

In the Strážnice square they are recruiting for war
The officials caught me, I also have to go
Hair, to me, they are cutting, cheeks, to me, they are paling
Already it's bad, not good, my love, with me

126 | 1 (T 168a)

Velká. Sb. Ú.- Zpívala prateta Kateřina Úlehlová z Velké
v listopadu 1906

Trvá 65"

Na strá-žnic - kém ryn-ku be-rú na - voj - nu,
chy-ti - li mňa pá-ni, mosím též na ňu.
Vla - sy ně re - žú, líč - ka ně bled - nú,
už je zle ne-do-bré, má mi-lá se mnú.

My great-grandfather Vladimír Úlehla's great-aunt Kateřina Úlehlová from the village of Velká sang this for him in November of 1906 (see the upper right hand corner of the transcription). If she was his great-aunt, she was two generations older than him, which means she was five generations from me. I imagine what she might have sounded like singing this song. In this plaintive lamentation about the sorrows of war, the narrator is utterly helpless to his fate. In the translation, we chose an awkward English construction to convey this sense of impotent futility: his hair is being cut by the recruiters, and his cheeks are literally being "paled" by his own body. He doesn't even have power over it anymore.

Vydala máti

Vydala máti vydala céru daleko od sebe
Přikázala jí nakázala jí nechod' cero ke mně
Já sa urobím fíáčkem jarabým a já k vám doletím
a sednu si já na bílú leluju a svůj žal vám povím
Ej akši akši fíáčku jarabý odleť s tej leluje
lebo ju zlomíš a nedolomíš ona mi uvadne
Ej nedošla sem mamičko milá leluje lámati
lež sem já došla mamičko milá žal vám žalovati

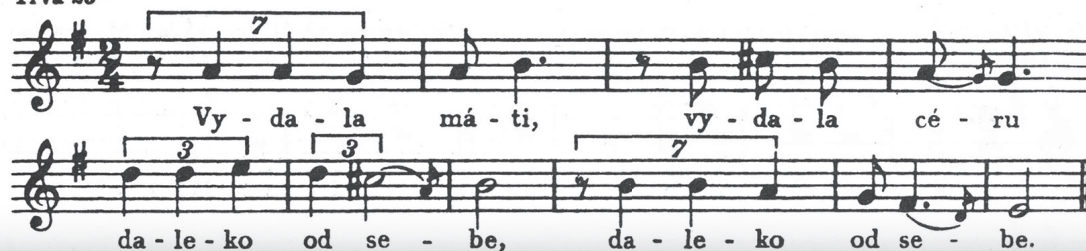
Mother gave away her daughter

Mother gave away her daughter, far away from herself
She admonished her, ordered her, daughter don't come back
to me
I will turn myself into a speckled bird and I will fly to you
And I will sit on the white lily and tell you my troubles
Eh, shoo, shoo speckled bird, fly away from that lily
Or you will break it, but not break it off, and it will wilt
Well I did not come, my dear mother, to break the lily
But I came, my dear mother, to lament about my grief

230/1a (Tšisa)

Trvá 25"

Strážnice. Sb.Ú. Zpíval strýček kráčejší ze šenku-podzim 1910



According to Vladimír Úlehla, Vydala máti is ancient. Traditionally, it is sung at weddings when the bride leaves her family to join her new husband's family. As is common in Moravian folk song, the text jumps between different points of view including an omniscient narrator (lines 1 and 2), the daughter (lines 3, 4, 7, and 8), and the mother (lines 5 and 6). It is a song that contains many secrets. For example, the girl transforms herself into the *fíáčku jarabý*, or speckled bird, in order to return to her mother. There is a Czech folk story by the name of "The Snake Husband" that describes such a bird.

A girl is swimming in a pond with her friends. All of the girls get out of the water to return to their duties, but our heroine finds a snake coiled on her underdress. She shoos him away, but he refuses to get off. Only if she consents to marry him, will he relinquish her dress. She denies him, of course, but he stubbornly refuses to get off. Exasperated, the girl finally consents to marry him, for how could a snake possibly marry her? She dresses and returns home, where she finishes her work, and goes to bed. The next morning, the girl looks outside and is astonished to see the snake along with an enormous wedding party of hundreds of other snakes at her door, waiting to take her away. She reluctantly leaves her home, and the snake husband takes her to the edge of the pond, and then under the water, where the newly wedded couple enters into an enchanted underwater realm in which the snake husband is king. He is a fine husband, and the girl falls deeply in love with him. They have two children and live very happily. One day, the girl says to her husband, 'I love you and I am very happy here, but I miss my mother. Could I please go and visit her?' The snake husband agrees, and teaches her magical words that will summon him when she returns back to the pond. He warns her that she must not stay overnight, and she must not tell anyone the magical words. She agrees. She returns home to her mother, and during the evening, her mother tricks her into revealing the magic words, and she sedates her daughter with a sleeping potion. The mother goes to the pond where she utters the magic words, summoning the snake husband. As he emerges from the water, she chops off his head. The girl wakes with a start the next morning, knowing that something is horribly wrong. She runs to the pond, only to find her beloved lying lifeless, beheaded. She jumps into the water to find her children. She transforms her son into the nightingale, and her daughter into the speckled mockingbird, and both will forever sing of their grief.

The story is etiological; it tells of the origin of both types of birds. When the speckled bird comes into a song, she is one who knows great suffering and sorrow, and it is fitting that the new bride of Vydala máti would transform herself into the creature that sings songs of sorrow. She sits upon a white lily, a flower also associated with grief. In other variants of the song, water appears as well (see the notes for Okolo Hradišča voděnka teče).

Peggy Lee is a beautiful musician, and from the beginning I imagined this song as a duet with her. Vydala máti is a conversation between two women—a mother and a daughter—and I wanted to create the space for such a conversation. I hear the bird's fluttering wings and movements in her playing.

Okolo Hradišča voděnka teče

Okolo Hradišče voděnka teče
ide k nám šohajek co si ně nese
nese ně uásku svázanú v šátku
miuovava sem ťa švarný obrázku

He's bringing something for me

Around Hradišče water flows
A boy is coming to us, he is bringing something for me
He's bringing me love wrapped in a kerchief
I loved you, beautiful picture

1 ad 126/2 Na strážnickém rynku

Velká.Sb.Ú. Zpívala Anna Žalmánková
květen 1937

O - ko - lo Hra - diš - ča vo - děn - ka
i - de k nám šo - ha - jek, co si ně
te - če, ne - se ně uá - sku,
ne - se;
svá - za - nú v šát - ku, mi - uo - va
ua sem ťa švar - ný ob - ráz - ku.

During the summer of 2016, Aram and I performed duet versions of many of these songs at the Folk Holidays Festival (Folkové prázdniny) in the town of Náměšť nad Oslavou. I had the opportunity to meet Jitka Šuranská who was also playing at the festival with her trio. She told me that what we did in this song was so strong, and that she had always considered it to be a song of quiet sadness. As if to demonstrate what she meant, she performed *Okolo Hradišča voděnka teče* as an encore that night. I loved the way Jitka sang it, so full of restrained longing and sadness. Zuzana Lapčíková also has a gorgeous version that is full of a similar quietly dignified melancholy. I wondered, why was our version so strong, so full of emotional force? Well, for one, the words collapse much time, action, and emotion into four short lines. A boy comes to a girl's house, bringing her something, which we then discover is "love wrapped in a kerchief"—in other words, a baby, i.e. he impregnates her. She concludes by saying, "I loved you, beautiful picture"—he is nothing more than a two-dimensional object, a thinned-out vision, not a flesh and blood, three-dimensional human body much less a husband. He isn't there any more, but did he desert her, or perish? We can't know, although in Vladimír's book, one learns that Anna Žalmánková, the woman who originally sang the song for him in 1937, was a widow with four children. Even though it has been nearly eighty years since he captured paní Žalmánková singing it, the story rings hauntingly true today. As we were creating our version of this song, a dear friend was abandoned by her husband, leaving her alone with a six-month old baby and a four-year old. Surely amidst the moments of dignified melancholy are ones of sheer, irrational force. Whenever a song from Strážnice mentions water, there is sure to be unhappy love; it is employed as a symbolic complex of instability and impermanence. And sure enough, the opening line of the song says, "Around Hradišče, water flows," forewarning what is to come. For me, the quality of this song is that same water, surging and pooling, sometimes in delicate rivulets, other times tsunami-like. Of all the songs on the record, this one is the most freely improvised, enacting and honoring that impermanence and unpredictability.

Fašanku

*Fašanku, fašanku, zabil sem galanku,
Zabil sem ju z rána, neměla ňa ráda*

Carnival

*Carnival, carnival, I killed my love,
I killed her in the morning, she didn't like me*

108/1d (T 87/2) *Má stará mamičko*

Strážnice. Sb.Ú.-Zp.Jožka Cundrla

Trvá 11"

11.1.1942

The musical score is written for two staves in 4/8 time. The melody is simple and repetitive, with a key signature of one flat (B-flat). The lyrics are written below the notes. The first staff contains the lyrics: "Fa - šan - ku, fa - šan - ku, za - bil sem ga - lán - ku,". The second staff contains the lyrics: "za - bil sem ju z rá - na, ne - mě - la ňa rá - da.".

I know of several texts that share this melody, and all of them describe liminal, transitional moments. One is a lament in which a new bride bids her dear mother and father goodbye. In another, the narrator personifies "Feast, dear feast," admitting that he hasn't slept at home or cleaned his horses in four days. This one, *Fašanku*, takes place during the liminality of the festival *Fašank* (akin to Carnival), a celebratory period before the time of fast, and in two short lines it tells the whole brutal story.

Pásl Jano koně

*Pásl Jano koně, aj koně, aj koně, aj koně
v Javornickéj dolině*

*Přišli k němu hájníci, hájníci, hájníci, hájníci
ti uherští zbojníci*

*Prodaj nám tu halenu, halenu, halenu, halenu
za tu trávu spasenú*

Sell us your shirt

*Jano was grazing horses, ay horses, ay horses, ay horses
in the valley of Javorník*

*He was accosted by woodsmen, woodsmen, woodsmen,
woodsmen
those Hungarian brigands*

*Sell us your shirt, shirt, shirt, shirt
for the grass that you grazed*

This is the second song that I know from the recording of my grandfather Jura, not from his father's book. It is just as heart-breaking as *Ej, na tej skale vysokej*, maybe more. The melody requires the singer to launch up a perfect fourth on *koně*, and my děda Jura sang it so that the jump up to the fourth was right at the top of his range. I sing it so that it is at the top of my chest voice. It requires some bravery—I have to throw my whole self into it and not worry about cracks or breaks. I've long felt that that's where the meat is anyway.

The song tells the story of a boy named Jano, alone in the valley of Javorník, a nearby village at the border of Slovakia (which used to be the border of the Kingdom of Hungary—hence the “Hungarian brigands”). Jura's ashes are scattered in Javorník—he rests at the base of an oak tree in a field of wild flowers along with his mother Marta—my great-grandmother and Vladimír's first wife. On the recording, Jura only sings three verses, and I don't know any others, but apparently Jano is eventually killed by the brigands because he refuses to give up his shirt.

Photograph from the archive of Blanka Úlehlová, photographer unknown



This record would not exist without the care, insight, and generosity of many people. First, love and gratitude to my collaborator and husband Aram Bajakian, whose creativity and spirit flood this record with life. I would like to thank my father, Martin Úlehla, with whom I have spent countless hours translating song texts and discussing their meanings, wrangling with existential dilemmas of fragmented cultural identity, and standing in awe before the metaphysical discoveries the songs have triggered. My sincere thanks also to my grandmother Blanka Ulehlová and uncle Tomáš Úlehla, who, along with me and my father, have engaged in transatlantic Skype discussions around this work. My doctoral advisor Michael Tenzer is immersed in this too, and is a support, inspiration, and skeptic at all the right moments. Heartfelt thanks to all of the musicians, journalists, scholars, thinkers, writers, artists, singers, drinkers, and dancers in the Czech Republic who have opened their world to let me and Aram in, in particular Jiří Plocek, Pepa Pokorný, Jiří Moravčík, Petr Dorůžka, Ivan Prokop, Michal Schmidt, Lucie Uhlíková, Don Sparling, Jura Mrenka, Vít Kalvoda, Zdeněk Bravenec, Radek Pospíšil, and Michal Krystýnek and Jakub Nožička from the band Ponk. In Vancouver, thanks to the Public Scholars Initiative at the University of British Columbia for supporting the creation of this work as a facet of my doctoral research in ethnomusicology, and in the Czech Republic thanks to Martin Glogar, Martina Pavlicová, and a Kohn Research Scholarship from Masaryk University for supporting my field work in Brno. Sincere thanks also to Kevin McNeilly, the International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation, and Rainbow Robert and the Coastal Jazz and Blues Society for supporting and coaxing out a fuller, elaborated incarnation of this vision from its tender beginnings. Gratitude and thanks to Peggy Lee, Dylan van der Schyff, Colin Cowan, and Tyson Naylor for giving their fierce talents and humanity to this project. Colin and Jenn Bojm at the China Cloud have nurtured a strangely magical home for this music. Thanks to Tony Reif and Songlines Recordings for believing in this project, and John Raham, Tony Diodore, and Michael Fossenkemper for beautifully seeing it through. Thanks to the care and knowing of Andrea Vargas, Lloyd Bricken, and Christa Morin as I come to know my old ones. Gratitude to the grandparents Ruth and Ed Bajakian and Karen and Martin Úlehla for their care and teaching of our children while we create, and our children Blanka and Mila for teaching us too. And finally, humble thanks to my great-grandfather Vladimír Úlehla, from whose work this one draws its breath.

Julia Ulehla

Vancouver, December 2016

For additional English language reading on traditional music and folk culture from Moravia and the Czech lands, please see Josef Baudis' *Czech Folk Tales* (1917); Michael Beckerman's "Kundera's Musical Joke and 'Folk' Music in Czechoslovakia, 1948-?" in *Retuning Culture*, edited by Mark Slobin (1996); Petr Bogatyrev's *The Functions of Folk Costume in Moravian Slovakia* (1971); Roman Doušek, Daniel Drápala, and Marie Novotná's edited volume, *Traditional Folk Culture in Moravia: Time and Space* (2015); Jesse Johnston's "The Cimbal (Cimbalom) and Folk Music in Moravian Slovakia and Valachia" in the *Journal of the American Musical Instrument Society* (2010); Natalie Kononenko's *Slavic Folklore* (2007); Barbara Krader and Bálint Sarosi's "Southern and Eastern Europe" in *Ethnomusicology: Historical and Regional Studies*, edited by Helen Myers (1993); Martina Pavlicová and Lucie Uhlíková's "Folklore Traditions in Contemporary Everyday Life: Between Continuity and (Re)construction" in *Slovenský národopis* (2014); Volume 8 (Europe) of the *Garland Encyclopedia of World Music*, edited by Timothy Rice, James Porter, and Chris Goertzen (2000), and John Tyrrell's two volume biography of composer Leoš Janáček, *Janáček: Years of a Life* (2006, 2007).

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